

Appendix C
Visual Impact Assessment

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Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum for the Improvements at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard



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Acronyms

BRT	bus rapid transit
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CPUC	California Public Utilities Commission
Draft EIS/EIR	Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report
Expo	Exposition Construction Authority
Expo LRT	Mid-City/Exposition Light Rail Transit
FEIS/EIR	Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
LAUSD	Los Angeles Unified School District
LAX	Los Angeles International Airport
LRT	light rail transit
Metro	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
MIS	Major Investment Study
ROD	Record of Decision
ROW	right-of-way
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
SCAG	Southern California Association of Governments
VIA	visual impact assessment

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Mid-City/Exposition Light Rail Transit Project

Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum for the Improvements at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard

1.0 Introduction

ICF Jones & Stokes prepared this visual impact assessment (VIA) for submission to and consideration by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Its purpose is to evaluate the proposed passenger station at the Farmdale Avenue crossing on the Mid-City/Exposition Light Rail Transit (Expo LRT) project (the proposed project) in comparison to the analysis in the previously certified final environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (FEIS/EIR) for the Expo LRT project and assist in determining whether further environmental documentation is necessary.

The Farmdale Avenue crossing is the final crossing to be considered by the CPUC for the Expo LRT line and is the subject of an amended application filed with the CPUC on July 29, 2009. All other crossings requiring the CPUC's approval have been approved, and much of the Expo LRT line is currently under construction.

This study examines the Exposition Construction Authority's (Expo's) original plan for an at-grade crossing, as modified in the course of this proceeding, including a new station with near-side platforms east and west of Farmdale Avenue at which all LRT vehicles would come to a full stop on approach to the Farmdale Avenue crossing. As part of the proposed project, the Expo Inn property located at 4523 West Exposition Boulevard, on the northeast corner of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue, would be acquired and all structures demolished to construct a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) staff parking lot. A stop-and-proceed procedure may be used until the proposed station is constructed.

The methodology utilized in this visual impact assessment is in accordance with guidelines specified by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and is organized based on the guidelines found in the *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA 1981).

The FEIS/EIR for the Expo LRT project was prepared to evaluate Phase 1 of the Expo LRT project, including an at-grade crossing proposed at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. This report evaluates whether the proposed project would create significant new visual impacts that would require further environmental review under CEQA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This report is intended to serve as a supporting technical study for the environmental documentation for the proposed project.

1.1 Background

The FEIS/EIR for the Expo LRT project, certified by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) in 2005, evaluated Phase I of the project (downtown Los Angeles to Culver City), including the at-grade crossing proposed at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. The FEIS/EIR was used as CEQA documentation by the CPUC in its December 2007 decision approving all of the at-grade crossings for the Expo LRT project except the proposed at-grade crossings at Farmdale Avenue near Dorsey High School and at Harvard Boulevard near the Foshay Learning Center. The FEIS/EIR was also used as CEQA documentation by the CPUC in its February 25, 2009, decision approving the construction of the Expo LRT project over the existing pedestrian tunnel crossing at Harvard Boulevard.

Members of the public have safety concerns regarding the proposed Farmdale Avenue at-grade LRT crossing. Of particular concern to LAUSD and local residents is the proximity of Dorsey High School, with a population of more than 2,000 students, to the at-grade crossing. Other issues include potential visual impacts, reduced access for vehicles, and noise.

This analysis is being prepared for submission to the CPUC in response to the commission's February 25, 2009, decision regarding the proposed at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue and in response to subsequent discussions between Expo and LAUSD. In its February 25 decision, the CPUC denied Expo's application for a proposed at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue. After considering various options for the Farmdale Avenue crossing, the CPUC found that a pedestrian overcrossing with Farmdale Avenue closed to traffic was a practicable alternative to the at-grade crossing as proposed at that time. Accordingly, the CPUC left the proceeding open to allow Expo to file an amended application or a new application. The CPUC decision also stated that the commission is a responsible agency under CEQA and that the CPUC, as a responsible agency, may act in a lead role for conducting any necessary future environmental review with respect to the Farmdale Avenue crossing if such review involves either a supplemental EIR or an addendum to the existing FEIS/EIR. The decision stated that the CPUC would not act as a responsible agency should a subsequent EIR be required.

Subsequent to the CPUC decision, Expo filed an amended application with the CPUC, suggesting several possible options for the crossing at Farmdale Avenue, including a pedestrian overcrossing with Farmdale closed, an at-grade crossing subject to a stop-and-proceed requirement for all trains, construction of an LRT station in conjunction with an at-grade crossing at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard, and an at-grade crossing subject to an interim stop-and-proceed requirement with later construction of an LRT station. The CPUC held a prehearing conference on the amended application on September 30, 2009, and at the direction of the Administrative Law Judge, the parties initiated a discussion of issues in hopes of achieving a safe solution that would be acceptable to the parties and capable of more expeditiously resolving the proceeding. These discussions indicated that the construction of a near-side LRT station in conjunction with an at-grade crossing at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard would provide a safe solution that might also facilitate a more expeditious resolution of this proceeding.

Given the foregoing discussion, this analysis is submitted for consideration in evaluating the proposed project.

1.2 Purpose of This Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to compare the effects of the proposed project with the environmental impact analysis set forth in the previously certified FEIS/EIR for the Expo LRT project. As noted in the analysis, the previously certified FEIS/EIR assumed that the Farmdale Avenue crossing would occur at grade. However, the CPUC, in its February 25, 2009, decision, rejected Expo's application for an at-grade crossing and left the proceeding open to allow Expo to file an amended application. CPUC found that a pedestrian bridge at Farmdale Avenue, with Farmdale Avenue closed to through traffic, is a practicable alternative to the proposed at-grade crossing. However, that option has been removed from further discussion because of community and stakeholders' concerns regarding the size and mass of the pedestrian overhead structure and the required closure of Farmdale Avenue to traffic crossing the Exposition Boulevard intersection.

