4.11 VISUAL RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION

This section describes the existing visual character of the Via Princessa project site and surroundings, and evaluates the potential changes in the visual character as a result of implementation of the proposed project. The project site presently is predominantly vacant, and is surrounded by mostly residential uses to the northeast, vacant land to the north, Golden Valley Road to the west, and Golden Valley High School to the south.

The proposed project would not significantly alter the visual characteristics of the scenic vistas visible from various vantage points surrounding the project site. While the proposed project is located between existing residential and commercial developments and is not removing or replacing prominent visual features, the image of the roadway, landscaping, and other human activity would be a significant change from the existing site characteristics, which could be viewed as a substantial adverse visual impact.

Drought-tolerant, native, and non-native landscaping would be incorporated throughout the project site. Project development would also introduce sources of outdoor illumination that do not presently exist. Outdoor lighting, such as streetlights and traffic signals, are essential safety features in roadway projects, and such lighting cannot be eliminated if the proposed project is implemented. Despite the recommended mitigation measures, which would reduce the impacts to a certain extent, the identified significant visual impacts would still result from the change in the visual character of the site from open space to urban. There is no feasible mitigation beyond that already identified for the proposed project to reduce the identified impacts to a level below significant. Consequently, such significant visual impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

The proposed project and other development in the City of Santa Clarita would transform the character of the area by adding urban uses in currently undeveloped areas, including hillside areas. Consequently, the project's contributions to cumulative visual character and quality and to light and glare impacts are considered to be significant and unavoidable.

Aesthetics

Aesthetic impact analysis generally involves the study of contrast, or the degree to which elements of the physical environment differ visually. The environment of a given project site can range in character from urban center to rural and wildland. Adverse visual project impacts may include the loss of natural features or open space, the removal of urban features with aesthetic value, or the introduction of contrasting urban features to existing natural areas or urban settings. Natural features may include open

space, native or ornamental vegetation and landscaping, topographic or geologic landforms, and natural water bodies. Urban features may include buildings or structures of architectural or historical importance, streetscapes and associated amenities, open space (such as plazas or parks), landscaping, or other design elements (such as height, setbacks, massing, lighting, and signage). The loss of such features or the introduction of contrasting features may have a local impact or contribute to a cumulative change in visual character.

This section characterizes and illustrates the existing visual character of the project site and surrounding area, and evaluates the project's potential to alter the existing visual character through the introduction of contrasts in development of a roadway, the removal or introduction of open space and vegetation, and other changes.

Obstruction of Views

The term "views" generally refers to visual access to, or the visibility of, a particular sight from a given vantage point or corridor. Focal views are those targeting a particular object, scene, setting, or feature of visual interest. Panoramic views or vistas, on the other hand, provide visual access to an expansive geographic area, for which the field of view is often wide and extends into the distance. Examples of focal views include distinct natural landforms, public art, landmarks, and individual buildings. Examples of panoramic views might include an urban skyline, valley, mountain range, the ocean, and other bodies of water.

The City of Santa Clarita recognizes three primary types of viewsheds:

- Significant Regional Viewshed—A viewshed where a significant number of prominent visual features, unique to the Santa Clarita Valley, can be identified.
- Significant Local Viewshed—A viewshed where a significant number of prominent visual features, unique to the Santa Clarita Valley or the City of Santa Clarita, can be identified, but are secondary in quantity or nature to a Significant Regional Viewshed.
- Dark Sky Viewshed—A location away from artificial or urban light sources, which preserves the nighttime view of stars, planets, constellations, and other celestial bodies.

Viewsheds can be adversely affected by the urbanization of natural areas, including prominent slopes or woodlands. Viewsheds are also sensitive to adverse changes in air quality since smog obscures long-range visibility. Potentially significant view impacts associated with the proposed project were evaluated based on visual simulations prepared by Impact Sciences, Inc.

