

## 4.5 Visual Quality and Aesthetics

### 4.5.1 Regulatory Framework and Methodology

#### 4.5.1.1 Regulatory Framework

The applicable federal, state, and local regulations that are relevant to an analysis of the proposed project's visual quality and aesthetics impacts are listed below. For additional information regarding these regulations, please see the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Report in Appendix K of this Draft EIS/EIR.

##### **Federal**

- NEPA

##### **State**

- CEQA

##### **Local**

- City of Los Angeles (City of Los Angeles Land Use/Transportation Policy, Special Districts, Targeted Neighborhood Initiatives, and Streetscape Plans); and
- City of San Fernando (General Plan, San Fernando Corridors Specific Plan).

#### 4.5.1.2 Methodology

The following steps were used to assess the existing visual setting of the project corridor:

- The existing visual character and quality were identified;
- Maps were prepared and photographs were taken to illustrate existing visual character and quality;
- Existing viewers, viewer exposure, and viewer response were evaluated; and
- An assessment of the project's impacts on visual resources was conducted using architectural renderings and visual simulations.

The existing visual quality of the project study area was evaluated using the methodology described in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance document, *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*.<sup>1</sup> According to the guidance document, visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness, and unity present in the viewshed. Each of these elements was assessed to support subsequent comparisons with post-project conditions. FHWA states that this method should correlate with public judgments of visual quality well enough to predict those judgments. This approach is particularly useful in roadway planning because it does not presume that a highway project is necessarily an eyesore. This approach to evaluating visual quality can also help identify specific methods for mitigating each adverse impact that may result from a project.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Highway Administration. 1981. *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*. March.

A landscape is composed of two elements: 1) the underlying landform (e.g., mountains, valley, or beach), and 2) the land cover on it (water, vegetation, man-made development). A landscape unit (LU) is a portion of the regional landscape and can be thought of as an outdoor room that exhibits a distinct visual character. An LU will often correspond to a place or district that is commonly known among local viewers. Within the project study area, there are distinct transitions in the visual setting that correspond primarily to changes in land use.

Because of the high level of diversity in land use and visual character along the project corridor, seven LUs have been defined to capture the overall character and quality of different segments of the corridor (see Figure 4.5-1, below, and Figures 3-2 through 3-9 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). These LUs represent typical characteristics rather than every detail of the project corridor.

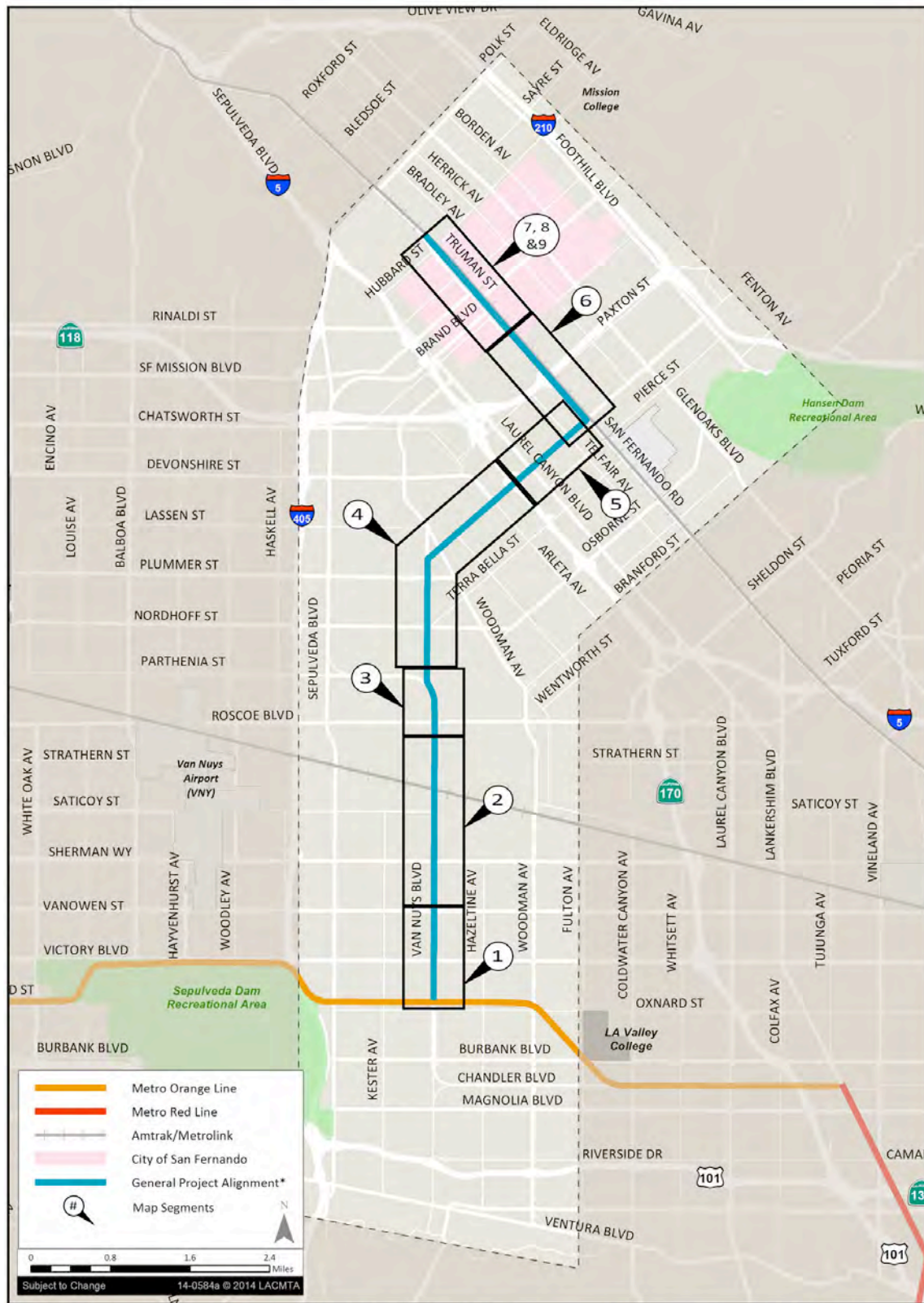
For the purpose of this report, a numerical rating between 1 and 7 was assigned to the vividness, intactness, and unity for each of the LUs (see Table 4.5-1). The lowest value was assigned a rating of 1, while 7 represents the highest value.

**Table 4.5-1: Visual Quality Numerical Ratings**

Rating	Description
1	Very Low
2	Low
3	Moderately Low
4	Moderate
5	Moderately High
6	High
7	Very High

Source: FHWA, 1981.

Figure 4.5-1: Landscape Unit Overview



\*Alignment generalized for this overview map only for clarity at this scale. Detailed alignments for each alternative are included on the map segments.

### 4.5.1.3 Significance Thresholds

#### NEPA

NEPA requires federal agencies to determine if an undertaking would significantly affect the environment; however, NEPA does not include specific significance thresholds. According to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing NEPA, the determination of significance under NEPA is based on context and intensity.<sup>2</sup>

Context relates to the various levels of society where impacts could result, such as society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. The intensity of an impact relates to several factors, including the degree to which the impact would affect public health and safety; the proximity of the project to sensitive resources; and the degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial or involve unique or unknown risks.

Under NEPA, the context and intensity of a project's impacts are discussed regardless of any thresholds levels, and mitigation measures are included where reasonable.

#### CEQA

CEQA requires state and local government agencies to identify the significant environmental effects of proposed actions; however, CEQA does not describe specific significance thresholds. According to the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, significance thresholds for a given environmental effect are at the discretion of the lead agency and are the levels at which the lead agency finds the effects of a project to be significant.

#### State CEQA Guidelines

The CEQA Guidelines define "significant effect on the environment" as: "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by a project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance" (CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR Section 15382).<sup>3</sup>

The CEQA Guidelines do not describe specific significance thresholds. However, Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines lists a variety of potentially significant effects. As outlined in Appendix G, a project may have a significant effect on visual and aesthetics resources if the project would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a scenic highway;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

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<sup>2</sup> Code of Federal Regulations. *CEQ – Regulations for Implementing NEPA, 40 CFR Part 1508, Terminology and Index.*

<sup>3</sup> California Natural Resources Agency. 2010b. *State CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR Section 15382.* Available: <<http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/guidelines/art20.html>>. Accessed: February 15, 2013.

## City of Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds

The *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide* states that a determination of significance for aesthetics and visual resources shall be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the following factors:<sup>4</sup>

### *Aesthetics*

- The amount or relative proportion of existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area, which would be removed, altered, or demolished;
- The amount of natural open space to be graded or developed;
- The degree to which proposed structures in natural open space areas would be effectively integrated into the aesthetics of the site, through appropriate design, etc.;
- The degree of contrast between proposed features and existing features that represent the area's valued aesthetic image;
- The degree to which a proposed zone change would result in buildings that would detract from the existing style or image of the area due to density, height, bulk, setbacks, signage, or other physical elements;
- The degree to which the project would contribute to the area's aesthetic value; and
- Applicable guidelines and regulations.

### *Obstruction of Views*

- The nature and quality of recognized or valued views (such as natural topography, settings, man-made or natural features of visual interest, and resources such as mountains or the ocean);
- Whether the project affects views from a designated scenic highway, corridor, or parkway;
- The extent of obstruction (e.g., total blockage, partial interruption, or minor diminishment); and
- The extent to which the project affects recognized views available from a length of a public roadway, bike path, or trail, as opposed to a single, fixed vantage point.

### *Shading*

- A project impact would normally be considered significant if shadow-sensitive uses would be shaded by project-related structures for more than three hours between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Pacific Standard Time (between late October and early April), or for more than four hours between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time (between early April and late October).

### *Nighttime Illumination*

- The change in ambient illumination levels as a result of project sources; and
- The extent to which project lighting would spill out of the project site and affect adjacent light-sensitive areas.

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<sup>4</sup> City of Los Angeles. 2006. *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide*, K. Public Services. Available: <<http://www.ci.la.ca.us/ead/programs/Thresholds/K-Public%20Services.pdf>>. Accessed: February 13, 2013.

## 4.5.2 Affected Environment/Existing Conditions

The study area runs generally north/south in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles County. The project corridor is approximately 9.2 miles in length, and runs nearly one-quarter of the length of the valley floor. The San Fernando Valley is a topographically flat area consisting of approximately 260 square miles; however, there are several mountain ranges near or adjacent to the project corridor, including the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west (see Figure 3-1 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). The project corridor is located in an urbanized area with residential, commercial, industrial, recreation, schools, community centers, and other urban land uses. There are a number of residential and recreational areas in the mountainous regions from where the viewshed includes the project corridor.