This study includes detailed analysis of the construction of an LRT passenger station at the intersection of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue and the acquisition and demolition of the property at the northeast corner of the intersection to construct a 26-space parking lot for school staff. In addition, this study evaluates whether implementation of the proposed project would result in new significant impacts or increase the severity of previously identified significant environmental effects under CEQA. CEQA provides, in Public Resources Code Section 21166, that once an EIR has been prepared for a project, no subsequent or supplemental EIR is to be prepared unless one of the following circumstances occurs:

- a. Substantial changes are proposed in the project that will require major revisions to the environmental impact report;

- b. Substantial changes have occurred with respect to the circumstances under which the project is being undertaken, which will require major revisions to the environmental impact report; or
- c. New information, which was not known and could not have been known at the time the environmental impact report was certified as complete, has become available.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 further clarifies the requirements for evaluating proposed changes to a project. Generally, the guidelines state that once an EIR has been certified, no further EIRs will be prepared unless there are substantial changes in the project, substantial changes in circumstances, or new information of substantial importance, all of which indicate that there will be either a new, significant adverse environmental impact or a substantially more severe adverse environmental impact than previously identified. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21166 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15162, the purpose of this study is to evaluate whether the potential changes presented in the proposed project set forth above would result in new, significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant environmental effects.

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162 through 15164, this study, together with the prior certified FEIS/EIR and other supporting documentation, is proposed to serve as the basis for the CPUC's CEQA review of the proposed change to the Expo LRT project, which would be made if the CPUC approves the proposed project.

The VIA is also intended to serve as a supporting technical document to the NEPA environmental assessment prepared for the proposed project. The methodology utilized in this visual impact assessment is in accordance with guidelines specified by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and is organized based on the guidelines found in the *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA 1981).

1.3 Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Summary of FEIS/EIR Conclusions

The FEIS/EIR did not specifically address visual impacts on the community surrounding the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. However, the FEIS/EIR found that the Expo LRT project would generally result in a less-than-significant impact on visual resources due to the landscaping and design elements already included in the project design, the inclusion of public art elements, and implementation of other mitigation measures specified in the FEIS/EIR, Section 4.4, pages 47–49.

After mitigation, less-than-significant impacts were identified for the Expo LRT project.

Proposed Project: Construction of an LRT Station at the Intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard

Implementation of the proposed project would not block any key views or be incompatible with the visual character of the surrounding area. In fact, removal of the Expo Inn would improve views in the area, enabling less obstructed views of the Hollywood Hills to the north and the Baldwin Hills to the south. The station canopy structures on each of the station platforms would not adversely affect the visual character and setting of the surrounding area. Mature trees that would be removed under the proposed project would be considered for replanting or replacement in consultation with a qualified arborist. The station design would be consistent with the other stations along the alignment.

A less-than-significant impact under CEQA and no substantial adverse effect under NEPA on visual resources would occur as a result of modifying the Expo LRT project with an LRT passenger station at Farmdale Avenue.

2.0 Description of the Proposed Project

2.1 Purpose and Need

In 1998, the Regional Council of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) adopted a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to establish goals, objectives, and policies for the region's transportation system and establish an implementation plan for transportation investment over the next 20 years. The RTP includes performance indicators with specific objectives, against which transportation investments can be measured. The performance indicators illustrate that travel conditions in the westside area of the City of Los Angeles will worsen by 2020 and that the area will not meet regional objectives for mobility, accessibility, reliability, or safety without the implementation of additional transportation improvements.

Given the RTP forecasts and the data provided in the Major Investment Study (MIS) for the Mid-City/Westside Study Area, several themes emerged with respect to the need for transportation improvements in the study area:

- The need for transit improvements has been established in previous studies.
- The “centers concept” land use policy is transit based.
- The study area contains a major concentration of activity centers and destinations.
- There is an existing concentration of transit-supporting land uses.
- The high study area population and employment densities support transit.
- Local redevelopment plans depend heavily on transit improvements.
- There is a history of transit usage in the study area.
- There is a significant transit-dependent population in the study area.
- The study area is expected to continue to capture a large share of regional population and employment growth.
- Continued growth in the business services sector (including entertainment and media-related businesses) underlies the future development potential in the study area.
- Travel demand justifies transit services.
- Peak-hour congestion on study area roadways underlies the need for transit improvements.
- Existing and future traffic and street conditions justify transit improvements.
- Local policies are oriented toward demand management and transit solutions rather than physical roadway improvements.

After review of the aforementioned themes and public review of the alternatives contained in the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS/EIR), which was prepared in June 2001, the Metro Board of Directors adopted a Locally Preferred Alternative (Draft EIS/EIR Alternative 3a), which included a bus rapid transit (BRT) project on Wilshire Boulevard and an LRT project along the Exposition Boulevard ROW from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City. The FEIS/EIR for the Mid-

City/Expo LRT project from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City was prepared and certified in October 2005.

Following certification of the FEIS/EIR, Metro adopted the locally preferred alternative, which contemplated an at-grade crossing at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles.

On February 25, 2009, the CPUC denied Expo's application for a proposed at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue. After considering various options for the Farmdale crossing, the CPUC found that a pedestrian bridge with Farmdale Avenue closed to traffic is a practicable alternative to the proposed at-grade crossing. The CPUC accordingly left the proceeding open to allow Expo to file an amended application or new application consistent with the CPUC decision. Based upon these findings, this analysis is submitted for the CPUC's consideration in evaluating the construction of an LRT passenger station at Farmdale Avenue.