Nighttime Illumination and Daytime Glare

For purposes of this analysis, "light" refers to light emissions, or the degree of brightness, generated by a given source. Artificial lighting may be generated from point sources (i.e., focused points of origin representing unshielded light sources) or from indirectly illuminated sources of reflected light. Light may be directed downward to illuminate an area or surface, cast upward into the sky and refracted by atmospheric conditions (skyglow), or cast sideways and outwards onto off-site properties (overspill). Skyglow and light overspill are considered forms of light pollution.

The effects of nighttime lighting are contextual and depend upon the light source's intensity, its proximity to light-sensitive land uses (i.e., sensitive receptors such as residential units), and the existing lighting environment in the vicinity of a project site. The primary sources of nighttime illumination include street lighting, security and other types of outdoor lighting on commercial and residential properties, surface-parking illumination, and illuminated commercial signage. Adverse lighting impacts may occur when project-related lighting is visually prominent and decreases available views, alters the nature of community or neighborhood character, or illuminates a sensitive land use. Nighttime illumination of sensitive receptors also may adversely affect certain land use functions, such as those of a residential or institutional nature, since such uses are typically occupied during evening hours and can be disturbed by bright lights.

"Glare," or "unwanted source luminance," is defined as focused, intense light directly emanated by a source or indirectly reflected by a surface from a source. Daytime glare typically is caused by the reflection of sunlight from highly reflective surfaces at or above eye level. Reflective surfaces generally are associated with buildings clad with broad expanses of highly polished surfaces or with broad, light-colored areas of paving. Daytime glare generally is most pronounced during early morning and late afternoon hours when the sun is at a low angle and the potential exists for intense reflected light to interfere with vision and driving conditions. Daytime glare also may hinder outdoor activities conducted in surrounding land uses, such as sports.

Nighttime light impacts associated with the project were evaluated by characterizing the existing nighttime light levels on the project site and in the surrounding area, and evaluating the potential for project features to change those conditions. Daytime glare impacts were evaluated by assessing the glare potential of the project's roadway and parkway materials.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Regional Setting

The project site is located in the City of Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County, California. The Santa Clarita Valley is characterized by flat areas and gently rolling hills that range in elevation from approximately 1,200 to 1,600 feet. The Valley is bounded on the south by the Santa Susana and San Gabriel Mountains and on the north by the Sierra Pelona Mountains. Whitaker Peak to the north of the project site has an elevation of 4,148 feet, Oat Mountain to the south is 3,747 feet high, and Mt. Gleason to the east has an elevation of 6,502 feet. The Santa Clara River crosses the Valley floor from east to west. Other prominent topographic features of the Valley include the various canyons descending from the foothills; one such canyon, Placerita Canyon, is located south of the project site.

Local Setting

The proposed roadway would be approximately 1.2 miles in length and the project site encompasses 16 parcels in the City of Santa Clarita approximately 2 miles north of State Route 14 (SR-14). The project site consists of portions of Via Princessa between Golden Valley Road in the west and Sheldon Avenue in the east. As depicted in **Figure 3.0-2, Project Site**, the project site is currently undeveloped rural land consisting of hilly terrain with extensive native vegetation (including a minimum of 12 oak trees as described in **Section 4.2 Biological Resources**). Currently, there are two City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power right-of-way crossing on the site, an aqueduct on the west side of the property, and an overhead power line corridor along the eastern side of the property. The Santa Clara River is located approximately 1 mile to the northeast.

Land uses surrounding the proposed project site include:

- Golden Valley High School, south of the project site
- Single-family residential development north of the existing portion of Via Princessa, northeast of the project site
- Vacant land located north of the project site
- Storage and testing facilities for National Technical Systems, Inc., and Golden Valley Road to the west of the project site

Existing Views

Scenic vistas are available along the Valley's major highways, particularly SR-14, Interstate 5 (I-5), and State Route 126 (SR-126). These highways provide mobile views of a wide variety of landforms, undisturbed mountains, ridgelines and national forests (Angeles National Forest and Los Padres National Forest), and extensive, uninterrupted views of wide expanses of land, in addition to views of the developed Valley areas. Vistas from these highways are often the only aesthetic experience for visitors or passersby of the Valley. Both I-5 and SR-14, which run through the pass between the Los Angeles Basin and the Valley, also serve as natural gateways to the Valley, providing the first views of the Valley, its topography, and vegetation. Due to intervening topography, the project site is not visible from either the I-5 or SR-14 which passes to the south of the project site.