### 4.5.2.1 Existing Scenic Vistas

Scenic vistas in the project study area include views of the surrounding mountains, which are visible from various locations along the project corridor and include the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west. Views of surrounding mountains are described for each LU in Section 4.5.2.3 below.

### 4.5.2.2 Existing Scenic Resources

Scenic resources in the project study area include existing landscaping elements, including rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, and historic properties along the project corridor, which include the following:

- 14601-3 Aetna Street: This property is an example of Progress Works Administration (PWA) Moderne architecture and early infrastructure in the San Fernando Valley.
- 130 N. Brand Boulevard: This property is a junior high school campus with Classical Revival architecture.
- 1140 San Fernando Road: This property is a unique example of a J.C. Penney department store in a commercial strip, as opposed to a shopping mall.
- 1601 San Fernando Road: This property is an example of a Googie-style car wash on San Fernando Road.
- 6353 Van Nuys Boulevard: This property is an example of Streamline Moderne architecture that represents an early period of commercial development in the San Fernando Valley.
- 6551 Van Nuys Boulevard: This property is an example of New Formalist architecture and the work of Millard Sheets.
- 8201 Van Nuys Boulevard: This property is a rare example of Expressionist architecture.
- 8324 Van Nuys Boulevard: This property is part of a planned commercial strip for the successful post-war suburb of Panorama City.
- 9110 Van Nuys Boulevard: This property is a planned commercial strip for the successful post-war suburb of Panorama City, and is the work of master architect William Pereira.
- San Fernando Road: A portion of San Fernando Road between the southern end of Truman Street to North Lincoln Street/Victory Place is a historic alignment, dating from as early as 1871.



### 4.5.2.3 Existing Visual Character and Quality

#### LU-1: Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Civic Center Unit

LU-1 includes the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor between approximately Calvert Street and Vanowen Street. This LU is in the Van Nuys – North Sherman Oaks Community Plan Area (CPA) and in the Van Nuys Community Design Overlay (CDO) District, Van Nuys Central Business District (CBD) CDO, and Van Nuys Targeted Neighborhood Initiative (TNI). This LU also includes historic properties at 14601-3 Aetna Street, 6353 Van Nuys Boulevard, and 6551 Van Nuys Boulevard. This segment of Van Nuys Boulevard is typically three vehicle lanes in each direction with a center median and/or turn lanes. There are parking spaces and sidewalks, but no bike lanes.

Typical views in LU-1 include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor, bordered by parking, sidewalks, street trees, commercial buildings, signs on both sides of the corridor, and additional buildings visible in the background. In the northbound direction, the San Gabriel Mountains are visible; in the southbound direction, the Santa Monica Mountains are visible. Representative Viewpoint (RV)-1, representing views from LU-1, is facing slightly northeast on Van Nuys Boulevard at its intersection with Haynes Street on the west side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-2, below).

Figure 4.5-2: Representative Viewpoint 1



Source: GPA, 2013.

The visual quality of LU-1 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2. Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-1 is rated at approximately 5.7, which is high (see Table 3-1 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K).

## LU-2: Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Commercial Unit

LU-2 includes Van Nuys Boulevard between approximately Vanowen Street and Titus Street. This LU is partially in the Van Nuys – North Sherman Oaks CPA and partially in the Mission Hills – Panorama City – North Hills CPA. This LU is within the Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), where lots are categorized by whether they have contributing features, non-contributing features, or if the parcel is undeveloped. A portion of the LU is also in the Van Nuys TNI II and Panorama City CDO District. This segment of Van Nuys Boulevard is typically three vehicle lanes in each direction with a center median and/or turn lanes. There are parking spaces and sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, but no bike lanes. LU-2 also passes under the Union Pacific Railroad just south of West Cabrito Road.

Typical views in LU-2 include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor stretching from the foreground to the horizon, bordered by sidewalks, street trees, commercial buildings, tall light poles, and signs on both sides, with additional buildings visible in the background. Mountains are minimally visible in the background in both the northbound (Santa Susana) and southbound (Santa Monica) directions. RV-2, representing views from LU-2, is facing slightly northeast on Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Hartland Street on the west side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-3).

**Figure 4.5-3: Representative Viewpoint 2**



Source: GPA, 2014.

The visual character of LU-2 is that of a small to medium-scale urban commercial corridor. Van Nuys Boulevard, adjacent commercial buildings, and associated overhead signs are the dominant components in LU-2, which create a pattern of straight yet jagged lines in the landscape. Street trees soften these lines, and add color, texture and shading to the landscape; however, because they are planted intermittently they blend into the overall landscape.



The northbound views of the San Gabriel Mountains add visual interest in the LU, but these views are dominated by other features in the landscape. Buildings in LU-2 are of all different sizes, styles, and colors, and are spaced at different intervals, creating a high level of visual diversity in the landscape with no common theme. The roadway is wide, which creates a more open and exposed feel in this area. Overhead streetlights create a uniform line along the roadway; however, this is minimized by the variety of building features.

The visual quality of LU-2 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-2 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-2 is rated at approximately 2, which is low.

### LU-3: Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City Commercial Unit

LU-3 includes Van Nuys Boulevard between approximately Titus Street and just north of Parthenia Street. This LU is in the Mission Hills – Panorama City – North Hills CPA, Panorama City CDO District, and Panorama City Business Improvement District (BID). This LU also includes historic properties at 8201 Van Nuys Boulevard and 8324 Van Nuys Boulevard. This segment of Van Nuys Boulevard is typically three vehicle lanes in each direction with a center median and/or turn lanes. There are parking spaces and sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, but no bike lanes. There is a large curve to the left along this section of Van Nuys Boulevard between Chase Street and Parthenia Street; Parthenia Street veers to the left while Van Nuys Boulevard turns again to the right and continues north.

Typical views in LU-3 include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor, bordered by parking, sidewalks, street trees, signs on both sides of the corridor, and commercial buildings, with additional buildings visible in the background. In the northbound direction, a curve in Van Nuys Boulevard reduces views beyond the roadway corridor itself. RV-3, representing views from LU-3, is facing northeast on Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Chase Street on the west side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-4).

**Figure 4.5-4: Representative Viewpoint 3**



Source: GPA, 2014.

The visual character of LU-3 is that of a small to medium-scale urban commercial corridor. Van Nuys Boulevard and the adjacent commercial buildings are the dominant components in LU-3. They create a pattern of straight but jagged lines in the landscape that are partially softened by street trees. These trees also add color, texture, and shading to the landscape, which is otherwise dominated by concrete. There is a curve in the road through a portion of LU-3 that adds a gently curving line to the landscape.

The visual quality of LU-3 has been quantified in using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-3 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-3 is rated at 3, which is moderately low.

#### **LU-4: Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City-Arleta Residential Unit**

LU-4 includes Van Nuys Boulevard between approximately just north of Parthenia Street and just south of I-5 (see Figure 3-6 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). This LU is located partially within the Mission Hills – Panorama City – North Hills CPA and partially within the Arleta – Pacoima CPA. This LU also includes one historic property at 9110 Van Nuys Boulevard. This segment of Van Nuys Boulevard is typically two vehicle lanes in each direction with a center median and/or turn lanes. There are parking spaces and sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, but no bike lanes. This LU also crosses over the Pacoima Wash Diversion Channel.

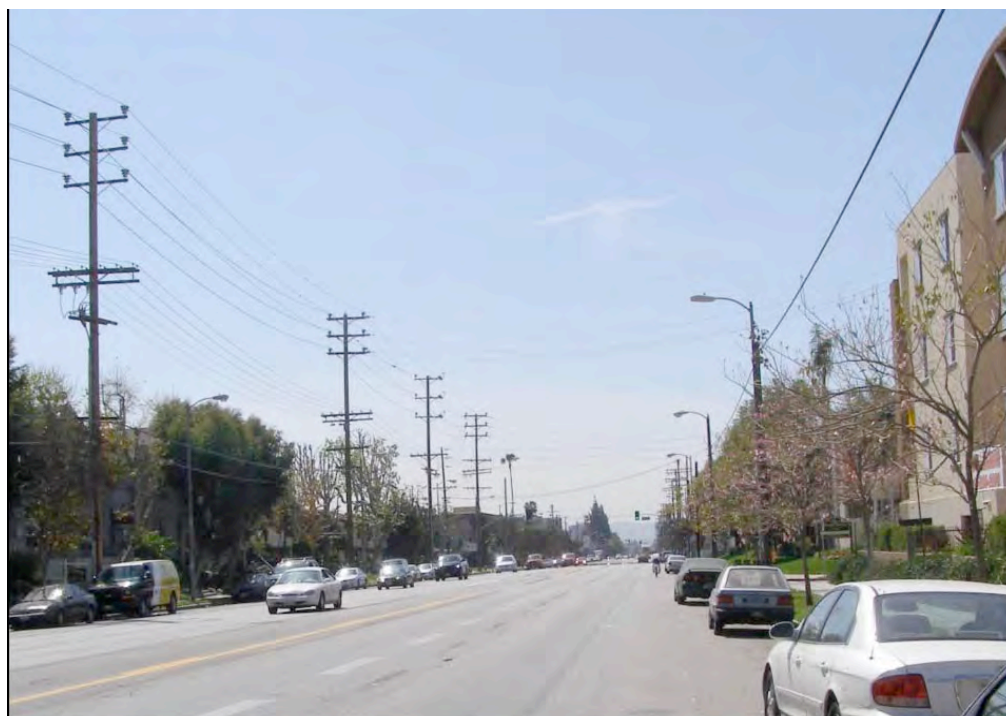
Typical views in LU-4 include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor, bordered by parking, sidewalks, overhead utility lines, landscaping, and apartment buildings. There is a curve in the road on Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Plummer Street, after which the I-5 overcrossing and the San Gabriel Mountains are visible in the background in the northbound direction. RV-4, representing views from LU-4, is facing slightly southeast on Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Vincennes Street on the west side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-5).

The visual character of LU-4 is that of a residential neighborhood. The dominant components in this LU include Van Nuys Boulevard, adjacent apartment buildings, landscaping, and overhead power lines. In the northbound direction, the San Gabriel Mountains are dominant in the background. The roadway, buildings, and power lines create straight lines through the LU, which are softened in part by the dense vegetation, as well as the mountains in the background.

The vegetation also provides color, texture, and shading to the landscape in this LU. The roadway is narrower through this area, as well as the sidewalks, creating a more enclosed feel in the landscape. On the east side of the roadway, the sidewalk is separated from the street by a strip of grass or other landscaping, which provides additional visual separation and a perception of safety for pedestrians walking through this area.

The visual quality of LU-4 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-4 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-4 is rated at 5, which is moderately high.

**Figure 4.5-5: Representative Viewpoint 4**



Source: GPA, 2013.