2.2 Project Location and Study Area

The project study area is located in the midwestern portion of the City of Los Angeles, approximately seven (7) miles to the southwest of downtown Los Angeles, within the West Adams–Baldwin Hills–Leimert Community Plan area (City of Los Angeles 2001), and encompasses the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and the proposed Expo LRT tracks along Exposition Boulevard and the immediate surrounding area. The Expo LRT line follows the existing Exposition Boulevard, which is a two-lane bi-directional street aligned along an east–west orientation. To the west of its intersection with Farmdale Avenue, Exposition Boulevard runs along the northern side of the Expo LRT project ROW. Dorsey High School is located at the southwest corner of the Farmdale Avenue intersection with Exposition Boulevard. Continuous blocks of low-scale light industrial buildings are located northwest of the intersection along the northern side of Exposition Boulevard. The northeast corner of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue includes motel uses and associated surface parking.

To the east of the intersection, the Expo LRT ROW forms a wide median strip along Exposition Boulevard. To the north of this median, Exposition Boulevard has bi-directional traffic, as does Exposition Boulevard South to the south of the median. This area includes a number of low- to medium-height trees that help define the ROW as open space. However, many of these trees were removed subsequent to the 2004 FEIS/EIR to prepare for the construction of the Expo LRT project. To the east of Farmdale Avenue, the primary surrounding land uses are single-family homes. The existing ROW is visible from some of the adjacent homes.

Farmdale Avenue is a two-lane bi-directional street that runs along a north–south orientation for approximately 0.5 mile from Vineyard Avenue to Rodeo Road between La Brea Avenue and Crenshaw Boulevard (see Figure 1, Regional Location Map, and Figure 2, Project Vicinity).

Figure 1: Regional Location

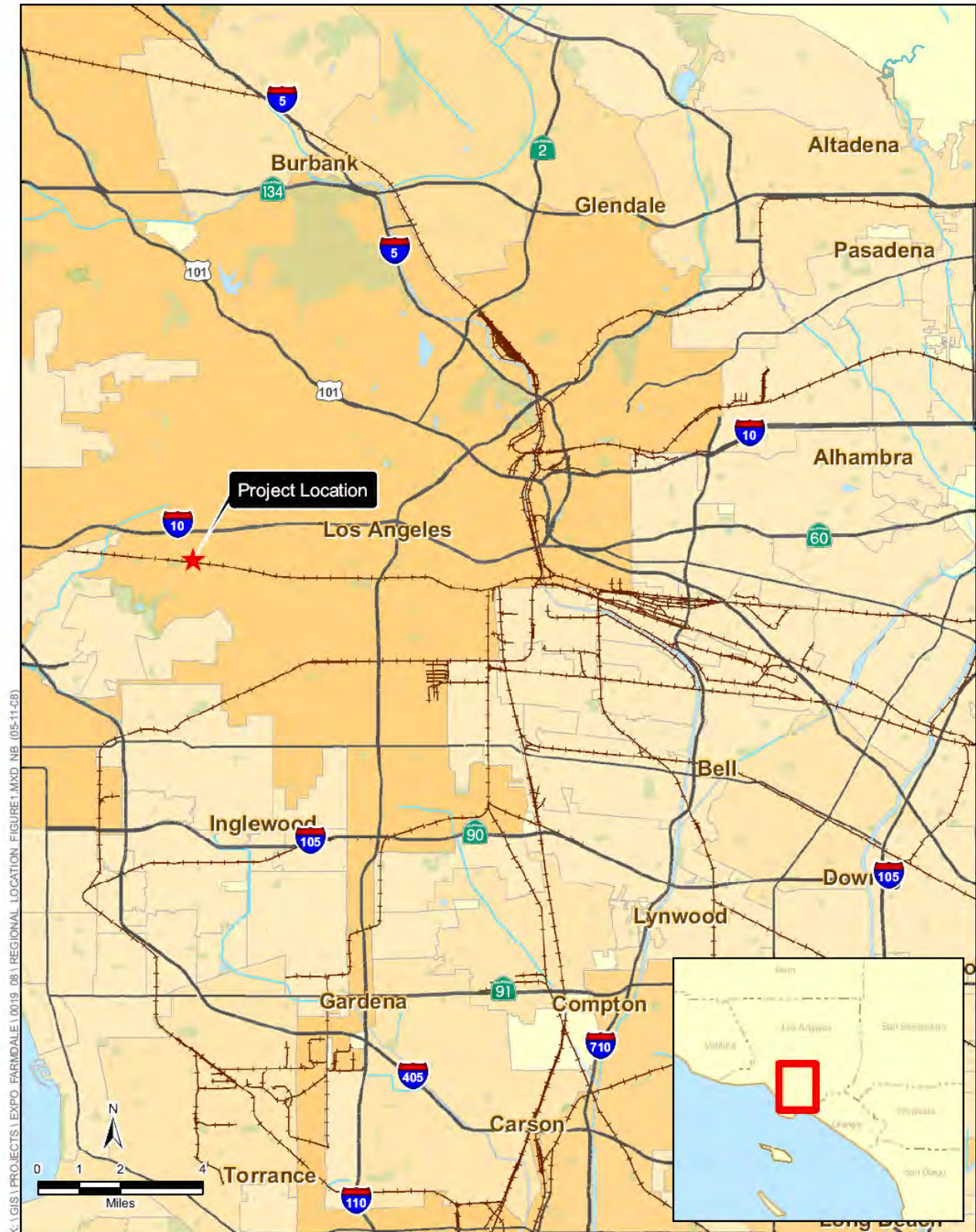
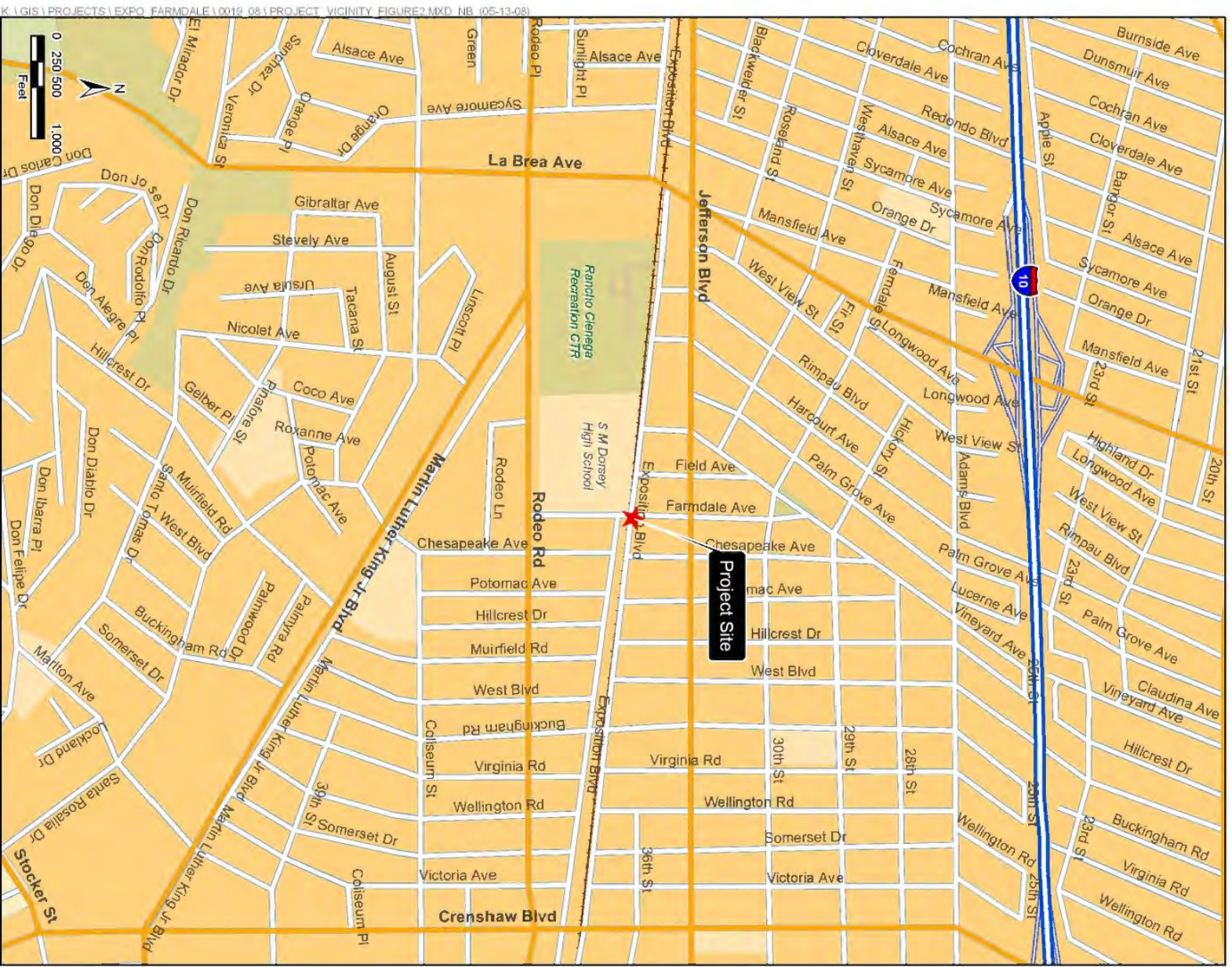