In addition to the major highways, scenic views and vistas can be found along roads through various canyons, including Soledad Canyon Road, Bouquet Canyon Road, Sand Canyon Road, Placerita Canyon Road, Sierra Highway, and Golden Valley Road. Many of these scenic drives traverse oak- and sycamore-studded canyons along winding intermittent streambeds. The project site is visible from the segment of Soledad Canyon Road that passes to the north of the project site. Due to distance and intervening topography, the project site is not visible from any canyon roads, except for the developed portion of Golden Valley Road that is adjacent and to the west.

Scenic, panoramic vistas of the Valley floor are also available from the various mountains surrounding the Valley, including the Santa Susana, San Gabriel, and Sierra Pelona Mountains. Like most of the area, the project site is likely visible within one or more of the long-range vistas offered from these mountains. However, due to the distance from these vista points and intervening topography throughout the Valley floor, the project site does not represent a distinctive or otherwise appreciable component of any such field of view.

Although the project site is visible from many locations, the most significant views occur in close proximity to the site. The nearest identified Ridgeline is located south of the project site. Six viewing locations, which are identified in **Figure 4.11-1, Viewpoint Locations**, were selected to represent views of the project site from areas with a sizable existing or future viewing audience, such as residents of adjacent neighborhoods and users of recreational trails. These existing views are characterized below.

Viewpoint 1

Viewpoint 1, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-2**, is on the intersection of Via Princessa and Sheldon Avenue in the Rainbow Glen residential community, adjacent to the project site. The view shown is oriented to the southwest, and represents views available to several residences in the Rainbow Glen residential

community and from the future Class I bike route.[1] The foreground view consists of Via Princessa, which directs traffic northbound onto Sheldon Avenue. The middleground view consists of Via Princessa, vegetation, and a masonry wall which separates single-family residences from the roadway. The background view consists of a previously graded hillside, the terminus of Via Princessa, and power lines.

Viewpoint 2

Viewpoint 2, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-3**, is on the intersection of Via Princessa and Rainbow Glen Drive in the Rainbow Glen residential community, east of the project site and Viewpoint 1. The view shown is oriented to the southwest, and represents views available to several residences in the Rainbow Glen community. The foreground view consists of Via Princessa, Rainbow Glen Drive, sidewalks, and streetscape vegetation. The middleground view consists of a residence, Via Princessa, streetlights, streetscape vegetation, and sidewalks. The background view consists of a hillside, Via Princessa, and streetscape vegetation.

Viewpoint 3

Viewpoint 3, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-4**, is adjacent to the private cul-de-sac of Piazz di Sapro on Sierra Highway and represents views available from pedestrians walking along Sierra Highway, residents of the Valle Di Oro townhomes and from the future Class III bike route. The foreground view consists of Piazz di Sapro, curbs, and ornamental vegetation. The middleground view includes townhomes, ornamental vegetation, a water tank and open space. The background view includes several multi-family residences adjacent to the east of Golden Valley High School south of the project site and, in the distance, undeveloped hills and mountains. The project is not visible from this location.

Viewpoint 4

Viewpoint 4, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-5**, is west of Golden Valley Road, at the western terminus of the project site. The view shown is oriented to the east, and represents views of pedestrians and the mobile public viewing audiences traveling along the Class I bike route and Golden Valley Road, respectively. Vacant land scattered with vegetation and Golden Valley Road occupy the foreground view. The middleground view consists of power lines and a transmission towers, several hills and the expanse of undeveloped land on the project site. The background view includes a view of the Sierra Pelona Mountains in the distance.

