3.6 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources include both natural and man-made features of the landscape. Intrinsic visual qualities and composition of a landscape together define the visual character of an area. This section describes the existing visual setting of the study area and assesses potential changes to the visual environment as a result of the No Build and Build Alternatives.

3.6.1 REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

There are no federal or state laws that specifically define or protect visual resources; however, several federal, state and local regulations provide protection for scenic views and other visual resources. Most local jurisdictions have provisions for design review of all commercial, industrial, or public buildings, facilities or other major infrastructure.

State

State Scenic Highway Program

The Caltrans Scenic Highway Program is intended to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California's highways and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment. The program protects against encroachment of incompatible land uses, mitigates and minimizes development activities along the corridor, prohibits billboards, regulates grading activity, etc.[1]

Local

Monterey County General Plan

The County has adopted through its General Plan goals and policies to retain and enhance the visual character, either directly or indirectly. Development and construction must use design guidelines to ensure the development is compatible with visual values of the area.[2]

[1] Caltrans, 2012

[2] County of Monterey, 2007

City of Salinas General Plan

The City of Salinas has a number of natural and historical resources that contribute to the visual character of the city. The city is mostly built-up with distinctive architectural styles, surrounded by agricultural edges that distinguish the aesthetic quality of the area. Salinas has historically been an agricultural community, thus maintaining visual open space and the rural aesthetic character of the community is an important value. Additionally, the city has defined several view corridors along US 101.[3] The city has adopted goals and policies to protect and preserve the community's image and identity.[4]

City of Soledad General Plan

Points within the city have scenic views of the Salinas valley and the Sierra de Salinas Range. The General Plan has adopted goals and policies to protect both natural and manmade scenic resources. New development must comply with the city design standards to ensure best practices are used and are compatible with character of the city.

The City of Soledad set forth goals to revitalize its downtown in its 2012 Downtown Specific Plan. The Specific Plan identifies a proposed passenger rail station site (consistent with that included here as part of the Build Alternative) and also encourages increased infill development, enhanced streetscapes and lighting, and improved sidewalks.[5]

The Soledad Downtown Specific Plan also includes conceptual plans for a proposed passenger rail station, discussed in more detail below.

City of King (King City) General Plan

King City adopted goals and policies to help ensure new development is compatible with the City's visual character and surrounding environment.[6] The King City First Street Corridor Master Plan includes conceptual plans for a proposed passenger rail station (this station is included as an element of the Build Alternative).

[3] City of Salinas, 2002

[4] City of Salinas, 2006. General Plan

[5] City of Soledad, 2012

[6] City of King, 1998, Conservation, Open Space, and Safety Elements

San Luis Obispo County General Plan

San Luis Obispo County has open space areas, scenic corridors, and urban landscapes that contribute to its visual character. The County General Plan has designated several scenic resources along the US 101 corridor (identified below). These resources are subject to scenic protection standards indicated in the San Luis Obispo County General Plan. Projects proposed in rural areas and/or designated scenic corridors are subject to design guidelines and standards.[7]

City of El Paso de Robles (Paso Robles) General Plan

Paso Robles has adopted policies and action items intended to retain the rural, open space, and agricultural areas surrounding the city. The city intends that its designation of a "Purple Belt" (wine grape belt) will preserve agriculture and open space and limit the conversion of lands from viticultural to urban uses.[8]

3.6.2 METHODS OF EVALUATION

The visual resources analysis focuses on the existing visual conditions of the railroad corridor and how it would change under each alternative. The analysis focuses on how existing visually dominant features would change and to what extent. Four generalized visual environments characterize the existing visual conditions for the railroad corridor: 1) Agricultural, 2) Urban/Suburban, 3) Industrial/Institutional, and 4) Open Space/Undeveloped. These landscape types are described in **Subsection 3.6.3, Affected Environment,** and summarize the existing visual baseline against which the potential effects of proposed improvements will be evaluated.

The Build Alternative improvements have varying levels of potential visual impacts depending upon on the type of physical improvement and proposed location. For this evaluation, potential visual impacts are grouped accordingly:

- **High visual impact:** The proposed improvement would be dominant in the existing landscape and represent a significant change (degradation) of visual character and quality.
- **Medium visual impact:** The proposed improvement would be readily discernible but does not dominate the existing landscape and have a moderately adverse effect on existing visual character and quality.