Figure 2: Project Vicinity



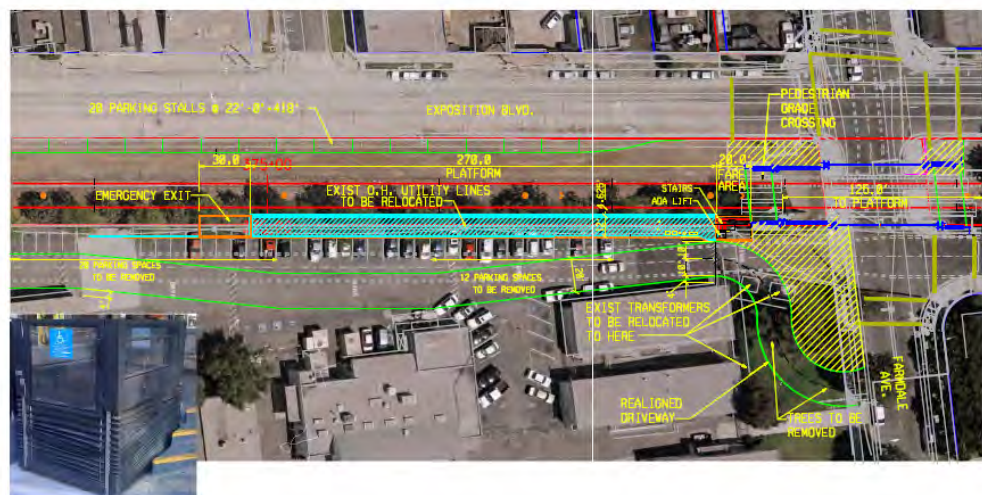
SOURCE: ESRI Streetmap USA (2007)

2.3 Proposed Project

The proposed project would involve the construction of a passenger station at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard (see Figures 3a and 3b). Farmdale Avenue would remain open to crossing vehicular and pedestrian traffic at Exposition Boulevard, and crossing gates and signals would be employed, similar to the design proposed for the at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue under the original Expo LRT project.

To ensure pedestrian safety, the passenger station would be constructed with a near-side split-platform configuration at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. The split-platform configuration would require trains to stop at each platform prior to reaching the vehicular and pedestrian crossings at Farmdale Avenue. Each station platform would be 12 feet wide and 270 feet long, with a 12-foot-wide, 20-foot-long fare collection area adjacent to Farmdale Avenue and an emergency exit on the far end of each platform. Westbound Expo trains would stop at the platform east of Farmdale Avenue, and passengers would ingress/egress trains from the north side of the Expo LRT tracks, within the existing right-of-way. Eastbound Expo trains would stop at the platform to the west of Farmdale Avenue, and passengers would ingress/egress trains from the platform on the south side of the Expo LRT tracks. Once passengers embark or disembark, trains would not leave the station until the train operator verifies that the at-grade crossing is clear of both pedestrians and vehicles. A small train control and communications building would be located east of the station along Exposition Boulevard.