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1 City of Santa Clarita, Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department, *Trails and Parks Map*, posted July 2010.

SOURCE: Google Earth – June 2011

FIGURE **4.11-1**

Viewpoint Locations

112-028•06/11

Existing View

Proposed View

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-2**

Viewpoint 1: Looking west from the corner of Via Princessa & Sheldon Avenue

Existing View

Proposed View

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-3**

Viewpoint 2: Looking west from the corner of Via Princessa & Rainbow Glen Drive

Existing View

Proposed View (Note: Project not Visible from this Location)

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-4**

Viewpoint 3: Looking north from Sierra Highway & Piazz di Sapro

Existing View

Proposed View

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-5**

Viewpoint 4: Looking east from Golden Valley Road & Via Princessa extension

Viewpoint 5

Viewpoint 5, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-6**, is on the intersection of Golden Valley Road and Centre Point Parkway. This view represents the views from the existing Class II bike route, pedestrians and mobile viewing audiences north of, and lower in elevation then, the project site. The view is oriented slightly to the southeast. The foreground view consists of Golden Valley Road, Centre Point Parkway, and the signalized intersection. The middleground view includes portions of the City of Santa Clarita Aquatics Center, transmission towers power lines, trees, commercial building, and sparse vacant land. The background view consists of open space and a ridgeline.

Viewpoint 6

Viewpoint 6, illustrated on **Figure 4.11-7**, is located south of Newhall Ranch Road, east of the River Village residential development. The view represents the view from pedestrians and the existing Class I bike route, the future Multi-Purpose Use trail[2] and the future mobile audiences traveling along Newhall Ranch Road. The view shown is oriented to the southeast. The foreground view includes a vegetated embankment and the Los Angeles Aqueduct. The middleground view includes the Santa Clara River and adjacent undeveloped land. The background view includes commercial buildings in the Centre Pointe Business Park, hills that have been partially developed, the project site, and the San Gabriel Mountains.

Existing Light and Glare

As is typical in urbanized environments with nighttime activity, the developed portion of the Santa Clarita Valley, such as the SR-14 corridor, is generally brightly illuminated at night, with the greatest concentration of light sources (e.g., commercial land uses and street lighting) found along major roadways and at intersections. Nighttime light levels are lower in the hillsides, which are generally less densely developed and contain fewer roadways.

The project site currently contains no source of daytime or nighttime light, except the single-family residential homes located on the intersection of Via Princessa and Sheldon Avenue. However, a variety of urban and rural land uses that generate light occur in the vicinity of the project site. Additionally, the project site and the vicinity do not contain any highly reflective or light-colored surfaces that generate substantial glare.

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2 City of Santa Clarita, Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department, *Trails and Parks Map*, posted July 2010.

REGULATORY SETTING

City of Santa Clarita

General Plan

The Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan, establishes a framework for the designation and long-term preservation of open space with the planning area, and addresses the wide range of community benefits derived from open space, In addition to providing for park and recreational facilities, open spaces provide the benefits of wildlife habitat preservation, scenic views, water recharge and watershed protection, protection of cultural and historical resources, moderation of microclimates, and enhanced property values. In addition, preservation of scenic and accessible open spaces around the urbanized portions of the Valley, and between neighborhoods and districts, contributes to community character and the distinctive sense of place enjoyed by Santa Clarita Valley residents.

Hillside Development Ordinance

The provisions of the City's Hillside Development Ordinance (Chapter 17.80 of the Municipal Code) are intended to regulate the development and alteration of hillside areas, to minimize the adverse effects of hillside development and to provide for the safety and welfare of the citizens of the City of Santa Clarita while allowing for the reasonable development of hillside areas through the following methods:

- Provide hillside development standards to maximize the positive impacts of site design, grading, landscape architecture and building architecture, and provide development consistent with the goals and policies of the City of Santa Clarita's General Plan.
- Maintain the essential natural characteristics of the area such as major landforms, vegetation and wildlife communities, hydrologic features, scenic qualities and open space that contribute to a sense of place.
- Retain the integrity of predominant off-site and on-site views in hillside areas in order to maintain the identity, image, and environmental quality of the City.