[7] County of San Luis Obispo, 2010, Conservation and Open Space Element

[8] City of El Paso de Robles, 2003, Open Space Element

- **Low visual impact:** The proposed improvement would be generally consistent with and/or blends with the visual attributes of the existing landscape; little or no degradation of visual character and quality results.
- **No visual impact:** No proposed improvement would occur within a particular area or the improvement would not be readily discernible by the general public.

3.6.3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The visual setting of the study area encompasses a spectrum of landscape types, as the rail corridor travels through many physiographic and ecological regions. The range in landscape type depends on the landform and land cover of the study area. Landform describes the shape of the landscape (e.g., valleys, plains, mountains) and land cover describes what overlays the landform (e.g., grassland, residential, agricultural).

The study area consists of the existing railroad between Salinas and San Luis Obispo. Immediately adjacent to the existing railroad, four landscape types predominate 1) Agricultural, 2) Urban/Suburban, 3) Industrial/Institutional, and 4) Open Space/Undeveloped. These landscape types, as described in more detail below, provide the baseline to evaluate the level of visual change that might occur with the alternatives.

Landscape Types

Agricultural

As shown in **Figure 3.6-1**, an agricultural landscape is often flat but in this region can also include rolling hills with parallel straight lines of crops and developed monoculture that stretch to form the near horizon. The continuous texture ranges from various shades of green where crops are growing for harvest and brown where crops were recently planted and much of the soil is exposed. In viticultural areas, yellow and red colors can predominate in the autumn. Fences, farm equipment, rural dirt roads, electrical distribution lines, barns, and crop processing buildings are common features in an agricultural area and contribute to the visual character. Agricultural areas are very common in the Salinas Valley and inland Central Coast region.

Urban/Suburban

Urban/suburban areas have a man-made land cover of residential and commercial buildings, parking lots, and landscaping along streets and sidewalks, as shown in **Figure 3.6-2**. Buildings vary in size and shape. Residential areas are often

surrounded by walls or fences. Electrical transmission and distribution lines, roadways, street lighting and signs are typical visual features in an urban/suburban area and contribute to the visual character. The railroad corridor travels through several urbanized areas that range in density and intensity and visual dominance of the immediate landscape.

Industrial/Institutional

Industrial/institutional areas are generally characterized by developed land cover that can appear similar to urban/suburban areas, with warehouses and buildings varying in size and shape that dominate the vista in comparison to its surrounding environment, as shown in **Figure 3.6-3**. Industrial areas typically include utility lines, equipment, machinery, freight tracks, and factories that contribute to the visual character. Notably, the existing railroad corridor traverses the San Ardo oil and gas field, which includes diverse man-made textures of drilling equipment as well as infrastructure buildings to process and transport crude oil and raw gas products. The railway corridor travels through several institutional areas as well with similar types of landscape patterns and elements. Institutional areas include Camp Roberts, an Army National Guard post located north of San Miguel, and state prisons in Soledad and near San Luis Obispo.

Open Space/Undeveloped

Open space and undeveloped areas have natural land cover with very limited man-made visual intrusions and high intactness, as shown in **Figure 3.6-4**. Throughout the inland central coast region, open space and undeveloped areas include gently rolling hills varying in shades of green and neutral colors. Views to distant mountain ranges are generally unimpeded except by intermittent and infrequent stands of large trees. The Salinas River, the Los Padres National Forest, and the Big Sandy Wildlife Area are key visual resources of this type located along the existing rail corridor.

Identified Scenic Resources

Varied topography, agricultural areas, and downtown developments comprise the visual character of Monterey County. The County also contains 95 miles of officially designated State Scenic Highways. Moving traffic is the most substantial source of light and glare. Monterey County identifies sensitive visual areas and scenic corridors in its General Plan EIR.[9] Scenic visual resources include views of several

[9] County of Monterey, 2006, figure 4.14-1

mountain ranges, including the Santa Lucias, the Gabilan (which includes the Pinnacles of the eponymous National Park), and others lining the Salinas and Carmel Valleys. The General Plan does not identify any sensitive visual areas or scenic corridors located within the immediate study area, but some distant views of the identified mountain ranges are visible from the railway corridor.

San Luis Obispo County also identifies protected scenic resources in its General Plan. The existing railroad corridor passes through the Los Padres National Forest near Cuesta Grade; in this area, tree cover is dense and the landscape has substantial topography. The General Plan identifies several scenic corridors located in San Luis Obispo County, but none of these are located within the immediate study area. One such corridor is Highway 1, which is a designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway from San Luis Obispo to the Monterey County line. Along this 57-mile stretch of Highway 1 are four major scenic sections: Morros, Estero Bay, Harmony Valley, and the Big Sur Gateway.[10] The railway parallels Highway 1 as it travels the south slope of Cuesta Grade and into the City of San Luis Obispo; however, none of the previously mentioned major scenic sections are within the study area.