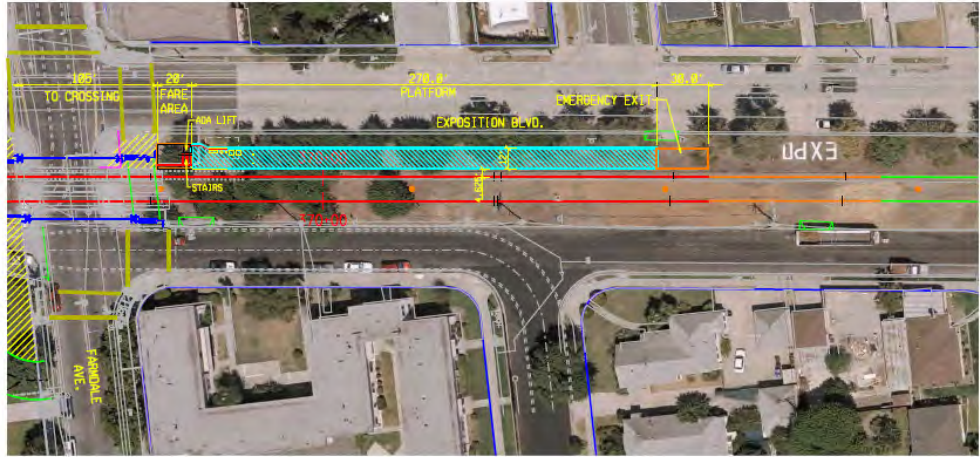
Figure 3a: Proposed LRT Passenger Station Plan with At-grade Crossing – Eastbound Platform, West of Farmdale Avenue



ADA LIFT

Source: Expo Construction Authority 2009.

Figure 3b: Proposed LRT Passenger Station Plan with At-grade Crossing – Westbound Platform, East of Farmdale Avenue



Source: Expo Construction Authority 2009.

Approximately 5,000 square feet of property would be acquired from Dorsey High School for construction of the eastbound platform on the south side of the Expo LRT right-of-way (approximately 2,500 square feet) and the pedestrian plaza for the at-grade crossing at the northeast corner of the Dorsey High School campus (approximately 2,500 square feet). The eastbound platform would be partially within an existing staff vehicle parking area on LAUSD property at Dorsey High School and would require the relocation or reconfiguration of approximately 32 existing parking spaces, with a net loss of approximately 19 spaces. A 10,963-square-foot property on the northeast corner of the intersection of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue would be acquired, and all structures would be demolished, including the Expo Inn, a residency motel located at 4523 West Exposition Boulevard. To compensate for the loss of parking spaces within the existing Dorsey High School staff parking lot for the construction of the proposed eastbound Expo LRT station platform, a new 26-space paved parking lot would be constructed on this acquired property.

To the west of Farmdale Avenue, construction of the eastbound platform would require existing Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) overhead utility lines to be relocated underground along the right-of-way as well as the relocation of an electrical transformer at the northeast corner of Dorsey High School. Overhead catenary power lines would be constructed along the Expo LRT alignment, including at this station, to provide electrical power to the Expo LRT trains.

The at-grade crossing would also include realignment of the existing Dorsey High School driveway at the northeast corner of the school property to accommodate the pedestrian plaza for the at-grade pedestrian crossing. Pedestrians would be directed across the crossing when it is safe. The other side of the crossing, on the north side of Exposition Boulevard, would include a smaller pedestrian plaza, including swing gates, pedestrian gates, and traffic signals to control pedestrian and vehicle traffic.

Figures 4a and 4b, below, illustrate the proposed station and the proposed parking lot in relation to Dorsey High School.

Figure 4a. LRT Passenger Station with At-grade Crossing and LAUSD Staff Parking Area, Northeast View



Source: Expo Construction Authority 2009.

Figure 4b. LRT Passenger Station Plan with At-grade Crossing, LAUSD Staff Parking Area, and Dorsey High School in Background, Southwest View



Source: Expo Construction Authority 2009.

Expo may decide to use an interim stop-and-proceed procedure until the station is constructed. During the initial interim phase, operating the at-grade crossing with a stop-and-proceed operation variation would not result in any physical modifications to the Farmdale Avenue crossing beyond those already evaluated in the FEIS/EIR and thus would not result in any environmental changes or new potentially significant environmental impacts beyond those evaluated in the FEIS/EIR.

2.4 Previously Considered Options

The following options were previously considered and evaluated but are no longer being proposed as a result of the CPUC decision dated February 25, 2009, and subsequent discussions among the parties conducted at the suggestion of the Administrative Law Judge to this proceeding to identify an option that could provide a basis for a more expeditious resolution to this proceeding. Accordingly, these options are not evaluated in this initial study.

- At-grade Expo LRT crossing at Farmdale Avenue.
- Stop and proceed for Expo LRT trains at the at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue.
- Pedestrian overcrossing and closure of Farmdale Avenue at Exposition Boulevard.
- Pedestrian overcrossing, with Farmdale Avenue remaining open at Exposition Boulevard.
- Train overcrossing at Farmdale Avenue.
- Train undercrossing at Farmdale Avenue.

3.0 Purpose of the Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum

This VIA Memorandum describes the potential for adverse effects on the visual environment that could result from the proposed project. Field surveys were conducted in March 2008, and documentation was gathered from the appropriate departments of the City and County of Los Angeles. The purpose of the VIA Memorandum is to document the proposed physical changes in the visual environment that may occur as a result of the proposed project.