The provisions of the Hillside Development Ordinance apply to parcels of land with average slopes of 10 percent or more. The provisions apply to all projects requiring grading permits, building permits, parcel maps, tentative tract maps, conditional use permits, and plans for development review. Such projects may be subject to specific development standards related to grading design, density, setbacks, building height, architectural treatments, landscaping, and retaining walls. The proposed project traverses areas with average slopes of 10 percent or more and, as a result, subject to the Hillside Development Ordinance.

Existing View

Proposed View

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-6**

Viewpoint 5: Looking south from Golden Valley Road & Centre Pointe Parkway

Existing View

Proposed View

SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. – January 2011

FIGURE **4.11-7**

Viewpoint 6: Looking south from Newhall Ranch Road & Pipeline overpass

Open Space and Acquisition Plan

The City of Santa Clarita's Open Space Acquisition Plan (OSAP) was adopted in 2002 to create a systematic and objective mechanism for evaluating and acquiring open space. This plan was intended to assist in the creation of a "greenbelt" surrounding the City of Santa Clarita to improve and expand wildlife habitat and corridors, and to provide a framework for the City to evaluate, acquire, and maintain the most beneficial parcels within and surrounding the City for preservation as open space. The OSAP also identified a goal of acquiring open space to augment the Rim of the Valley open space and trail system. Since its incorporation in 1987, the City of Santa Clarita has acquired more than 3,000 acres of land for the purpose of preservation of natural habitat and open space. The City Council has focused on preserving a greenbelt of open space around the City's incorporated boundaries, and about 50 percent of that greenbelt was completed as of 2007.[3]

Beautification Master Plan

In 2001, the City adopted the Santa Clarita Beautification Master Plan, which contains Citywide design guidelines as well as specific guidelines tailored to maintain community character within Canyon Country, Newhall, Saugus, and Valencia. According to the document, "the Beautification Master Plan addresses concepts for streetscape design, landscape enhancement, gateways, and monumentation and signage, on both a regional and a community scale. The Master Plan strives to maintain the identity of individual communities while unifying the entire City through design."

In its Beautification Plan, the City has identified a goal of providing landscaped medians within major arterial roadways in order to provide aesthetic appeal, control vehicle circulation, calm traffic, and provide area for directional and traffic signs. Specifically, the following arterials are identified for landscape median enhancement:

- Via Princessa
- Santa Clarita Parkway
- Soledad Canyon Road
- Railroad Avenue
- Newhall Ranch Road
- Lyons Avenue

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3 City of Santa Clarita, "City of Santa Clarita Open Space FAQs," http://www.santaclaritaopenspace.com/faq.asp.

- Sierra Highway

Standardized, drought-tolerant plant palettes along with decorative concrete are desired in the medians, which will help to enhance and unify the community.

Another area in which the City and County can coordinate beautification efforts is the provision of unified signs, especially for regional trails, trailheads, open space, and preserve areas. In addition, consistent street furniture such as bus shelters, benches, and trashcans can be used to unify streetscapes throughout the Valley.[4]

PROJECT IMPACTS

Significance Threshold Criteria

The following thresholds for determining the significance of impacts related to visual resources are contained in the *City of Santa Clarita Environmental Guidelines* and the environmental checklist form contained in Appendix G of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. Impacts related to visual resources are considered significant if the proposed project would:

- have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, identified ridgelines, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area; or,
- result in changes to the topography of any identified Ridgeline.[5]

No identified ridgelines are located on the project site.[6] The project site does contain five small hills and elevations across the project site range from approximately 1,390 feet to 1,830 feet above mean sea level, an elevation differential of 440 feet. Since there will be no identified Ridgelines affected by grading of the proposed project, no further discussion is required.

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4 Draft Land Use Element (July 2008).