Salinas and Soledad have designated scenic corridors and views within each city's jurisdiction, but none are located within the immediate study area. King City has designated riparian areas along the Salinas River and San Lorenzo Creek as scenic resources and has also adopted goals to improve the visual quality of several roads in the city, including First Street, relatively near the proposed passenger station site.

Identified scenic Resources for Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties are depicted on **Figure 3.6-5 and 3.6-6**.

3.6.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative represents the continuation of existing operations and physical components, and assumes the perpetuation of existing freight and passenger service with no physical improvements. As a result, the No Build Alternative would result in no substantial visual impacts because the existing landscape character of the study area would not be changed substantially. Implementation of PTC improvements could require installation of antennas and signaling equipment within or immediately adjacent to the railroad right-of-way, but no specific equipment for the Coast Corridor has been selected.

[10] County of San Luis Obispo, 2010, Visual Resources Element

Build Alternative

This section analyzes potential visual impacts of the Build Alternative. The analysis compares the Build Alternative and its components to the existing visual setting.

Construction-Period Effects

In general, construction impacts include the visual presence of construction equipment, light and glare impacts from any nighttime construction work, and newly disturbed natural land cover that will recover to its original undisturbed form. Such effects would be somewhat more pronounced in high population areas or areas seen by substantial numbers of passing motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and rail passengers. It is reasonable to assume that construction outside of the right-of-way would have a more noticeable visual effect because these improvements (e.g., curve realignments and new passenger stations) would involve more earth-moving and excavation activities on land that has not necessarily been in a railroad transportation use. Improvements within the railroad right-of-way (e.g., signal upgrades, powered switches, and sidings) would occur on land already used by the railroad, thus improvements would be more harmonious with the existing land cover.

Operational Effects

Visual Effects of Proposed Improvements under the Build Alternative

Potential visual impacts of each of these proposed physical improvements are described in segments below.

The Build Alternative proposes reinstitution of the *Coast Daylight* passenger rail service along the existing active rail corridor. The Build Alternative would expand service initially by 2 passenger trains per day, increasing to 4 trains per day by 2040. While additional trains traveling on the tracks would be apparent, the visual presence of additional trains would be intermittent, with trains generally passing from view in one minute or less. Therefore, reinstitution of the *Coast Daylight* passenger rail service would have a low visual effect.

Implementation of CTC improvements would require installation of railway signaling poles of approximately 10-12 feet in height at periodic intervals along one or more sections of the existing railroad. The portions of the existing railroad currently under CTC already feature such signal poles. Exact locations of new signal poles have yet to be defined, but would be within the existing right-of-way and would be visually consistent with existing elements and features of the railroad. Additionally, the installation of new powered switches and rail upgrades would all occur in the immediate track bed and would not exceed the height of the existing track.

Accordingly, such features would be difficult to discern against the existing visual landscape and thus would be highly unlikely to result in any significant visual impact. Consequently, visual effects from track/signal upgrades and powered switches are not substantial and not discussed further.

Salinas

Track upgrades and new powered switches are proposed to the existing railroad tracks within urban/suburban landscape types within the City of Salinas. Adjacent areas include residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. Proposed improvements in this area would be largely imperceptible to viewer groups in the greater urbanized context as they would be implemented directly into the tracks. These improvements would not be out of context or substantially change the overall visual character of the area; therefore, the visual impact would be low.

Salinas to Chualar

The new Spence siding is proposed within agricultural landscape types of this segment. A new siding entails construction of an additional track immediately alongside the existing railroad, generally within the existing railroad right-of-way. Adding a segment of additional track along the existing railroad would not pose a substantial visual contrast with the existing visual environment. Therefore, visual impacts in this segment would be low.

Chualar to Soledad

The landscape type within this segment is predominantly agricultural, with some urban/suburban areas near the City of Gonzales and Soledad. There are no proposed improvements between Chualar and Soledad beyond rail upgrades that would be embedded into existing railroad tracks as well as corridor-wide signaling improvements. Such features would be difficult to discern against the existing visual landscape and thus visual impacts would be low.