## **LU-5: Pacoima Commercial Unit**

LU-5 includes Van Nuys Boulevard between approximately just south of I-5 and San Fernando Road. LU-5 is in the Arleta-Pacoima CPA, the Pacoima CDO District, and the Pacoima Town Center TNI. This segment of Van Nuys Boulevard is typically two vehicle lanes in each direction with a center median and/or turn lanes. There are parking spaces and sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, but no bike lanes. This LU also crosses under I-5 and over the UPRR railroad tracks.

Typical views in this LU include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor, bordered by parking spaces, sidewalks, street trees, signs, utility lines, and commercial buildings, with additional buildings visible in the background. In the northbound direction, the San Gabriel Mountains are visible. RV-5, representing views from LU-5, is facing slightly southwest on Van Nuys Boulevard just south of El Dorado Avenue on the east side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-6).

The visual character of LU-5 is that of a small to medium-scale urban commercial corridor. The dominant components in this LU are Van Nuys Boulevard, the adjacent commercial buildings, and overhead power lines. In the northbound direction, the San Gabriel Mountains are dominant in the background. The buildings, roadway, and overhead utilities create a pattern of straight lines in the landscape, which are partially softened by street trees. Trees also add color, texture, and shading to the landscape.

The visual quality of LU-5 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-5 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-5 is rated at approximately 3.3, which is moderately low.

**Figure 4.5-6: Representative Viewpoint 5**



Source: GPA, 2014.

## **LU-6: San Fernando Road Unit**

LU-6 includes the San Fernando Road corridor from Van Nuys Boulevard in the south to Kittridge Street in the north. LU-6 is in the Arleta-Pacoima CPA. A portion of the LU near Van Nuys Boulevard is also in the Pacoima Community Design Overlay area. The roadway is generally two lanes in each direction with street parking on portions of the south side of the roadway, and a Class 1 bike path adjacent to the east of the roadway. LU-6 crosses under SR-118 and over the Pacoima Wash Diversion Channel.

Typical views in LU-6 include the San Fernando Road corridor, bordered by parking spaces, sidewalks, streetlights, overhead utilities, sparse vegetation, and commercial/industrial buildings. On the north side of the road, the railroad tracks also are visible along the corridor. In the westbound direction, the Santa Susana Mountains are visible on the north side of the corridor to the northwest. RV-6, representing views from LU-6, is facing southeast on San Fernando Road just north of Pinney Street on the north side of the roadway (see Figure 4.5-7).

The visual character of LU-6 is that of an urban industrial corridor. The dominant components in this LU consist of San Fernando Road, adjacent commercial/industrial buildings, and the railroad tracks on the north side of the roadway. These components create a pattern of straight but jagged lines in the landscape. To the northeast, the San Gabriel Mountains are also a visually dominant feature in the corridor.

The scale and openness of the corridor create a more exposed feel for pedestrians but are slightly minimized by the larger mountains in the background. The varying sizes, styles, and colors of the buildings create a high level of visual diversity in the landscape with no common theme.



**Figure 4.5-7: Representative Viewpoint 6**



Source: GPA, 2014.

The visual quality of LU-6 has been quantified in Table 3-6 using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-6 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-6 is rated at approximately 3.3, which is moderately low.

### **LU-7: San Fernando Mall Unit**

LU-7 includes the San Fernando Road corridor, including the San Fernando Mall, from Kittridge Street to the Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink. The San Fernando Mall begins at Kittridge Street, where San Fernando Road becomes one lane in each direction, and continues to San Fernando Mission Boulevard. This LU includes historic properties at 130 N. Brand Boulevard, 1140 San Fernando Road, 1601 San Fernando Road, and the historic segment of San Fernando Road between the southern end of Truman Street and North Lincoln Street/Victory Place. From San Fernando Mission Boulevard to the Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink Station, the roadway is generally two lanes in each direction, and the visual setting within this area is similar to LU-6. Within the San Fernando Mall corridor, there are diagonal parking spaces on one side of the roadway, and parallel street parking on the other side of the roadway, which varies from block to block. There are no center medians or bike lanes along this section of the roadway.

Typical views in LU-7 include the San Fernando Road corridor, bordered by parking spaces, sidewalks, streetlights, landscaping, and storefronts. RV-7, representing views from LU-7, is facing south on San Fernando Road looking toward the intersection with Maclay Avenue (see Figure 4.5-8).

The visual character of LU-7 is that of a local retail shopping area. The dominant components in this LU are the San Fernando Mall corridor and the adjacent storefront, which create a pattern of straight lines in the landscape that is softened in part by the existing landscaped trees and planters. This vegetation adds texture to the landscape, which is otherwise dominated by concrete and parked cars.

**Figure 4.5-8: Representative Viewpoint 7**



Source: GPA, 2014.

The visual quality of LU-7 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-7 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-7 is rated at 4, which is moderate.

### **LU-8: Truman Street Unit**

LU-8 includes the Truman Street corridor from San Fernando Road to the Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink Station. This LU is within the San Fernando Corridors SPA, and includes historic properties at 130 N. Brand Boulevard, 1140 San Fernando Road, and 1601 San Fernando Road. The roadway is generally two lanes in each direction with a center median or turn lanes. There is street parking along portions of the roadway, but no bike lanes.

Typical views in LU-8 include the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor, bordered by parking spaces, sidewalks, streetlights, landscaping, signs, and commercial buildings. The San Gabriel Mountains are highly visible in the background in the northbound direction. RV-8, representing views from LU-8, is facing northeast on Truman Street at its intersection with Maclay Avenue (see Figure 4.5-9).

The visual character of LU-8 is that of a local retail shopping area. The dominant components in this LU are Truman Street and the adjacent commercial buildings, which create a pattern of straight lines in the landscape that is softened in part by the existing street trees. These trees also add color and texture to the landscape, which is otherwise dominated by concrete. To the northeast, the San Gabriel Mountains are also a visually dominant feature in the corridor.

The visual quality of LU-8 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-8 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-8 is rated at 4, which is moderate.



**Figure 4.5-9: Representative Viewpoint 8**



Source: GPA, 2013.

## **LU-9: Metrolink Railroad Unit**

LU-9 includes the Metrolink Railroad from La Rue Street to the Sylmar-San Fernando Metrolink Station. The Metrolink railroad tracks run through an industrial area, northeast of Truman Street. There are industrial buildings located southwest of the railroad tracks and landscaped trees and vegetation are located adjacent to the Mission City Bike Trail (trail) just northeast of the railroad tracks. Chain-link and iron-rod fences separate the railroad tracks from the adjacent land uses. There are telephone poles and wires that span the length of the railroad tracks with light poles adjacent to the trail. This LU also includes historic properties at 130 N. Brand Boulevard, 1140 San Fernando Road, and 1601 San Fernando Road.

Typical views in LU-9 include the railroad tracks, landscaped trees, telephone poles, fences, and industrial buildings. RV-9, representing views from LU-9, is facing southeast from the entrance to the Mission City Bike Trail and looks down the railroad corridor (see Figure 4.5-10).

The visual character of LU-9 is that of a landscaped industrial area. The dominant components in this LU are the railroad tracks, industrial buildings, and adjacent landscaping. The trees and vegetation add texture to the landscape and contrast with the sharp lines of the industrial buildings and telephone poles.

The visual quality of LU-9 has been quantified using the rating system described in Section 4.5.1.2 (see Table 3-8 in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics Impacts Report in Appendix K). Overall, on a scale of 1 to 7, the visual quality of LU-9 is rated at 3, which is moderately low.

**Figure 4.5-10: Representative Viewpoint 9**



Source: GPA, 2014.

#### **4.5.2.4 Existing Viewers and Viewer Response**

Viewer groups were identified by researching and observing the land uses and circulation patterns throughout the project corridor. Viewers in the project corridor may shift between viewer groups at different times of the day. The user groups described below were identified for the project study area.

##### **Drivers**

The project corridor is heavily used by single-passenger cars. Drivers include those traveling to and from land uses in the project study area as well as those traveling through the area from other parts of the city and region. Drivers include bus, train, and other transit drivers as well.

##### **Transit Riders**

Multiple transit lines, including Metro Local and Metro Rapid bus service, the Metro Orange Line, the Metrolink Ventura Line commuter rail service, Amtrak inter-city rail service, and the Metrolink Antelope Valley Line commuter rail service, run along or across the project corridor. Transit riders include those riding the bus or train to/from or through the area.

##### **People on Bicycles**

There are currently 2 miles of Class II bike lanes along the project corridor on Van Nuys Boulevard from Parthenia Street to Beachy Avenue as well as a Class I bike path just east and adjacent to the alignment along San Fernando Road; additionally, people on bicycles may use sections that do not have bike lanes. Therefore, people on bicycles who may be traveling along Van Nuys Boulevard, along the San Fernando Road bike path, and/or intersecting roadways have been included as a viewer group. According to community outreach completed for the project, there is a high level of interest for bicycle lanes.

## **Pedestrians**

Pedestrians include people walking either to or from land uses along the project corridor, or those traveling through the area. The pedestrian circulation system, which consists of sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, and street furniture, is generally well developed and complete, serving both adjacent residential and commercial land uses in the two corridors (the Van Nuys Boulevard corridor and the San Fernando Road/Truman Street corridor) as shown in Figure 4.14-1.

Sidewalk widths along Van Nuys Boulevard range from a minimum of 5 feet to a maximum of 20 feet, with most sidewalks ranging from 10 to 13 feet in width. Along San Fernando Road and Truman Street, the sidewalks range from a minimum of 7 feet to a maximum of 13 feet, with most sidewalks falling in the 8 to 12 foot range. There are sections of sidewalk where pedestrian accessibility is compromised by crossing driveways and obstructions protruding into the path of pedestrians.

Crosswalks at signalized intersections have pedestrian indicators and push-button activation for pedestrian phases in the Cities of Los Angeles and San Fernando. Most intersections in the project study area allow pedestrian crossings along all four sides.

## **Residents**

There are several residential neighborhoods along the project corridor, as well as others located on adjacent blocks that are within the project study area. Residential viewers are considered to be those who reside along the corridor itself and would see the project from their homes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 154,510 housing units and a total population of 492,164 individuals in the project study area in the year 2010.

## **Employees/Students**

There are a number of employment centers along and adjacent to the project corridor. Employees at these businesses may view the project when arriving at or departing work, during lunch breaks, and potentially from inside their workplaces. There are also several schools located along or adjacent to the project corridor. Students may have similar viewing patterns as employees.

## **Visitors**

There are a number of retail businesses in the project corridor, as well as government offices and medical complexes. There are a number of churches, libraries, and other community centers along the project corridor. Visitors, which would include shoppers, restaurant-goers, and civic building users, may view the project while arriving at or leaving a particular building.