3.1 Approach

This VIA memorandum was prepared in accordance with guidelines found in the *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA 1981). The analysis identified important views, or *key views*, that could theoretically be noticeably altered by the proposed project. As recommended by FHWA, these views are described by the view character and quality, the visual resources present, viewer group and viewer group sensitivity, as well as the duration of the views. For evaluation purposes, key views are views from the vicinity of the project site in which visual resources—including mountains/ridgelines, historic buildings, parks, open space, trees, and vegetation—appear as a backdrop. The terminology is described below.

The *character* of a view is described by the topography, land uses, scale, form, and natural resources depicted in the view. The assessment of the visual character is descriptive and not evaluative because it is based on defined attributes.

Visual *quality* refers to the aesthetics of the view. Determining the quality of a view can be subjective because it is based in part on the viewer's values and notions about what constitutes a quality setting. In an effort to establish an objective framework, this assessment applies the evaluative criteria (i.e., vividness, intactness, and unity) and qualitative rankings (low, medium, and high) presented in the FHWA guidelines. *Vividness* is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns. *Intactness* is the visual integrity of the natural and artificial landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. *Unity* is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole.

Views of *high* quality have topographic relief, a variety of vegetation, rich colors, impressive scenery, and unique natural and/or built features. Views of *medium* quality have interesting but minor landforms, some variety in vegetation and color, and/or moderate scenery. Views of *low* quality have uninteresting features, little variety in vegetation and color, uninteresting scenery, and/or common elements. The FHWA guidelines explain that all three criteria—vividness, intactness, and unity—must be high to indicate high quality. In this assessment, the visual quality of the study area is ranked as low to medium because no views of high quality were identified.

Visual resources within a view may include unique views, views identified as important in local plans, views from scenic highways, or other features such as familiar landmarks and trees.

Viewer groups/sensitivity refers to people who would see the project both during construction and after its completion, and whether these viewers would likely have a low, moderate, or high level of concern about the aesthetic changes resulting from the project. It is presumed that people who can see the project from their place of residence, work, or school would have a relatively high level of sensitivity.

Duration of a view refers to the length of time the view is observed by a particular viewer group. The view duration may be either short- or long-term. Short-term views include fleeting or intermittent views, such as those visible from a moving source over a short distance (e.g., motorists' views from moving vehicles). Long-term views are composed chiefly of constant views as experienced over an extended period of time (e.g., a view from a residential property or office building). Viewer group sensitivity increases as the duration of a view increases.

3.2 Methodology

Criteria Used to Evaluate Effects on the Landscape and Existing Views

CEQA Criteria

The following criteria were used to evaluate whether or not the proposed project would result in new or substantially more severe visual impacts when compared to the impacts described in the FEIS/EIR.

- *Criterion 1 (Character Consistency):* A significant visual impact under CEQA would result if the proposed project would introduce new visual elements that would strongly contrast or be incompatible with the character of the existing landscape or key view.
- *Criterion 2 (Obstruction of Views):* A significant visual impact under CEQA would result if the proposed project would obstruct key views. The importance of a view is based on its character and quality, its viewers, and the duration of the view. For purposes of this analysis, a view is considered key if at least one of the following circumstances applies:
 - a) Visual resources are present, regardless of the quality of the view. The sensitivity of the affected viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term;
 - b) The quality of the view is medium or high, regardless of whether visual resources are present. The sensitivity of the viewer group is medium or high, and the duration of the view is long-term; or
 - c) The view is distinct, clear, and unobstructed from the highway to adjacent businesses and is viewed regularly by a large number of commuters. In this case, the viewer sensitivity is medium, and the view is long-term.

NEPA Criteria

Although specific significance thresholds or screening criteria are not provided in NEPA or under CEQ regulations, in its Declaration of Purpose, NEPA states that it is the responsibility of the federal government to: "...assure all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings ... and to attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences." (Section 101 [42 USC § 4331]). Among the ten types of issues listed in NEPA as important to consider, three touch upon aesthetics indirectly, including the potential to adversely affect the unique character of the affected resource, the potential for controversy, and the potential to violate laws and regulations (Section 1508.27, CEQ: Regulations for Implementing NEPA, Index and Terminology). For the purposes of the proposed project, the relevant thresholds of significance applied to NEPA components are the same as those described for CEQA.

Criteria Used to Evaluate Light, Glare, and Shade/Shadow

Based upon the guidelines established by FHWA, potential visual impacts would occur if the proposed project resulted in substantial light, glare, or shade/shadow impacts, including substantial light intrusion on sensitive receptors (residences, office buildings), noticeable glare that is hazardous to motorists, or substantial shade/shadow on sensitive receptors (e.g., residences and parks).

Criteria Used to Evaluate Construction Impacts

Potential impacts would occur during construction if the construction activities would:

- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

4.0 Environmental Setting

The project site is located within the City of Los Angeles in Los Angeles County. This is a predominately urban area, with a mixture of public facilities, light industrial, and mixed residential land uses. The project site is approximately 100 feet above sea level. To the north, the Hollywood Hills (up to 1,700 feet) are a visible landform, while to the southwest, the Baldwin Hills (up to 500 feet) are prominent. However, given the presence of urban uses in the vicinity of the project site, the views of these landforms are often obstructed (see Appendix A, *Map of Viewpoints*, and Figures B-2, B-3, B-4, B-5, and B-10 in Appendix B). Due to the long history of urban and suburban development and land uses in Los Angeles, the natural landscape is relegated to the background, while the foreground is occupied by residential and industrial buildings. The typical uses surrounding the Farmdale Avenue/Exposition Boulevard intersection include public facility (school, playing field), residential, and industrial uses.

4.1 Existing Views

In this study, key views are from residences or public spaces where views of the Hollywood Hills or Baldwin Hills are visible (background). Although these mountains and hills, as well as their ridgelines, trees, and vegetation, are visible, these views are of low to medium quality, often completely obscured by intervening buildings and air pollution. Open space along the Expo LRT ROW may be considered a visual resource; however, due to a lack of vegetation, memorable views, or unique landscape features, the quality of this view is low.