Soledad Passenger Station

A new passenger rail station is proposed for the City of Soledad. Soledad has an urban/suburban landscape type, surrounded by agricultural areas. Soledad's Downtown Specific Plan, includes a potential layout view of station along Front Street. The development plans for this station are conceptual in nature, but propose a ticket building, an overhead pedestrian overpass on eastern side of the tracks, and a parking area on the western side of the tracks. According to the *Downtown Soledad Specific Plan EIR*, the proposed railroad parcels are undeveloped and a new one/two story structure may potentially block the view of potentially historic structures and existing development on Front Street for viewers traveling on Highway 101. The addition of a new passenger station would generally blend into the existing urbanized visual character of Soledad and would not disrupt views of

the mountains to the east. The *Downtown Soledad Specific Plan EIR* concluded there would be moderate viewer sensitivity to a new station.[11] While previously undeveloped parcels would be converted to accommodate new passenger station plans and may potentially alter the existing visual character, the proposed station footprint would be generally consistent with the existing urbanized visual character. Therefore, there would be a medium visual impact for a new passenger station in Soledad.

Soledad to King City

The Harlem/Metz curve realignments and the Coburn curve realignments are proposed in this segment predominantly in agricultural and open space/undeveloped landscapes. These curve realignments would cut through agricultural land up to about 600 feet beyond the existing railroad right-of-way. The curve realignments would disrupt and permanently alter existing agricultural land cover where the new train tracks would be located. However, relatively few sensitive viewers are located near the proposed improvement areas, since the areas are predominantly rural, and the curve realignments would introduce railroad elements that already exist in the nearby viewshed. The proposed curve realignments would become part of the landscape and contrast would lessen over time. Notwithstanding, this curve realignments would directly convert existing land and have a readily discernible effect on the visual landscape. As a result, the visual impact would be medium to high.

The new siding at Chalone Creek and the King City siding extension are also proposed in this segment. Each would add or extend a siding railroad track within the railroad right-of-way, parallel to the existing alignment. The visual impact would be low because the new track would be consistent with the existing visual setting. The King City siding travels through an urban area that is more populated, but would also have a low visual impact because extending the track along the existing corridor would not visually contrast with the existing viewshed.

King City Passenger Station

A new passenger rail station is proposed in King City. King City has an urban/ suburban landscape type, surrounded by agricultural areas and ringed by hills. K*ing City's First Street Corridor Master Plan* includes a schematic diagram of the

[11] City of Soledad, 2012, pp. 4.1-7-4.1-14

proposed passenger station along the existing tracks that parallel First Street. The city envisions a station platform about 12 feet wide and 800 feet long, along with a small parking lot.[12]

Given the nature and the visual setting of the proposed site, the proposed station would not adversely affect scenic resources or corridors. Furthermore, the proposed stations would not visually contrast with the urban, developed visual setting. The proposed station would in fact be generally consistent with the existing urbanized visual character of King City. Therefore, there would be a medium visual impact for the proposed station.

King City to San Ardo

Curve realignments are proposed at MP 165 and MP 172 in agricultural and open space/undeveloped landscape types. The proposed MP 165 curve realignment location would be east and at a higher elevation than the existing train tracks as the Coast Corridor travels against a hillside to the east. The new tracks would traverse an agricultural area and require conversion of existing land cover where the new train tracks would be located. Because of the natural topography and placement of new tracks, the resultant railroad would be somewhat more visible. Therefore, the proposed MP 165 curve realignment would have a readily discernible effect on the visual landscape and a medium visual impact.

Agricultural landscape types are apparent to the west of where the curve realignment proposed at MP 172. The existing railroad corridor is located on the east side of the adjacent frontage road. The proposed realignment would move the train tracks to the east side of the frontage road, thus potentially creating a new at-grade crossing in this location. An at-grade crossing in a rural area may entail signs and signaling for safety purposes. While proposed curve realignments would not sharply contrast with the existing visual character once construction is complete, implementation of curve realignments would directly convert existing land cover and have a readily discernible effect on the visual landscape. As a result, the visual impact would be medium.

The proposed new San Lucas siding would travel through agricultural landscape types until entering the unincorporated community of San Lucas. The San Lucas community is comprised of one and two story residential buildings and industrial areas. A second track would have a low visual impact because adding a track along the existing corridor would not present a significant visual contrast with the existing viewshed.

[12] City of King, 2013, p. 10.