## **Recreational Users**

There are a number of parks along the project corridor. Recreational users may view the project when arriving at or leaving the facilities or from the facility park itself.

## **Outside Viewers**

The Van Nuys Boulevard corridor is located in a very flat valley surrounded by steep hillsides. Residents and recreational users in the nearer hills would have views of the project.

## **Viewer Sensitivity**

Viewer sensitivity is defined as both the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a

visual resource analysis. Even when the existing appearance of a project site is uninspiring, a community may still object to projects that fall short of its visual goals. Analysts can learn about these special resources and community aspirations for visual quality through citizen participation procedures, as well as from local publications and planning documents.

### **Drivers**

Drivers in the project corridor are moving along roadways, and would therefore not be expected to notice changes in visual character as much as viewers who are stationary. Drivers would also be travelling at a maximum of 35 miles per hour (mph), and would remain in the project corridor for a shorter period of time than people on bicycles or pedestrians. In addition, all of the roadway corridors in the project corridor are busy roadways and demand the careful attention of drivers using these roadways. Viewer sensitivity is considered low.

### **Transit Riders**

Transit riders may have a higher concern for their visual surroundings, depending on what activities they choose to do during their trips along the project corridor. Because riding the bus is a passive activity, riders have the opportunity to read or do some other activity that would allow them to focus their eyes away from their surroundings. However, it is likely that many riders would spend some or all of their time looking out the window at their surroundings. These riders would be expected to be more concerned with changes in visual character. Viewer sensitivity is considered moderately high.

### **People on Bicycles**

People on bicycles using the project corridor are moving along roadways, and would therefore not be expected to notice changes in visual character as much as viewers who are stationary. In addition, roadways within the project corridor are busy and demand the careful attention of people on bicycles. However, people on bicycles are travelling at a slower speed (an average of 10 mph) than engine-powered vehicles and would be in the project corridor during a longer period of time. Therefore, people on bicycles would be more sensitive to visual changes than drivers. Viewer sensitivity is considered moderate.

### **Pedestrians**

Pedestrians may have a higher concern for their visual surroundings, in particular those that are in the area shopping or standing/sitting at one location waiting for a bus. For those that spend a lot of time in the project corridor, the ability to observe their surroundings may be of importance, and these users would be expected to be more concerned with changes in visual character. Viewer sensitivity is considered high.

### **Residents**

Residents along the project corridor may have a higher concern for their visual surroundings since they may be able to view the roadway from their front yards and/or from inside their homes. Typically, people feel strongly about the visual character of areas surrounding their homes, and these viewers would be expected to be more concerned with changes in visual character. Viewer sensitivity is considered very high.

### **Employees/Students**

Employees and students may be concerned about their visual surroundings, especially if they have views from their offices or classrooms. In addition, students may also spend time outdoors for recess or physical education activities. Because employees and students are pursuing activities during the

day that would very likely take some attention away from their surroundings (e.g., looking at computers, reading), their concern about their visual surroundings may not be as high as for those viewers, such as residents, who may not be engaged in those types of activities throughout the day. However, employees and students are likely returning to the project corridor day after day, and would therefore be expected to have some concern about changes in the visual quality of their surroundings. Viewer sensitivity is considered moderately high.

### **Visitors**

Visitors to the area may be more or less concerned with the visual character of an area, depending on the purpose of their visit, but they would not be as familiar with the existing visual character because they do not return to the project corridor on a daily basis, and therefore may not be as concerned with whether there has been a visual change. Viewer sensitivity is considered low to moderate.

### **Recreational Users**

Recreational users may be more concerned about their visual surroundings because they either are pursuing passive activities or are specifically seeking a pleasant visual setting. Viewer sensitivity is considered very high.

### **Outside Viewers**

Outside viewers may be more or less sensitive to their visual surrounding depending on their activities and their view of the project corridor. Hillside residents and hillside recreation viewers have been identified as potential viewers from outside of the project corridor. Residents outside of the corridor would be expected to have a high sensitivity to their surroundings. However, because the project corridor would not likely be the primary component of their view, concern may be less than if the project corridor were closer. Recreational users that may have views of the corridor from surrounding hillsides would also be concerned with the visual setting and changes in the visual character of the corridor if that would affect the quality of the views themselves. Viewer sensitivity is considered high.

## **4.5.2.5 Community Preferences**

Community preferences are important for determining the potential visual impacts of a project. A good indicator of visual preferences in the community can be found in local design guidelines. There are a number of existing planning documents (see Section 4.5.1.1) that identify design preference within the project study area. Overall, these planning documents identify a strong desire to improve the visual appearance of these areas through building style and spacing, consistent streetscaping elements, and strategic placement of signage and other elements to create a cohesive aesthetic. These plans also are aligned in wanting to improve the pedestrian experience along the project corridor to attract more people and encourage a more thriving community center.

In addition to past outreach completed for existing community plans, a series of community outreach meetings were held in order to gauge community attitudes and potential issues that could arise in the project study area. Three rounds of community meetings were held in 2011-12, 2013, and 2014, and presentations on the project have been given to other key stakeholders including elected officials and community organizations.

According to the results of the community outreach to date, the majority of community members attending the outreach meetings prefer the LRT alternatives versus the BRT alternatives. One of the reasons given by a commenter for support of this option was that the “beauty” of the existing Expo Line is desired for the project. This comment is understood to mean that consistent visual elements, as seen

with the transit features of the Expo Line, are viewed as aesthetically pleasing. Another commenter stated that streetcars with low floor entries look cutting edge and modern. Other comments were received in relation to a desire for additional landscaping along San Fernando Road to enhance the visual setting, and upgrading striping, lighting, paving, and signage to create visual continuity.

#### **4.5.2.6 Existing Lighting, Glare, and Shading**

Existing lighting, glare, and shading in the project study area are characteristic of a typical urban environment that includes the transportation route, adjacent commercial and residential buildings, and streetscape elements (light poles, street trees). Existing sources of light in the project study area include streetlights, headlights and taillights on cars and other vehicles in the roadway, and interior and exterior lighting from adjacent buildings. There are no major sources of glare in the project study area. Existing shading in the project area is from vehicles on the roadway, adjacent buildings, streetlights, and street trees.

### **4.5.3 Environmental Consequences, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures**

#### **4.5.3.1 No-Build Alternative**

##### **Construction Impacts**

The No-Build Alternative would not involve new transportation or infrastructure improvements aside from other related projects currently under construction or funded for future construction. Therefore, the No-Build Alternative would have no visual or aesthetics construction impacts.

##### **Operational Impacts**

The No-Build Alternative would not result in any visual changes to the project corridor, except for those changes resulting from other planned projects, such as the various freeway and arterial roadway upgrades, expansions to the Metro Rapid bus system, and upgrades to the Metrolink system, as specified in Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Southern California Association of Government's (SCAG) Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS). Therefore, there would be no visual impacts from this alternative. However, beneficial visual enhancements from the build alternatives, such as improvements to visual quality in station areas, would not result under the No-Build Alternative.

##### **Cumulative Impacts**

Per CEQA Section 15130 (b), the cumulative impacts analysis can consider either a "list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts" or "a summary of projections contained in an adopted local, regional, or statewide plan, or related planning document, that describes or evaluates conditions contributing to the cumulative effect." The cumulative impacts analysis below is based on the approach that considers cumulative projects listed in Table 2-3 of this EIS/EIR.

The study area for cumulative visual impacts consists of those areas that have views of the project corridor and those areas that can be seen from locations along the project corridor.

Under the No-Build Alternative, there would be no impacts on visual and aesthetic resources; therefore, this alternative would not contribute to any cumulative impacts on these resources.



## **Mitigation Measures**

### **Construction Mitigation Measures**

No construction mitigation measures are required.

### **Operational Mitigation Measures**

No operational mitigation measures are required.

## **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

### **NEPA Finding**

No adverse effects under NEPA would occur.

### **CEQA Determination**

No impacts under CEQA would occur.

### **4.5.3.2 TSM Alternative**

#### **Construction Impacts**

The TSM Alternative may include minor bus stop and roadway improvements, as well as operational enhancements to the bus system. Given the very limited extent of potential physical improvements, construction activities would likely have no or very minimal impacts on visual and aesthetic resources.

#### **Operational Impacts**

Under the TSM Alternative, minor visual change could occur as a result of traffic signalization improvements and bus stop amenities/improvements. These improvements would not be expected to result in substantial changes to the existing visual character or quality in the project corridor, and would not be expected to affect any existing scenic vistas, scenic resources, or add any substantial sources of light or glare. Therefore, impacts would not be adverse or would be beneficial under NEPA, and less than significant and beneficial under CEQA. It should also be noted the TSM Alternative would not result in the more extensive potential visual enhancements that could occur under the build alternatives (Alternatives 1 to 4), such as improvements to visual quality in station areas.

#### **Cumulative Impacts**

The TSM Alternative would have no or negligible adverse effects on visual and aesthetic resources. As a consequence, the TSM Alternative would not contribute in any appreciable way to cumulative impacts on visual and aesthetic resources that might occur due to other projects in the study area. Therefore, the TSM Alternative would not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact.

## **Compliance Requirements and Design Features**

The TSM Alternative would be designed in accordance with local codes and ordinances. This would include visual and aesthetic elements including siting and height restrictions, structure scale, streetscaping features, and landscape design.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### **Construction Mitigation Measures**

No construction mitigation measures are required.

#### **Operational Mitigation Measures**

No operational mitigation measures are required.

### **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

#### **NEPA Finding**

Effects under NEPA would not be adverse or would be beneficial.

#### **CEQA Determination**

Impacts under CEQA would be less than significant and beneficial.

### **4.5.3.3 BRT Alternatives (Alternatives 1 and 2)**

#### **Alternative 1 – Curb-Running BRT**

##### **Construction Impacts**

Construction of Alternative 1 could result in temporary visual impacts within and surrounding the project corridor. Construction areas along the entire length of the project corridor would be visible to all viewer groups identified in Section 4.5.2 above from areas within and adjacent to the project corridor, including residential and recreational areas. Construction activities in staging areas and at proposed stations may include the use of construction lighting, and large equipment such as cranes and associated vehicles, including bulldozers, backhoes, graders, scrapers, and trucks, which could be visible from public streets, sidewalks, and adjacent properties.

Construction lighting could spill over onto adjacent properties, and could result in glare that could adversely affect the clarity of nighttime views in the area. All viewer groups near the construction areas may be affected by the presence of equipment, as well as stockpiled construction-related materials. In addition, mature vegetation, including trees, may need to be temporarily or permanently removed from some areas. These activities could adversely affect visual character and quality along the project corridor. Therefore, Construction activities would result in substantial adverse effects on all viewer groups under NEPA and significant impacts under CEQA.