5 Subsequent to the adoption of Resolution 05-38, the City modified its hillside guidelines to consider any change to primary ridgelines as significant.

6 City of Santa Clarita, "Significant Ridgelines Map," 2006; City of Santa Clarita, Draft General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (October 2008), Exhibit CO-1, "Hillsides and Ridgelines."

Impact Analysis

Impact Threshold 4.11-1 Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

The proposed project would be visible from many locations, including Newhall Ranch Road, Golden Valley Road, commercial uses, and adjacent residential uses. While the proposed project would likely be visible within several distant scenic vistas offered from the mountains, the project itself would not represent a distinct or otherwise appreciable component of any such field of view, given the extent of surrounding development and intervening topography on the Valley floor. However, short-range views of the project site would be affected. In order to evaluate the impact to existing views, visual simulations of the project were prepared from the six viewpoints previously described under **Existing Conditions**. Graded hillsides are shown as hydroseed, colored green, within each figure.

Viewpoint 1 (Looking west from the corner of Via Princessa and Sheldon Avenue)

As shown in **Figure 4.11-2** views from Viewpoint 1, which is within the Rainbow Glen community east of the project site, would be substantially altered. Foreground views of Via Princessa and Sheldon Avenue would remain. Middleground views would be substantially altered, as the proposed project would grade the existing graded hillside, further to the south. The roadway would be expanded to include six lanes, a pathway, and landscaped median with the proposed project improvements. Background views of the mountains would remain. The removal of a portion of the hillside within the project site constitutes a physical, adverse change in this viewpoint.

Viewpoint 2 (Looking west from the corner of Via Princessa and Rainbow Glen Drive)

As shown in **Figure 4.11-3**, views from Viewpoint 2 would not be substantially altered. The foreground and middleground views would be retained with the addition of streetscape landscape and lighting along the southern side of Via Princessa. Background views would be changed to include the widening of the southern side of Via Princessa, the extension of the southern sidewalk further to the west, and a landscaped median. The background views of the hillside would be unaltered.

Viewpoint 3 (Looking north from Sierra Highway and Piazz di Sapro)

As shown in **Figure 4.11-4**, the project site is not visible from this location. All views looking towards the project site would remain unaltered with implementation of the proposed project.

Viewpoint 4 (Looking east from Golden Valley Road and Via Princessa extension)

As shown in **Figure 4.11-5**, views from Viewpoint 4 would be substantially altered. Foreground views would include intersection improvements such as signalized lights and crosswalks. Middleground views would illustrate the ultimate buildout of the six-lane roadway with a landscaped median, sidewalk, bikeway, and streetscape landscaping along both sides of Via Princessa. Changes in the middleground view would include the grading and elimination of a hillside. Middleground views of the transmission power lines would remain. Background views of the Sierra Pelona Mountains would remain. The removal of the local hillside would constitute a physical, adverse change in this viewpoint.

Viewpoint 5 (Looking south from Golden Valley Road and Centre Pointe Parkway)

Viewpoint 5, as shown on **Figure 4.11-6**, would be slightly altered. Foreground and middleground views would remain unchanged. Background views would be altered. Hillsides would be landform graded for the alignment of the proposed project. The graded areas are shown as hydroseed (green on the figure). Views of landscaping along the proposed project would be barely visible.

Viewpoint 6 (Looking south from Newhall Ranch Road and Pipeline overpass)

As shown in **Figure 4.11-7**, portions of the graded hillsides within the project site are barely perceptible from this viewpoint. The hillsides would contain native vegetation at buildout. The landform-graded hillsides are shown as hydroseed along the alignment of the extension of Via Princessa. The Via Princessa roadway, landscaping, and lighting will also be visible. The San Gabriel Mountains in the background would remain unchanged. Middleground views of Centre Pointe Business Park would remain unchanged and views of the Santa Clara River and Los Angeles Aqueduct would remain unchanged.