San Ardo to Bradley

There are no proposed improvements within the San Ardo oil and gas fields except corridor-wide rail upgrades and signaling improvements. As discussed, such features would be difficult to discern against the existing industrial/institutional landscape and thus would be highly unlikely to result in any significant visual impact.

The Getty/Bradley curve realignments are located just south of the San Ardo area with few nearby viewers. The landscape type for this portion of the segment is open space/undeveloped. Implementation of curve realignments would directly convert existing land cover and have a readily discernible effect on the visual landscape. As a result, the visual impact would be medium.

The Bradley siding extension is also proposed in this segment. The landscape type is also open space/undeveloped. Further south, the Bradley siding passes through Bradley, an unincorporated city in Monterey County. Bradley is a small residential community that is adjacent to the Coast Corridor. An extended siding track would have a low visual impact because it would be harmonious with the existing corridor and would not pose a strong visual contrast with the existing viewshed.

Bradley to San Miguel

South of Bradley, the Coast Corridor passes the Big Sandy Wildlife Area and Camp Roberts. The Big Sandy Wildlife Area is an open space/undeveloped landscape type characterized by open grasslands and stream habitat. The Camp Roberts landscape is marked by out-of-use, decaying military barracks buildings and signage.

The McKay/Wellsona curve realignment is proposed in this segment with Big Sandy Wildlife Area on the East and Camp Roberts on the west. This proposed realignment would traverse Big Sandy Wildlife Area, in doing so, extending the visual reach of the railroad from an industrial area adjacent to US 101 to a designated open space area - whose very openness is an important element of its existing visual character. If this curve realignment is selected for construction and design practices cannot avoid or minimize its footprint within the Big Sandy Wildlife Area, the resulting adverse visual effects could be high.

San Miguel to Paso Robles

Within San Miguel, the predominant landscape type is urban/suburban with residential areas, buildings, paved roadways, and development. San Miguel is comprised of one and two story residential buildings and industrial areas. South of San Miguel, the landscape type is mostly open space/undeveloped and agricultural, with occasional homes scattered on both sides of the railroad corridor. The Coast Corridor is east of US 101 within this segment.

A leg of the proposed McKay/Wellsona and all portions of the Wellsona/Paso Robles curve realignments are proposed in this segment. Each would cut through agricultural land outside the railroad right-of-way. Implementation of curve realignments would directly convert existing land cover and have a readily discernible effect on the visual landscape. As a result, the visual impact would be medium.

The proposed Wellsona siding would add a new siding track, adjacent to the existing track and within the right-of-way. A second track would have a low visual impact because adding a track along the existing corridor would not visually contrast with the existing viewshed.

Paso Robles to Santa Margarita

South of Paso Robles, the landscape type is predominantly urban/suburban with residential areas surrounding both sides of the Coast Corridor alignment, with both rural and agricultural farming areas scattered nearby as well. Several physical improvements are proposed within this segment.

The proposed Templeton siding would add a second track, adjacent to the existing track and within the railroad right-of-way. A second track would have a low visual impact because adding a track along the existing corridor would not visually contrast with the existing viewshed.

The proposed Templeton/Henry curve realignment and the Henry/Santa Margarita curve realignments would occur outside the railroad right-of-way. The proposed curve realignments would permanently alter existing land cover and require tree removal in areas where new tracks would be located. The Templeton/Henry curve realignment would be noticeable to the local road and nearby residential neighborhoods west of the rail alignment.

The portions of the Henry/Santa Margarita curve realignment near Salinas Road and Asuncion Road, if constructed, would potentially cut through residential and farming properties approximately 100-150 feet from the existing railroad right-of-way, likely entailing the removal of several existing buildings. New tracks would be placed closer to nearby residents and viewer groups, which would sharply lower the visual character and quality of the landscape for these residents. The proposed Henry/Santa Margarita curve realignments would be dominant in the existing landscape and would permanently convert existing land cover. As a result, the visual impact could be high.

Santa Margarita to San Luis Obispo

The landscape type between Santa Margarita and San Luis Obispo is primarily open space/undeveloped. Dense vegetation and trees surrounds the Coast Corridor on both sides in some areas and the topography of the landscape becomes more pronounced as the railroad and US 101 pass through a portion of the Los Padres National Forest.

A second mainline is proposed within this segment; the second mainline would be constructed within the existing railroad right-of-way. The size and reach of the Los Padres National Forest make it an important visual resource within San Luis Obispo County and the larger Central Coast region. Views of the existing rail corridor from US 101 are somewhat limited through this area due to intervening trees between the highway and the railroad. Furthermore, the hilly topography through this area also limits visibility of the railroad from passing vehicles. Dense trees somewhat limit views of the freeway and the railroad from adjacent portions of the National Forest itself. In summary, a second track would have a low to moderate visual impact because adding a track along the existing corridor would not strongly contrast with the existing visual setting.