## Operational Impacts

### *Scenic Vistas*

Scenic vistas in the project study area include views of the surrounding mountains, which are visible from various locations along the project corridor and include the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, views of surrounding mountains are visible in several LUs, including LU-1, LU-2, LU4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. In some LUs, the surrounding mountains are minimally visible, such as in LU-2; and in some LUs, the surrounding mountains are a visually dominant feature in the background, such as in LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. Drivers, transit riders, people on bicycles, and pedestrians would be expected to have more fleeting views of scenic vistas because they are moving along the project corridor, while pedestrians, employees/students, and visitors would be expected to have longer views.

The primary visual elements included as part of Alternative 1 would be the addition of BRT vehicles, changes to existing parking and vehicle lanes, bus station upgrades, and sidewalk widening (see Figure 4.5-11). Along Van Nuys Boulevard, the BRT buses would operate within dedicated bus lanes on the outside curb lanes of the existing roadway; and along San Fernando Road and Truman Street, they would operate in mixed-flow lanes.

The addition of buses along outside curb lanes or within mixed-flow lanes would not be expected to substantially change or adversely affect existing views along the project corridor. Upgraded stations would include canopies, which could limit views for viewers directly adjacent to or underneath the canopies; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected. (Because the City of Los Angeles has a contract with CBS Decaux for bus station design, Metro would confirm their legal ability to upgrade the stations with the City of Los Angeles.) Widened sidewalks would not be expected to result in changes to scenic vistas. Impacts would not be adverse under NEPA and would be less than significant under CEQA.

### *Scenic Resources*

Scenic resources in the project study area include existing landscaping elements, including rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, and historic properties along the project corridor in LUs 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, existing landscaping elements, such as trees and other vegetation, serve to soften views and add color and texture in several LUs, including LU-2, LU3, LU-5, LU-7, LU-8, and LU-9.

Under Alternative 1, the addition of buses along outside curb lanes or within mixed-flow lanes would not be expected to substantially affect visual resources along the project corridor, because they would operate within existing vehicle lanes and would not require any alterations to existing landscaping or adjacent properties. Station upgrades and sidewalk widening could result in impacts on existing landscaping, but existing visual resources, such as the rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, would be preserved. In addition, no historic properties would be adversely affected under this alternative. Impacts would not be adverse under NEPA and would be less than significant under CEQA.

**Figure 4.5-11: Illustrative View of Curb-Running BRT Alternative**



Source: KOA, 2015.

### *Visual Character and Quality*

Visual character and quality vary by LU, as discussed in Section 4.5.2. Under Alternative 1, the addition of buses along outside curb lanes or within mixed-flow lanes would not be expected to substantially affect the visual character of the project corridor, because they would operate within existing vehicle lanes, and the corridor would remain dedicated to transportation. The removal of parking along the outside curb lanes could enhance the visual quality of the corridor by creating a higher visual unity along the corridor. Station upgrades and sidewalk widening could also result in a more cohesive landscape design along the corridor with canopies, additional street trees, and benches that would provide a more unified appearance in station areas, as illustrated in Figure 4.5-1. Post-project visual quality, and change from pre-project conditions, is summarized as follows:

- LU-1 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Civic Center Unit): The Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-1, which would remain high at 6. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-1, which would remain high at 7. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-1, which would be high at 6. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately high to high at 6.3.
- LU-2 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Commercial Unit): The Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-2, which would remain low at 2. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly

increase unity in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from low to moderately low at 2.7.

- LU-3 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City Commercial Unit): The Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-3, which would remain moderate at 4. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-3, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-3, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately low to moderate at 3.7.
- LU-4 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City-Arleta Residential Unit): The Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-4, which would remain high at 6. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-4, which would increase from moderate to moderately high at 5. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-4, which would increase from moderately high to high at 6. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately high at 5.7.
- LU-5 (Pacoima Commercial Unit): The Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-5, which would remain moderate at 4. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4.
- LU-6 (San Fernando Road Unit): Because buses would operate in mixed-flow lanes in this area, the Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-6, which would remain moderate at 4. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4.
- LU-7 (San Fernando Mall Unit): Because the buses would not operate along San Fernando Road in the San Fernando Mall area, the Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-7. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-8 (Truman Street Unit): Because buses would operate in mixed-flow lanes in this area, the Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-8, which would remain moderately high at 5. Station upgrades and parking removal would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-8, which would increase from moderate to moderately high at 5. Station upgrades would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-8, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.7.
- LU-9 (Metrolink Railroad Unit): Because the buses would not operate along the railroad tracks, the Curb-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-9. Following implementation of the Curb-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.

Overall, visual quality would increase slightly under Alternative 1.

Unlike visual quality impacts, visual character impacts are based on viewer response and the sensitivity of viewer groups. Along the project corridor, viewer response would be expected to vary by viewer group and location, and would be dependent on sensitivity, exposure, and awareness. Residents, employees, and recreational users would be expected to have the greatest response to visual change, based on these three criteria; therefore, viewer response would likely be the greatest in the residential and recreational areas, where visual changes relate to Alternative 1 would be most noticeable. Because the curb-running buses would operate within existing vehicle lanes, and because bus station upgrades would likely result in an overall minor improvement to visual character and quality, viewer response would be expected to be low and positive. In addition, portions of the project corridor along San Fernando Road and Truman Street, where buses would operate within mixed-vehicle lanes, would likely result in a lower response. Impacts would not be adverse or would be beneficial under NEPA and would be less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

### ***Lighting, Glare, and Shading***

Because the project study area is in a developed, urban area, there is a substantial amount of existing lighting and glare. Current lighting and glare sources in the project study area include streetlights, buildings and other structures, vehicles, and other various sources. Shading sources include buildings, other structures, utilities, and vegetation. The primary elements included under Alternative 1 that could result in lighting, glare, and shading are the station upgrades and additional buses. These elements would not be expected to result in a substantial change in existing lighting, glare, or shading along the project corridor. Shading related to the bus station canopies would be a beneficial change for station users. Impacts would not be adverse or would be beneficial under NEPA and would be less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

Per CEQA Section 15130 (b), the cumulative impacts analysis can consider either a “list of past, present, and probable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts” or “a summary of projections contained in an adopted local, regional, or statewide plan, or related planning document, that describes or evaluates conditions contributing to the cumulative effect.” The cumulative impacts analysis below is based on the approach that considers cumulative projects listed in Table 2-3 of this EIS/EIR.

The study area for cumulative visual impacts consists of those areas that have views of the project corridor and those areas that can be seen from locations along the project corridor.

During construction, Alternative 1 would result in temporary adverse effects on visual and aesthetic resources. Construction impacts would be minimized or mitigated through mitigation measures, and would be reduced to levels that are less than significant. Other present and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area could result in temporary visual or aesthetic impacts from construction activities, and impacts from past projects may also have resulted in temporary impacts. However, because these impacts are temporary, cumulative impacts would be less than significant. Because impacts under Alternative 1 would also be temporary, and impacts would be minimized or mitigated through mitigation measures, the alternative’s contribution to cumulative impacts during construction would not be cumulatively considerable.

Operational impacts would not be adverse, or would be beneficial under NEPA, and would be less than significant and beneficial under CEQA. Past projects have resulted in a highly urbanized landscape along the project corridor from the construction of buildings, transportation infrastructure, and other structures that have adversely affected scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual character



and quality. In addition, other present or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area could further degrade the visual character and quality of the area, though this is unlikely as the related projects mostly consist of infill development projects that would not drastically change the existing visual and aesthetic setting along the corridor. Because views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected, operational cumulative impacts would be less than significant. Furthermore, because impacts resulting from Alternative 1 would be minimized or mitigated through mitigation measures, the alternative's contribution to cumulative impacts during operation would not be cumulatively considerable, after implementation of mitigation measures.

### **Compliance Requirements and Design Features**

Alternative 1 would be designed in accordance with local codes and ordinances. This would include visual and aesthetic elements including siting and height restrictions, structure scale, streetscaping features, and landscape design.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### ***Construction Mitigation Measures***

**MM-VIS-1:** Construction staging shall be located away from residential and recreational areas, and shall be screened to minimize visual intrusion into the surrounding landscape. The screening shall be a height and type of material that is appropriate for the context of the surrounding land uses. There shall be Metro-branded art and community-relevant messaging on the perimeter of the construction staging walls. Lighting within construction areas shall face downward and shall be designed to minimize spillover lighting into adjacent properties.

#### ***Operational Mitigation Measures***

While impacts would be less than significant before mitigation, the following measures are recommended to further reduce potential impacts:

**MM-VIS-2:** Vegetation removal shall be minimized, and shall be replaced following construction either in-kind or following the landscaping design palette for the project, which would be prepared in consultation with the Cities, including the City Tree Removal Policy and replacement ratio.

**MM-VIS-3:** Scenic resources, including landscape elements such as rows of palm trees (along Van Nuys Boulevard) or mature trees (along San Fernando Road) and uniform lighting, shall be preserved, where feasible.

**MM-VIS-4:** Lighting associated with the project shall be designed to face downward and minimize spillover lighting into adjacent properties, in particular residential and recreational properties.

**MM-VIS-5:** Infrastructure elements shall be designed with materials that minimize glare.

### **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

#### ***NEPA Finding***

The potential construction effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse or would be beneficial.

### ***CEQA Determination***

The potential construction impacts on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant or beneficial.

## **Alternative 2 – Median-Running BRT**

### **Construction Impacts**

Construction impacts would be the same as those described above for Alternative 1.

### **Operational Impacts**

Scenic vistas in the project study area include views of the surrounding mountains, which are visible from various locations along the project corridor and include the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, views of surrounding mountains are visible in several LUs, including LU-1, LU-2, LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. In some LUs, the surrounding mountains are minimally visible, such as in LU-2; in some LUs, the surrounding mountains are a visually dominant feature in the background, such as in LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. Drivers, transit riders, people on bicycles, and pedestrians would be expected to have more fleeting views of scenic vistas because they are moving along the project corridor, while pedestrians, employees/students, and visitors would be expected to have longer views. Scenic resources in the project study area include existing landscaping elements, including rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, and historic properties along the project corridor.

The primary visual elements included as part of Alternative 2 would be the addition of bus stop platforms and railings (on the backside of bus stop platforms) in the roadway median, a barrier along the entire length of the median bus lanes, the addition of BRT vehicles, changes to existing parking and vehicle lanes, and sidewalk widening (see Figure 4.5-12).

Operational impacts would be the same as those described above for Alternative 1. New stations in the median would present a new vertical feature in the landscape that could partially block views of the roadway corridor and surrounding mountains in several LUs along the project corridor; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected. Street trees would be removed along the corridor for implementation of this alternative, but the landmark trees within the Van Nuys Civic Center and downtown San Fernando would be minimally affected. Post-project visual qualities, and changes from pre-project conditions, are summarized as follows:

- LU-1 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Civic Center Unit): The new median bus stations associated with the Median-Running BRT Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-1, which would be reduced from high to moderately high at 5. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-1 as a whole would not be substantially affected. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-1, which would remain high at 7. Station upgrades and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-1, which would be high at 6. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately high to high at 6.