The skyline to the east and west along the Expo LRT ROW consists of views that are of low quality, often visually fragmented by urban development, overhead wires, and air pollution. No vista or memorable landmarks are visible from the project site in either direction. While the existing skyline may be considered a visual resource, the quality of this view is low.

The view of Dorsey High School (foreground) may be considered a visual resource and, thus, a key view due to its distinctive historical value and architectural aesthetic. From the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard, the view of the school is low to medium quality because the view is partially obscured by mature trees. Additionally, the primary orientation of the school is toward Farmdale Avenue rather than Exposition Boulevard. The main entrance and architectural façade faces Farmdale Avenue approximately 400 feet south of the project site, and cannot be readily seen from the project site. The historic significance of the school and its contextual relationship with the Expo LRT ROW are discussed in detail in the *Cultural Resource Technical Study*.

The Rancho Cienega Sports Center is a large, open-space public recreation facility adjacent to Dorsey High School to the west along the Expo LRT ROW, consisting of playing fields, trees, and sports facilities. While this facility is a visual resource, it is not visible from the project site and is not expected to be affected by the proposed project.

Sensitive viewers include students and staff of Dorsey High School, residents of surrounding homes, workers at industrial facilities, passing motorists, and (future) train passengers of the Expo LRT system. Each of these sensitive viewer groups has different sensitivities and potential viewable areas and will be addressed for each of the project alternatives below.

Appendix A, *Map of Viewpoints*, is a map that identifies the location and directions for the photos used in this assessment. The numbers in the figure represent the location and direction of view for the subsequent photos. A summary of the key views is provided below. The potential effects of the proposed project are included in the following discussion.

Key Views

Visual Resources

- Distant, background views of the Hollywood Hills to the north (Figures B-2, B-3, and B-4; Appendix B) and Baldwin Hills to the south (Figures B-5 and B-10; Appendix B).
- Skyline to the west and east (Figures B-8 and B-9; Appendix B).
- Dorsey High School in foreground (Figures B-1 and B-5; Appendix B).

Visual Quality of the Visual Resource

- Views of low to moderate quality of the Hollywood Hills and Baldwin Hills given the intervening distance, air pollution, and urban development.

- Views of low to moderate quality of the eastern and western skyline because of a lack of notable vistas or landmarks.
- Views of low to moderate quality of Dorsey High School because the primary orientation of the school is away from the project site.
- Views of moderate quality of the community landscaping and “Expo” sign along the Exposition ROW west of Farmdale Avenue.

Viewer Group/Viewer Sensitivity

- High sensitivity of pedestrians, including residents, students, workers.
- Moderate sensitivity of recreational users at Rancho Cienega Sports Facility (primarily engaged in sports activities).
- Low sensitivity of passing motorists.

View Duration

- Long-term views to residents along Exposition Boulevard to the east of the intersection, students, workers at Dorsey High School and nearby industrial businesses to the west of the intersection.
- Short-term views to motorists, sports facility users, future train passengers.

5.0 Effects on the Landscape

5.1 Summary of FEIS/EIR Conclusions

The FEIS/EIR found that the Expo LRT project would have a less-than-significant impact on visual resources, due to the landscaping and design elements already included in the project, the inclusion of public-art elements, and implementation of mitigation measures specified in the FEIS/EIR, Section 4.4, 47-49. The previously considered at-grade crossing at Farmdale Avenue was included as part of the FEIS/EIR, and was found to have no adverse visual impact. The visual quality of the proposed project was not previously considered and is therefore the subject of examination in this document.

5.2 Proposed Project

The design features that have the highest potential to result in visual change associated with the proposed project are:

- Construction of two 15-foot high station platform canopies within the Exposition Boulevard ROW,
- Removal of four mature trees along the northeast corner of Dorsey High School, and
- Demolition of the Expo Inn at the northeast corner of the intersection of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue.

The station platform and canopy would be constructed within an existing transportation ROW, the Exposition Boulevard and would not block any views of high quality. The 15-foot station platform canopies would be compatible with the low- to medium-rise character of the surrounding neighborhood. The station design would be similar to the other stations along the proposed Exposition Boulevard Light Rail Transit Line and therefore would be visually compatible with rest of the alignment. Therefore, no visual impacts would occur.

Two mature redwood trees along the northeastern corner of Dorsey High School property would be removed to allow for realignment of the staff parking vehicle access, necessary to accommodate the proposed station platform within the Exposition Boulevard ROW, as well as the pedestrian plaza as part of the at-grade crossing. These trees are not protected by local ordinance. Two trees along the Farmdale Avenue sidewalk along the eastern edge of Dorsey High School would also be removed, neither of which are protected. Since only four trees would be potentially affected and these trees are not protected, loss of these trees is not considered significant. Nonetheless, the following mitigation measure shall be implemented:

H-4 Two mature redwood trees near the northeast corner of Dorsey High school shall be assessed for viability, and removed and placed under the care of a licensed arborist during construction. Replanting or replacement of these mature trees shall be considered on the Dorsey High School campus or at a nearby suitable location. Consistent with the City of Los Angeles policy, any removed street trees shall be replaced in the local vicinity at a 2:1 ratio. All replanting or replacement of trees shall be performed in accordance with the Landscape Element of the Mid-City/Exposition Transit Parkway plan, as described in the FEIS/EIR.

Minimal light or glare would be generated by the proposed station platforms. There will be outdoor security lighting on and around the platforms. All lights would be shielded and directed towards the immediate area on and around the platforms. The platform canopies would not be of substantial height to cast long shadows outside the ROW.

The sensitivity of residents and students is normally considered high. However, the proposed project would be consistent with the urban and industrial character of the surrounding community. Most visual effects would be limited to non-sensitive viewers, such as passing motorists.