Table 3.6-1 Potential Visual Impacts

Build Alternative Components	Landscape Type	Visual Impacts
Salinas Powered Switch	Urban/Suburban	None
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #1	Urban/Suburban; Agricultural	Low
Spence Siding Extension	Agricultural	Low
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #2	Agricultural	Low
Gonzales Powered Switch	Urban/Suburban	None
Soledad Powered Switch	Urban/Suburban	None
Soledad New Passenger Station	Urban/Suburban	Medium
Harlem/Metz Curve Realignments	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Medium
Chalone Creek New Siding	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low

Build Alternative Components	Landscape Type	Visual Impacts
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #3	Agricultural; Urban/Suburban	Low
Coburn Curve Realignments	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Medium
King City Siding Extension	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low
King City New Passenger Station	Urban/Suburban	Medium
King City Powered Switch	Urban/Suburban	None
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #4	Agricultural	Low
MP 165 Curve Realignment	Agricultural	Medium
San Lucas New Siding	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #5	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped; Industrial/Institutional	Low
MP 172 Track Realignment	Agricultural; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Medium
San Ardo Powered Switch	N/A	None
Getty/Bradley Curve Realignments	Open Space/ Undeveloped	Medium
Bradley Siding Extension	Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low
Bradley Powered Switch)	Open Space/ Undeveloped	None
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #6	Industrial/ Institutional; Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #7	Industrial/ Institutional; Open Space/ Undeveloped; Urban/Suburban	Low
McKay/Wellsona Curve Realignments	Industrial/ Institutional; Open Space/ Undeveloped	High
McKay East Powered Switches	Industrial/ Institutional; Open Space/ Undeveloped	None
Wellsona New Siding	Urban/Suburban	Low

Build Alternative Components	Landscape Type	Visual Impacts
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #8	Urban/Suburban	Low
Wellsona/Paso Robles Curve Realignments	Urban/Suburban	Medium
Templeton Siding	Urban/Suburban	Low
Templeton/ Henry Curve Realignments	Urban/Suburban	Medium
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #9	Urban/Suburban	Low
Henry/Santa Margarita Curve Realignment	Urban/Suburban; Agricultural; Open Space	High
Santa Margarita Powered Switch	Urban/Suburban	None
Cuesta Second Main Track	Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low to Medium
Upgrades to Existing Alignment Section #10	Open Space/ Undeveloped	Low

Source: Circlepoint, 2013

3.6.5 AVOIDANCE, MINIMIZATION, AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Mitigation strategies could include design features and techniques to integrate new rail improvements into the existing landscapes. Design measures should be reviewed with local jurisdictions, resource agencies, and the public to determine site-specific effectiveness and acceptability. Some strategies include the following:

MIN-VIS-1. In locations where construction would take place overnight, appropriate light and glare screening measure could be used at construction staging areas, including the use of downward cast lighting.

MIN-VIS-2. Where physical improvements pass through or along the edge of residential or heavily traveled roadways, landscape treatments such as trees and shrubs, could be installed and continuously maintained along the edge of the ROW to provide partial screening of visual changes.

MIN-VIS-3. While new sidings/siding extensions can have low visual impacts as noted above, use of sidings for long-term "parking" of train cars can have visual

consequences. Mitigation strategies could thus include limits on the use of sidings for longer-term train car storage, with potential priority to areas of greater visual sensitivity.

MIN-VIS-4. Night lighting at stations will be the minimum required for operations and safety. All lights should be hooded and directed to the area where the lighting is required to be on all the time, sensors and timers should be specified.

MM-VIS-5. Natural land cover removed or disturbed to implement physical improvements would be replaced, as feasible.

These mitigation strategies would help reduce the level of visual impact of the proposed physical improvements. Future evaluation prior to implementing an improvement would determine specific mitigation suitable for each proposed improvement and specific location.

3.6.6 SUBSEQUENT ANALYSIS

Future project-level environmental review would be necessary if any of the Build Alternative improvements are carried forward. The visual analysis would specifically evaluate the visual character and quality of the study area and assess potential effects to existing conditions based on proposed project components. At that time, a detailed assessment of construction and operation-related activities would occur. The amount of introduced man-made development features and encroachment would be the criteria to determine the overall changes to visual quality. The evaluation would focus on changes to the integrity and continuity of the physical environment as well as the viewer responses to such physical changes.