**Figure 4.5-12: Illustrative View of Median-Running BRT Alternative**



Source: KOA, 2015.

- LU-2 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Commercial Unit): The Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-2, which would remain low at 2. New stations and station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. New stations, station upgrades, and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from low to moderately low at 2.7.
- LU-3 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City Commercial Unit): The Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-3, which would remain moderate at 4. New stations, station upgrades, and parking removal would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-3, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations and station upgrades would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-3, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately low to moderate at 3.7.
- LU-4 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City-Arleta Residential Unit): The median running buses and new median bus stations associated with the Median-Running BRT Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-4, which would be reduced from high to moderate at 4. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-4 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New stations and station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-4, which would increase from moderate to moderately high at 5. New stations, station upgrades, and

parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-4, which would increase from moderately high to high at 6. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately high at 5.

- LU-5 (Pacoima Commercial Unit): The Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-5, which would remain moderate at 4. New stations and station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations, station upgrades, and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4.
- LU-6 (San Fernando Road Unit): Because buses would operate within mixed-flow lanes in this area, the Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-6, which would remain moderate at 4. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Station upgrades would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4.
- LU-7 (San Fernando Mall Unit): Because the buses would not operate along San Fernando Road in the San Fernando Mall area, the Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-7. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-8 (Truman Street Unit): Because buses would operate within mixed-flow lanes in this area, the Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-8, which would remain moderately high at 5. Station upgrades would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-8, which would increase from moderate to moderately high at 5. Station upgrades would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-8, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.7.
- LU-9 (Metrolink Railroad Unit): Because the buses would not operate along the railroad tracks, the Median-Running BRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-9. Following implementation of the Median-Running BRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.

Overall, visual quality would increase slightly under Alternative 2.

Unlike visual quality impacts, visual character impacts are based on viewer response and the sensitivity of viewer groups. Along the project corridor, viewer response would be expected to vary by viewer group and location, and would be dependent on sensitivity, exposure, and awareness. Residents, employees, and recreational users would be expected to have the greatest response to visual change, based on these three criteria; therefore, viewer response would likely be the greatest in the residential and recreational areas, where visual changes relate to the Median-Running Bus Alternative would be most noticeable. New median stations could affect visual character in certain portions of the project corridor by including additional vertical elements on the existing landscape; however, because the median-running buses would operate within an existing roadway corridor, and because bus station upgrades would likely result in an overall minor improvement to visual character and quality, viewer response would be expected to be low and positive. In addition, portions of the project corridor along San Fernando Road and Truman Street, where buses would operate within mixed-vehicle lanes, would likely result in a lower response.

Operational impacts under Alternative 2 would be considered adverse or beneficial under NEPA, and less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

The cumulative impacts that could occur due to implementation of Alternative 2 would be the same as those described above for Alternative 1.

### **Compliance Requirements and Design Features**

Alternative 2 would be designed in accordance with local codes and ordinances. This would include visual and aesthetic elements including siting and height restrictions, structure scale, streetscaping features, and landscape design.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### ***Construction Mitigation Measures***

See mitigation measure MM-VIS-1 above under Alternative 1.

#### ***Operational Mitigation Measures***

See mitigation measures MM-VIS-2 through MM-VIS-5 above under Alternative 1.

### **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

#### ***NEPA Finding***

The potential construction effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse or would be beneficial.

#### ***CEQA Determination***

The potential construction impacts on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant or beneficial.

## **4.5.3.4 Rail Alternatives (Alternatives 3 and 4)**

### **Alternative 3 – Low-Floor LRT/Tram**

#### **Construction Impacts**

Construction of Alternative 3 could result in temporary visual impacts within and surrounding the project corridor. Construction areas along the entire length of the project corridor would be visible to all viewer groups identified in Section 4.5.2 above, from areas within and adjacent to the project corridor, including residential and recreational areas. Construction activities in staging areas and at proposed stations may include the use of construction lighting, and large equipment such as cranes and associated vehicles, including bulldozers, backhoes, graders, scrapers, and trucks, which could be visible from public streets, sidewalks, and adjacent properties.

Construction lighting could spill over onto adjacent properties, and could result in glare that could adversely affect the clarity of nighttime views in the area. All viewer groups near the construction areas may be affected by the presence of equipment, as well as stockpiled construction-related materials. In addition, mature vegetation, including trees, may need to be temporarily or permanently removed from some areas. These activities could adversely affect visual character and quality along the project corridor.

Unlike the BRT alternatives, more extensive construction would be required to construct Alternative 3 facilities, which would include the Overhead Contact System (OCS), Traction Power Substations (TPSS), a pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink station, maintenance and storage facility (MSF), and larger station platforms than the BRT alternatives. Construction activities would be completed over a longer duration than the BRT alternatives. Although construction impacts on visual quality and aesthetics may be more extensive, they would be to the same as those described above for the BRT alternatives. Consequently, construction activities from Alternative 3 would result in substantial adverse effects on all viewer groups under NEPA and significant impacts under CEQA.

## **Operational Impacts**

### ***Scenic Vistas***

Scenic vistas in the project study area include views of the surrounding mountains, which are visible from various locations along the project corridor and include the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, views of surrounding mountains are visible in several LUs, including LU-1, LU-2, LU4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. In some LUs, the surrounding mountains are minimally visible, such as in LU-2; in some LUs, the surrounding mountains are a visually dominant feature in the background, such as in LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. Drivers, transit riders, people on bicycles, and pedestrians would be expected to have more fleeting views of scenic vistas because they are moving along the project corridor, while pedestrians, employees/students, and visitors would be expected to have longer views.

The primary visual elements included as part of Alternative 3 would be the new low-floor LRT/tram cars, OCS, median stations and fencing, railroad crossing gates, TPSSs, the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station, the MSF, and changes in parking, lanes, and sidewalks (see Figures 4.5-13, 4.5-14, 4.5-15, and 4.5-16). New stations and the OCS in the median or along mixed-flow lanes, and the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station would present new vertical features in the landscape that could partially block views of the roadway corridor and surrounding mountains in several LUs along the project corridor.

New stations along the outside edge of the roadway would present new vertical features in the landscape, and may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by these stations because the visual changes would be localized around station areas. Sidewalks would be narrowed in some areas, but this would not be expected to substantially affect views along the corridor. The MSF would not substantially affect existing views because the facility would replace existing commercial and industrial buildings, and the facility would typically look similar to existing buildings and would not include any structures or features that would be substantially taller than existing buildings. In addition, the TPSSs would only be 12 to 14 feet high, and would not be expected to substantially block views of scenic vistas.



**Figure 4.5-13: Illustrative View of Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative**



Source: KOA, 2015.

**Figure 4.5-14: Example of a Typical Pedestrian Bridge**



Source: Metro, n.d.



**Figure 4.5-15: Example of a Typical MSF**



Source: Metro, 2015.

**Figure 4.5-16: Example of a Typical TPSS (Traction Power Substation)**



Source: Google, 2015.

The OCS, in particular, would substantially affect existing views of scenic vistas. The OCS poles would be approximately 30 feet tall and typically located every 90 to 170 feet along the tram tracks. Currently, the surrounding mountains are visually dominant features in several LUs, but the vertical elements proposed under Alternative 3 would substantially detract from existing views because of their height, and because they would be located throughout the corridor. Therefore, overall impacts on scenic vistas would be substantial and adverse under NEPA, and significant under CEQA.

### ***Scenic Resources***

Scenic resources in the project study area include existing landscaping elements, including rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, and historic properties along the project corridor in LUs 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, existing landscaping elements, such as trees and other vegetation, serve to soften views and add color and texture in several LUs, including LU-2, LU3, LU-5, LU-7, LU-8, and LU-9.

Under Alternative 3, the addition of Low-Floor LRT/Tram cars and stations along the roadway median or within mixed-flow lanes could require the removal of existing landscaping along certain segments of the corridor, since there are areas where the medians are landscaped. Construction of plazas could also result in impacts on existing resources from the removal of landscaping; in particular, the mature trees found along San Fernando Road in downtown San Fernando would be affected (see Tree Inventory Report in Appendix EE). In addition, TPSSs and MSFs along the side of the roadway would result in impacts on existing landscaping and historic properties with the construction of additional vertical elements that could partially block views of these resources. However, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by stations, plazas, TPSSs, or MSFs because the visual changes would be localized around these areas. In addition, vegetation removal would be minimized along the project corridor, and no historic properties would be removed to construct the tram facilities.

The OCS, in particular, would substantially affect existing views of scenic resources. The OCS poles would be approximately 30 feet tall and typically located every 90 to 170 feet along the tram tracks. Currently, existing landscaping elements, such as trees and other vegetation, serve to soften views and add color and texture in several LUs, but the vertical elements proposed under Alternative 3 would substantially detract from existing views because of their height, and because they would be located throughout the corridor. Therefore, overall impacts on scenic resources would be substantial and adverse under NEPA, and significant under CEQA.

### ***Visual Character and Quality***

Visual character and quality vary by LU, as discussed in Section 4.5.2. Under Alternative 3, the addition of low-floor LRT/tram cars along the roadway would affect the visual character of the project corridor, since these cars would run along a dedicated guideway, they would have the OCS that would be a new and visible vertical feature, and would have a different appearance than the existing buses (see Figures 4.5-17, 4.5-18, 4.5-19, and 4.5-20). In addition, new stations in the median and along the sides of the roadway would present new vertical features in the landscape that could affect existing visual character and quality by limiting views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by these stations.

The MSF would not be expected to affect existing visual character and quality substantially because the MSF would replace existing industrial/commercial buildings and would have a similar appearance as the replaced buildings (see Figure 4.5-15). In addition, the MSF would be located in commercial and industrial zones, and would have similar visual characteristics as the adjacent and surrounding commercial and industrial facilities. The TPSSs along the side of the roadway could disrupt the visual unity along the corridor slightly, and affect visual quality (see Figure 4.5-16).



**Figure 4.5-17: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 3 at RV-2**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Hartland Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-18: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 3 at RV-2**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Hartland Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-19: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 3 at RV-4**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Vincennes Street; Source: GPA, 2013.

**Figure 4.5-20: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 3 at RV-4**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Vincennes Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

However, the removal of parking along the outside curb lanes could enhance the visual quality of the corridor by creating a higher visual unity along the corridor.