As previously stated, the proposed project would include the acquisition of the 10,963-square-foot property located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Exposition Boulevard and Farmdale Avenue. All existing structures, including the Expo Inn, a residency motel located at 4523 West Exposition Boulevard, would be demolished prior to the construction of a 26-space parking lot. Removal of the two-story motel and construction of the parking lot is not anticipated to result in significant aesthetic impacts. As described previously, existing views of mountains and hills, as well as their ridgelines, trees, and vegetation, are visible from the project area. These existing views are of low to medium quality and often completely obscured by intervening buildings and air pollution. Implementation of the proposed project would not block these existing

views. Removal of the motel and the proposed construction of surface parking may in fact increase views of the Baldwin Hills to the south and the Hollywood Hills to the north. The proposed parking lot would be compatible with the existing urban and industrial character of the surrounding community. Landscaping would be implemented around the perimeter of the proposed parking lot in accordance with FEIR/EIS-recommended landscaping.

Minimal light and glare would be generated from the proposed parking lot. The parking lot would include security lighting typical of commercial urban parking lots. Parked vehicles could generate minimal amounts of glare. This would be considered a less-than-significant impact.

Construction impacts associated with the proposed station platforms would be moderate and comparable with the construction process for the remainder of the Expo LRT project along the ROW, as discussed on page 4.15-22 of the FEIS/EIR. Although existing landscaping removal and earthmoving work have already occurred in the project ROW area, minor potential visual impacts would result from the presence of staging/stockpiling, rail-building materials, the presence of construction equipment, and temporary traffic barricades across the intersection. Visible activities would include scaffolding, pouring of concrete, excavation, other routine construction activities, and truck shipments. These activities would be visible from some of the adjacent residential/commercial properties. These construction activities are consistent with those described in the FEIS/EIR. Construction impacts would be temporary, and would not substantially degrade the current urban and industrial character of the neighborhood.

Recommended mitigation measures are specified in Section 4.4 (pp. 47-49) of the FEIS/EIR, include landscaping, and lead artist input.

No new or more severe significant impacts under CEQA and no new or more severe adverse substantial effects under NEPA on visual resources would occur.

6.0 Cumulative Impacts

Common elements from the proposed project are addressed below relative to their potential for cumulative impacts. The Expo LRT system is part of a countywide transportation network and will interconnect with the existing Metro Blue Line, and the planned Crenshaw-Prairie Transit Corridor, a bus or light-rail transit line that will start at Exposition Boulevard and continue south along Crenshaw Boulevard providing a connection with the Metro Green Line and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). However, these existing and planned projects, including other planned aerial structures as part of the Expo LRT project, including the La Brea Station, will not be visible from the project site at the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. The project alternatives involve improvements to the existing Expo LRT ROW. Motorists are considered to have low sensitivity, and neither Exposition Boulevard nor Farmdale Avenue is considered a scenic highway.

For the proposed project, the loss of landscaping and potential impacts due to the Expo LRT project (security/soundwalls and addition of hard surfaces, potential vertical structures) could result in a net loss of visual character and quality. However, the potential for cumulative impacts and mitigation measures for the removal and/or replacement of landscaping and other vegetation along the ROW have previously been discussed in the FEIS/EIR and are, therefore, not considered further in this document.

The completion of the Expo LRT system may encourage increased residential or commercial development pressure in the area that may affect its visual characteristics. However, since these potential cumulative impacts were already addressed in the FEIS/EIR for the project as a whole, they are not considered further. Other than the planned additional school buildings along the northern edge of the Dorsey High School property, no other projects are known to be under construction or planned or proposed within the immediate vicinity of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.

6.1 Proposed Project

Despite the vertical nature of the station canopies included as part of the proposed project, due to the low quality of the affected visual resources, a less-than-significant visual impact under CEQA, and no adverse effect under NEPA would occur.

The proposed project would not affect the historic integrity or visual character of the nearby historic resource, Dorsey High School. The loss of mature trees would not be significant and measures have been proposed (mitigation measure H-4) to consider replanting or replacement of the trees per a qualified arborist's opinion. The proposed parking lot that would be constructed at the northeast corner of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard would include landscaping elements around the periphery and would be consistent with landscaping along the rest of the Expo LRT alignment.

As discussed above, the potential for cumulative impacts and mitigation measures for the removal and/or replacement of landscaping and other vegetation along the ROW have previously been discussed in the FEIS/EIR. Therefore, with the implementation of all applicable mitigation measures described above, the proposed project would not result in new or more severe cumulatively effects that would impact visual resources.

The proposed project would result in a less-than-significant cumulative visual impact under CEQA and no adverse cumulative effect under NEPA on the visual resources of the surrounding area.

7.0 References

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Appendix A Map of Viewpoints



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Appendix B
Photos: Site Location/Views



Image 1. View of northeastern corner of Dorsey High School.



Image 2. View facing north along the center of Farmdale Avenue, adjacent to Dorsey High School, looking toward the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 3. View facing north along the west side of Farmdale Avenue from the northeastern corner of Dorsey High School.



Image 4. View facing north along the east side of Farmdale Avenue, from the northeast corner of the property of Dorsey High School, looking toward the proposed action location.



Image 5. View facing south along the center of Farmdale Avenue, immediately north of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard. Dorsey High School is along the right side of the road, and is mostly obscured by mature trees and vegetation.



Image 6. View facing north, looking across Exposition Boulevard from the northern edge of Dorsey High School, to the west of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 7. View facing south, looking across Exposition Boulevard toward the northern edge of Dorsey High School, to the west of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 8. View facing west, looking along the Expo LRT ROW, from the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 9. View facing east, looking along the Expo LRT ROW, from the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 10. View facing south, looking along Farmdale Avenue, toward the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 11. View facing northwest, looking across Exposition Boulevard, toward the Metro-owned parcel on the northwest corner of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.



Image 12. View facing northeast, looking across Exposition Boulevard, toward the Expo Inn Motel on the northeast corner of the intersection of Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard.

Appendix D
Community Impact Assessment