Note: South of Salinas

Note: South of Salinas

Existing Landscape Type: Agricultural

Figure 3.6-1

Source: Google Earth, 2013

Note: Soledad

Note: King City

Existing Landscape Type: Urban/Suburban

Figure 3.6-2

Source: Google Earth, 2013

Note: San Ardo Oil & Gas Fields

Note: Camp Roberts

Existing Landscape Type: Industrial/Institutional

Figure 3.6-3

Source: Google Earth, 2013

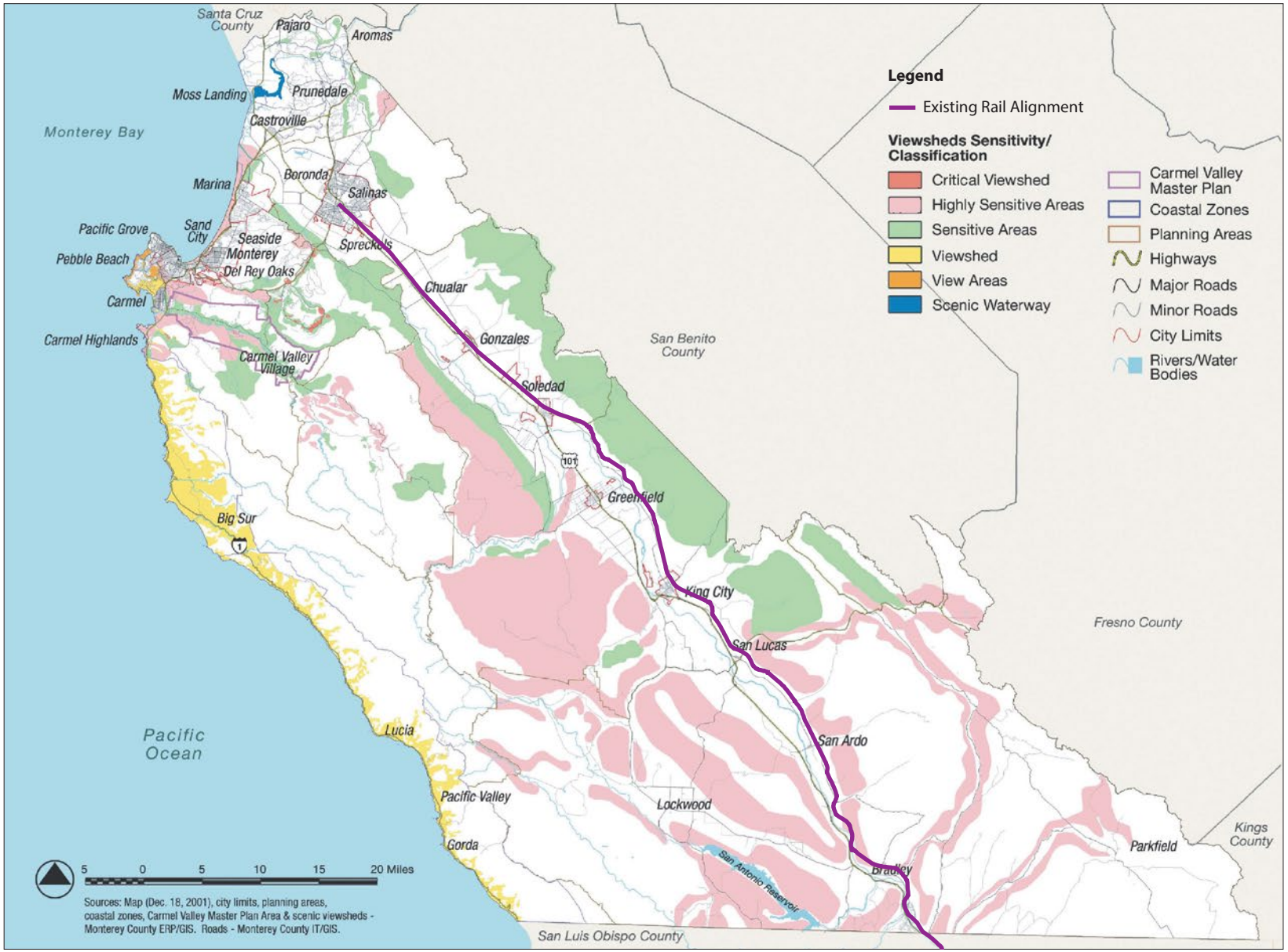