Post-project visual quality and changes from pre-project conditions are summarized as follows:

- LU-1 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Civic Center Unit): The tram cars and the OCS associated with the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-1, which would be reduced from high to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-1 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New median stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-1, which would remain high at 7. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-1, which would be high at 6. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately high at 5.3.
- LU-2 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Commercial Unit): The Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-2, which would remain low at 2. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-2, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from low to moderately low at 2.7.
- LU-3 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City Commercial Unit): The Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-3, which would remain moderate at 4. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-3, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-3, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately low to moderate at 3.7.
- LU-4 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City-Arleta Residential Unit): The tram cars and the OCS associated with the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-4, which would be reduced from high to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-4 as a whole would not be substantially affected. Tram cars, the OCS, and new stations would also be expected to slightly detract from intactness in LU-4, which would decrease from moderate to moderately low at 3. The tram line, new stations, and parking removal would be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-4, which would increase from moderately high to high at 6. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be reduced from moderately high to moderate at 4.
- LU-5 (Pacoima Commercial Unit): Because of the proximity to views of the Santa Monica Mountains, the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-5, which would be reduced from moderate to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-5 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New stations and parking removal would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.7.



- LU-6 (San Fernando Road Unit): Because of the proximity to views of the San Gabriel Mountains, the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-6, which would be reduced from moderate to moderately low at 3. New stations would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-5 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-6, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.7.
- LU-7 (San Fernando Mall Unit): The tram cars and OCS associated with the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-7, which would be reduced from moderately high to moderately low at 3. New stations would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-5 as a whole would not be substantially affected. The proposed pedestrian overcrossing would create a new vertical feature in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to the overcrossing; however, views in LU-7 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-7, which would increase from moderate to moderately high at 5. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-7, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-8 (Truman Street Unit): Because the tram would not operate along Truman Street, the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-8. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-9 (Metrolink Railroad Unit): Because the tram would not operate along the railroad tracks, the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-9. The proposed pedestrian overcrossing would create a new vertical feature in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to the overcrossing; however, views in LU-7 as a whole would not be substantially affected. Following implementation of the Low-Floor LRT/Tram Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.

Visual quality would increase slightly, decrease slightly, or remain the same under Alternative 3, depending on the LU. Therefore, the impacts of Alternative 3 on the visual quality of the project corridor would not be adverse or would be beneficial under NEPA and less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

Unlike visual quality impacts, visual character impacts are based on viewer response and the sensitivity of viewer groups. Along the project corridor, viewer response would be expected to vary by viewer group and location, and would be dependent on sensitivity, exposure, and awareness. Residents, employees, and recreational users would be expected to have the greatest response to visual change, based on these three criteria, and viewer response would likely be the greatest in the residential and recreational areas, where visual changes related to Alternative 3 would be most noticeable. Multiple elements of this alternative, including the new stations and the OCS in the median, and the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station, could affect both visual character and quality in certain sections of the project corridor. Viewer response in residential areas along Van Nuys Boulevard could likely be moderate and may be negative because this alternative would result in the highest level of change to the visual character in this area. However, in other areas, new stations could result in an overall minor improvement to visual

character and quality; therefore, overall viewer response would be expected to be moderate and positive, with the exception of residential areas. However, in those residential areas or other areas where there are sensitive viewer groups and where Alternative 3 would require new vertical elements, impacts on visual character could be substantial and adverse under NEPA and significant under CEQA.

### ***Lighting, Glare, and Shading***

Because the project study area is located in a developed, urban area, there is a substantial amount of existing lighting and glare. Current lighting and glare sources in the project study area include streetlights, buildings and other structures, vehicles, and other various sources. Shading sources include buildings, other structures, utilities, and vegetation. The primary elements included under Alternative 3 that could result in lighting, glare, and shading are the tram cars, the OCS, new stations, TPSSs, and the MSF. These elements would not be expected to result in a substantial change in existing lighting, glare, or shading along the project corridor, with the exception of residential areas where elements of this alternative could increase nighttime lighting. Impacts would not be adverse or would be beneficial under NEPA and less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

During construction, the cumulative impacts that could occur due to implementation of Alternative 3 would be the same as those described above for Alternatives 1 and 2. Because construction impacts from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects are temporary, cumulative impacts are less than significant. Because impacts under Alternative 3 would also be temporary, and impacts would be minimized or mitigated through mitigation measures, the alternative's contribution to cumulative impacts during construction would not be cumulatively considerable.

During operation, Alternative 3 would result in potentially significant operational visual impacts on sensitive viewer groups. Past projects have resulted in a highly urbanized landscape along the project corridor from the construction of buildings, transportation infrastructure, and other structures that have adversely affected scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual character and quality. In addition, other present or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area could further degrade the visual character and quality of the area, though this is unlikely as the related projects mostly consist of infill development projects that would not drastically change the existing visual and aesthetic setting along the corridor. Therefore, cumulative impacts from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects are significant. As a result, any adverse impacts from Alternative 3 would be considered cumulatively considerable. Because impacts from Alternative 3 would remain significant after implementation of mitigation measures, the alternative's contribution to cumulative impacts during operation would be cumulatively considerable, unlike the BRT alternatives.

### **Compliance Requirements and Design Features**

Alternative 3 would be designed in accordance with local codes and ordinances. This would include visual and aesthetic elements including siting and height restrictions, structure scale, streetscaping features, and landscape design.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### ***Construction Mitigation Measures***

Please see mitigation measures MM-VIS-1 above under Alternative 1.



### ***Operational Mitigation Measures***

Please see mitigation measures MM-VIS-2 through MM-VIS-5 above under Alternative 1.

### **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

#### ***NEPA Finding***

The potential construction effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects would not be adverse or would be beneficial on visual quality, but would remain adverse on scenic views, scenic resources, and visual character.

#### ***CEQA Determination***

The potential construction impacts on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational impacts would be less than significant or beneficial on visual quality, but would be significant on scenic views, scenic resources, and visual character.

## **Alternative 4 – LRT**

### **Construction Impacts**

Construction of Alternative 4 could result in temporary visual impacts within and surrounding the project corridor. Construction areas along the entire length of the project corridor would be visible to all viewer groups identified in Section 4.5.2 above, from areas within and adjacent to the project corridor, including residential and recreational areas. Construction activities in staging areas and at proposed stations may include the use of construction lighting, and large equipment such as cranes and associated vehicles, including bulldozers, backhoes, graders, scrapers, and trucks, which could be visible from public streets, sidewalks, and adjacent properties.

Construction lighting could spill over onto adjacent properties, and could result in glare that could adversely affect the clarity of nighttime views in the area. All viewer groups near the construction areas may be affected by the presence of equipment, as well as stockpiled construction-related materials. In addition, mature vegetation, including trees, may need to be temporarily or permanently removed from some areas. These activities could adversely affect visual character and quality along the project corridor.

The LRT Alternative would include construction of the OCS, TPSSs, construction of a pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink station, an MSF, and larger station platforms than the BRT alternatives. However, Alternative 4 would require the most extensive construction of the four build alternatives because of the subway portion of the alignment.

Cut-and-cover activities to construct the subway portion would be conducted over a 60-month period, and would result in substantial visual changes to the alignment because of the extent of ground disturbance that would be required, as well as the amount of construction-related materials and equipment required for these activities. Therefore, Alternative 4 would result in the greatest construction impacts, compared to the other alternatives; however, aside from the cut-and-cover activities, the types and level of significance of the impacts would be the same as those described above for Alternative 3. Consequently, construction activities would result in substantial adverse effects on all viewer groups under NEPA and significant impacts under CEQA.

## Operational Impacts

### *Scenic Vistas*

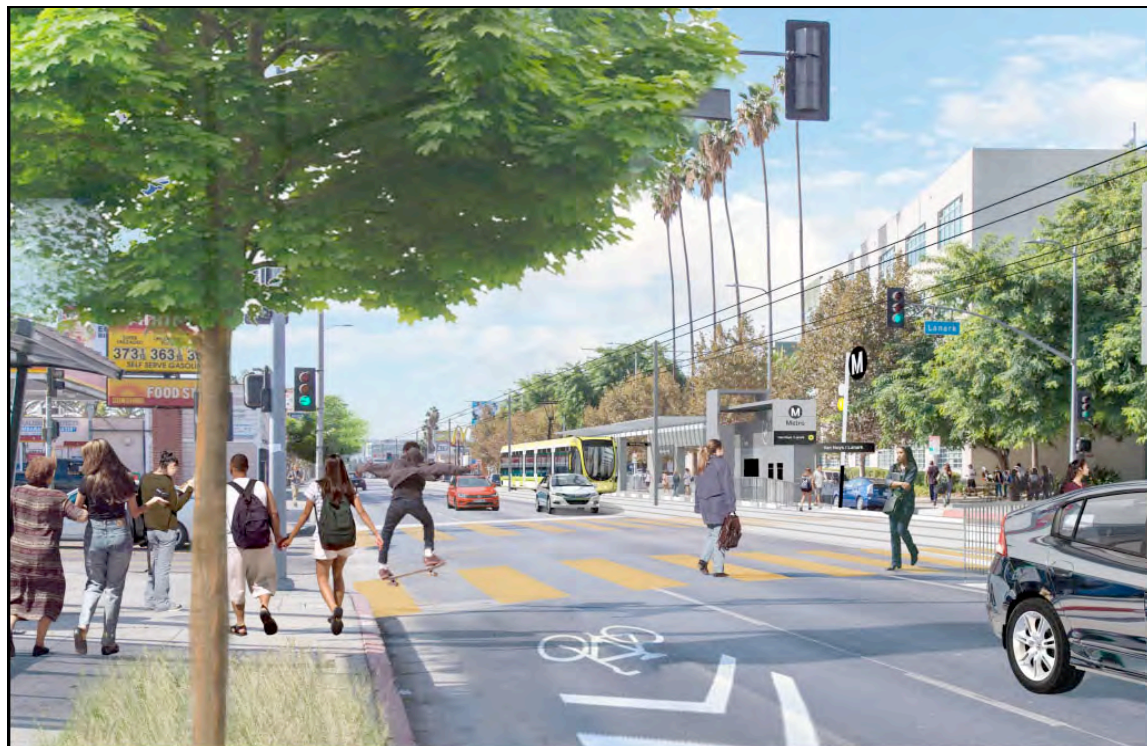
Scenic vistas in the project study area include views of the surrounding mountains, which are visible from various locations along the project corridor and include the Santa Monica Mountains to the south, the Verdugo Mountains to the east, the San Gabriel Mountains to the northeast, and the Santa Susana Mountains to the north and west. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, views of surrounding mountains are visible in several LUs, including LU-1, LU-2, LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. In some LUs, the surrounding mountains are minimally visible, such as in LU-2; in some LUs, the surrounding mountains are a visually dominant feature in the background, such as in LU-4, LU-5, LU-6, and LU-8. Drivers, transit riders, people on bicycles, and pedestrians would be expected to have more fleeting views of scenic vistas because they are moving along the project corridor, while pedestrians, employees/students, and visitors would be expected to have longer views.