Note: North of Paso Robles

Note: Highway 101 within Los Padres National Forest

Existing Landscape Type: Open Space/Undeveloped

Figure 3.6-4

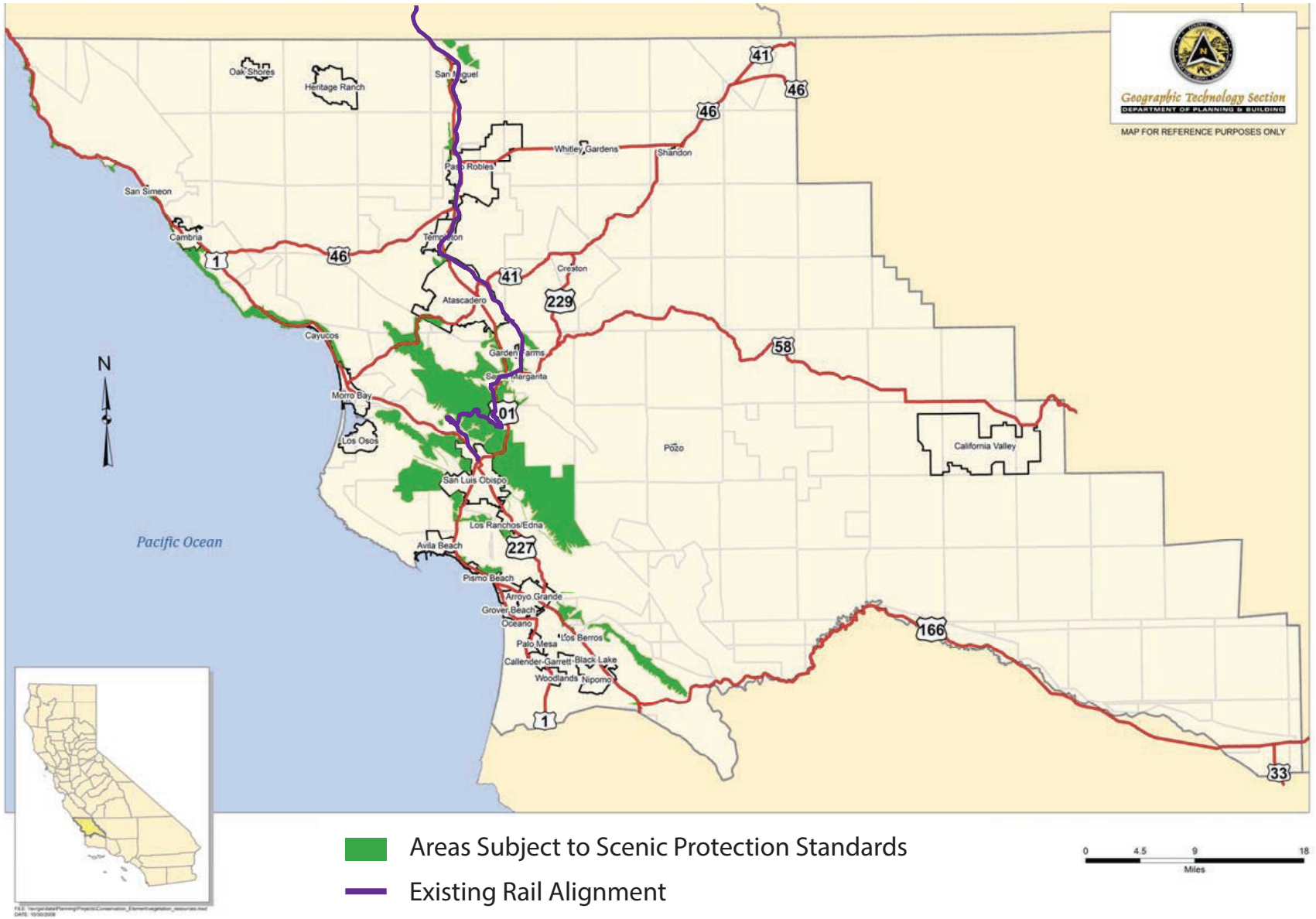
Source: Google Earth, 2013



Monterey County Visual Resource Areas

Figure 3.6-5

Source: Monterey County, 2004



San Luis Obispo County Visual Resource Areas

Figure 3.6-6

Source: San Luis Obispo County, 2010