The primary visual elements included as part of Alternative 4 would be the new LRT cars and OCS, median stations and fencing, railroad crossing gates, TPSSs, the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station, the MSF, and changes in parking, lanes, and sidewalks (see Figures 4.5-14, 4.5-15, 4.5-16, and 4.5-21). This alternative would also include a subway segment along approximately 2.5 miles of the corridor between Vanowen Street and Nordhoff Street. Along the north end of the corridor, the LRT would be located along the UPRR railroad tracks from the Van Nuys Boulevard/San Fernando Road intersection to the project terminus on the north. The MSF would not substantially affect existing views because the facility would replace existing commercial and industrial buildings, and the facility would typically look similar to existing buildings and would not include any structures or features that would be taller than existing buildings. In addition, the TPSSs would only be 12 to 14 feet high, and would not be expected to substantially block views of scenic vistas.

New stations and the OCS in the median, and the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station would present new vertical features in the landscape that could partially block views of the roadway corridor and surrounding mountains in several LUs along the project corridor. New stations along the outside edge of the roadway would also present new vertical features in the landscape, and may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by these stations. Sidewalks would be narrowed in some areas, but this would not be expected to substantially affect views.

The OCS, in particular, would substantially affect existing views of scenic vistas. The OCS poles would be approximately 30 feet tall and typically located every 90 to 170 feet along the LRT tracks. Currently, the surrounding mountains are visually dominant features in several LUs, but the vertical elements proposed under Alternative 3 would substantially detract from existing views because of their height, and because they would be located throughout the corridor. Therefore, overall impacts on scenic vistas would be substantial and adverse under NEPA, and significant under CEQA.

**Figure 4.5-21: Illustrative View of LRT Alternative**



Source: KOA, 2015.

### ***Scenic Resources***

Scenic resources in the project study area include existing landscaping elements, including rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard, and historic properties along the project corridor in LUs 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. As discussed in Section 4.5.2 above, existing landscaping elements, such as trees and other vegetation, serve to soften views and add color and texture in several LUs, including LU-2, LU3, LU-5, LU-7, LU-8, and LU-9.

Under Alternative 4, the addition of LRT cars and stations along the roadway median or within mixed-flow lanes could require the removal of existing landscaping along certain segments of the corridor, since there are areas where the medians are landscaped with rows of palm trees, such as along Van Nuys Boulevard in the Van Nuys Civic Center area. Construction of plazas could also result in impacts on existing resources from the removal of landscaping, including street trees (e.g., the landmark rows of palm trees along Van Nuys Boulevard in the Van Nuys Civic Center area). In addition, TPSSs and MSFs along the side of the roadway would result in impacts on existing landscaping and historic properties with the construction of additional vertical elements that could partially block views of these resources. However, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by stations, plazas, TPSSs, or MSFs because the visual changes would be localized around these areas. In addition, vegetation removal would be minimized along the project corridor, and no historic properties would be removed to construct the LRT facilities.

The OCS, in particular, would substantially affect existing views of scenic resources. The OCS poles would be approximately 30 feet tall and typically located every 90 to 170 feet along the LRT tracks. Currently, existing landscaping elements, such as trees and other vegetation, serve to soften views and add color and texture in several LUs, but the vertical elements proposed under Alternative 3 would substantially detract from existing views because of their height, and because they would be located throughout the corridor. Therefore, overall impacts on scenic resources would be substantial and adverse under NEPA, and significant under CEQA.

### ***Visual Character and Quality***

Under Alternative 4, the addition of LRT cars along the roadway would affect the visual character of the project corridor, since these cars would run along a dedicated guideway, they would have the OCS that would be a new and visible vertical feature, and would have a different appearance compared to the existing buses (see Figures 4.5-22 through 4.5-31).

In addition, new stations in the median and along the sides of the roadway would create new vertical features in the landscape that could affect existing visual character and visual quality by limiting views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in the corridor as a whole would not be substantially affected by these stations. The MSF would not be expected to affect existing visual character and quality substantially because the MSF would replace existing industrial/commercial buildings and would have a similar appearance as the replaced buildings (see Figure 4.5-15). In addition, the MSF would be located in commercial and industrial zones, and would have similar visual characteristics as adjacent and surrounding commercial and industrial facilities. The TPSSs located along the side of the roadway could disrupt the visual unity along the corridor slightly, and affect visual quality (see Figure 4.5-16). However, the removal of parking along the outside curb lanes could enhance the visual quality of the corridor by creating a higher visual unity along the corridor. Post-project visual quality and changes from pre-project conditions are summarized as follows:

- LU-1 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Civic Center Unit): The LRT cars and the OCS associated with the LRT Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-1, which would be reduced from high to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-1 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New median stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-1, which would remain high at 7. Stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-1, which would be high at 6. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately high at 5.3.
- LU-2 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Van Nuys Commercial Unit): Because the LRT would be underground throughout LU-2, this alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-2. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain low at 2.
- LU-3 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City Commercial Unit): The LRT Alternative would not be expected to affect vividness in LU-3, which would remain moderate at 4. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-3, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-3, which would increase from low to moderately low at 3. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be increased from moderately low to moderate at 3.7.



**Figure 4.5-22: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-1**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard and Haynes Street; Source: GPA, 2013

**Figure 4.5-23: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-1**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard and Haynes Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-24: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-3**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Chase Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-25: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-3**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just north of Chase Street; Source: GPA, 2014.



**Figure 4.5-26: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-5**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just south of El Dorado Avenue; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-27: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-5**



Location: Van Nuys Boulevard just south of El Dorado Avenue; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-28: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-6**



Location: San Fernando Road just north of Pinney Street; Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-29: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-6**



Location: San Fernando Road just north of Pinney Street; Source: GPA, 2014.



**Figure 4.5-30: Photograph before Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-9**



Location: UPRR railroad corridor near entrance to Mission City Bike Trail just south of Hubbard Street;  
Source: GPA, 2014.

**Figure 4.5-31: Visual Simulation after Implementation of Alternative 4 at RV-9**



Location: UPRR railroad corridor near entrance to Mission City Bike Trail just south of Hubbard Street;  
Source: GPA, 2014.

- LU-4 (Van Nuys Boulevard/Panorama City-Arleta Residential Unit): The LRT cars and the OCS associated with the LRT Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-4, which would be reduced from high to moderately low at 3. LRT cars, the OCS, and new stations would also be expected to slightly detract from intactness in LU-4, which would decrease from moderate to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-4 as a whole would not be substantially affected. The LRT line, new stations, and parking removal would be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-4, which would increase from moderately high to high at 6. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would be reduced from moderately high to moderate at 4.
- LU-5 (Pacoima Commercial Unit): Because of the proximity to views of the Santa Monica Mountains, the LRT Alternative could detract from vividness in LU-5, which would be reduced from moderate to moderately low at 3. New stations in the median would create new vertical features in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to or within the stations; however, views in LU-5 as a whole would not be substantially affected. New stations would be expected to slightly increase intactness in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. New stations and parking removal would also be expected to slightly increase unity in LU-5, which would increase from moderately low to moderate at 4. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.7.
- LU-6 (San Fernando Road Unit): Because the LRT Alternative would not operate along San Fernando Road, this alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-6. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.3.
- LU-7 (San Fernando Mall Unit): Because the LRT Alternative would not operate along San Fernando Road, this alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-7. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-8 (Truman Street Unit): Because the LRT Alternative would not operate along Truman Street, this alternative would not be expected to affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-8. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderate at 4.
- LU-9: Under the LRT Alternative, the existing single rail track would be removed and replaced with double tracks to serve commuter and freight rail operations, and the Mission City Bike Trail would be moved from the east side to the west side of the tracks through the City of San Fernando. Because the LRT Alternative would operate along existing railroad tracks, this alternative would not be expected to substantially affect vividness, intactness, or unity in LU-9. The proposed pedestrian overcrossing would create a new vertical feature in the landscape that may limit views directly adjacent to the overcrossing; however, views in LU-9 as a whole would not be substantially affected. Following implementation of the LRT Alternative, visual quality in this LU would remain moderately low at 3.

As discussed above, visual quality would increase slightly, decrease slightly, or remain the same under the LRT Alternative, depending on the LU. Therefore, the impacts of Alternative 4 on visual quality would not be adverse, or would be beneficial under NEPA and less than significant or beneficial under CEQA.

Unlike visual quality impacts, visual character impacts are based on viewer response and the sensitivity of viewer groups. Along the project corridor, viewer response would be expected to vary by viewer group and location, and would be dependent on sensitivity, exposure, and awareness. Residents, employees, and recreational users would be expected to have the greatest response to visual change and viewer response would likely be the greatest in the residential and recreational areas, where visual changes related to the LRT Alternative would be most noticeable. Multiple elements of this alternative, including the new stations and the OCS in the median, and the pedestrian bridge at the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station, could affect both visual character and quality in certain sections of the project corridor. Viewer response in residential areas along Van Nuys Boulevard would likely be moderate and may also be negative because this alternative would result in the highest level of change to visual character in this area. However, in other areas, the new stations would also result in an overall minor improvement to visual character and quality; therefore, overall viewer response would be expected to be moderate and positive. However, in those residential areas or other areas where there are sensitive viewer groups and where Alternative 4 would require new vertical elements, impacts on visual character would be substantial and adverse under NEPA and significant under CEQA.

### ***Lighting, Glare, and Shading***

Lighting, glare, and shading impacts under Alternative 4 would be the same as those described for Alternative 3. Impacts would not be adverse under NEPA and would be less than significant under CEQA.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

The cumulative impacts that could occur due to implementation of Alternative 4 would be the same as those described above for Alternative 3.

### **Compliance Requirements and Design Features**

Alternative 4 would be designed in accordance with local codes and ordinances. This would include visual and aesthetic elements including siting and height restrictions, structure scale, streetscaping features, and landscape design.

### **Mitigation Measures**

#### ***Construction Mitigation Measures***

Please see mitigation measure MM-VIS-1 above under Alternative 1.

#### ***Operational Mitigation Measures***

Please see mitigation measures MM-VIS-2 through MM-VIS-5 above under Alternative 1.

### **Impacts Remaining After Mitigation**

#### ***NEPA Finding***

The potential construction effects on visual and aesthetic resources would not be adverse after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational effects would be potentially adverse on scenic views, scenic resources, and visual character, and would not be adverse or would be beneficial on visual quality.

### ***CEQA Determination***

The potential construction impacts on visual and aesthetic resources would be less than significant after implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The potential operational impacts would be potentially significant on scenic views, scenic resources, and visual character, and less than significant or beneficial on visual quality.