Summary

The proposed project would contain six travel lanes and is designated in the City's Circulation Element of the General Plan as a Major Arterial Highway. The proposed project would not obstruct long-range public views of scenic resources within, and surrounding the Santa Clarita Valley. Those resources would include the San Gabriel Mountains to the south of the site, Sierra Pelona Mountains, the Santa Clara River, and the Los Angeles Aqueduct to the north. As described above, no primary Ridgelines would be altered as a result of the proposed project.

As shown in the above simulations, the alignment of the proposed project would result in landform grading of the existing hillsides which would result in altered short-range views. In particular, Viewpoints 1 and 4 would substantially alter the existing contours of the hillsides along the proposed

alignment west of Sheldon Avenue. The proposed extension would be designed in a fashion consistent with applicable development codes and developed consistent with landform contour grading to the extent feasible. The alteration of the hillsides would be considered an adverse physical change to views of the project site west of Sheldon Avenue and east of Golden Valley Road.

Mitigation Measures

The alteration of the local hillsides would be minimized by the use of landform grading. Natural topographic features will be preserved to the extent feasible to blend manufactured slopes with natural topography.

Residual Impacts

Long-range scenic vistas would be unaffected with implementation of the proposed project and would result in less than significant impacts. Short-range views would be altered, adversely impacting the local hillsides. Therefore, the proposed project would result in significant viewshed impacts.

Impact Threshold 4.11-2 Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, identified ridgelines, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

There are no designated state scenic highways in the Santa Clarita Valley. SR-126 is designated as an eligible state scenic highway, but has not officially received scenic highway status. Furthermore, Los Angeles County designates SR-126 as a "First Priority Scenic Route" that is proposed for further study, but has no regulatory restrictions placed on it; however, the project site is not visible from SR-126. The project site is not visible from SR-14, which is not a designated scenic highway. Impacts to views from other roadways are discussed under **Impact Threshold 4.11-1**, above. Impacts to scenic resources on the project site are discussed in **Impact Threshold 4.11-3**, below. Since the proposed project would not damage any scenic resources within a designated scenic highway, no impacts would result.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are necessary.

Residual Impacts

There would be no impacts to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Impact Threshold 4.11-3 Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

Construction

During the construction of the proposed project, the proposed alignment would be cleared and landform graded west of Sheldon Avenue to Golden Valley Road. The proposed project would balance approximately 551,590 cubic yards (cy) of cut and 210,530 cy of fill on site. The southern side of Via Princessa (eastbound) would be widened from Sheldon Avenue east of Isabella Parkway to include the proposed three travel lanes the proposed Class I bike path. Via Princessa would then be paved and landscaped. Such construction activity would change the existing visual character of the project site and its surroundings. However, construction activity would be temporary, and the permanent visual character of the project site would not be realized until completion of construction. For this reason, impacts during construction would be temporary and less than significant.

Operation

The existing project area contains residential uses adjacent and to the northeast, a significant Ridgeline to the south, Golden Valley High School to the south, and commercial uses to the northwest of the project site. The area along Via Princessa between Rainbow Glen Drive and Sheldon Avenue is a four-lane roadway with streetscape landscaping and residential uses along the northern portion of the roadway. The project site west of Sheldon Avenue is currently vacant open space. Maintenance access roads for the transmission towers and aqueduct occur throughout this area. As described in **Section 4.2, Biological Resources,** a minimum of 12 protected oak trees are located on the lower portions of north facing slopes and within drainages in the central-western portion of the project site.

The proposed project would introduce a paved roadway and landscaped surfaces and would connect Via Princessa at Sheldon Avenue west to Golden Valley Road. The right-of-way of the extension would be 116 feet consisting of a 14-foot raised landscaped median, a 10-foot parkway including 5-foot sidewalk on each side, and a 10-foot bike path with a 2-foot parkway along the south side and 35 feet of paved travel lanes. The remaining right-of-way would be vegetated with native vegetation types. Improvements along the south side of Via Princessa from Rainbow Glen Drive to Sheldon Avenue would include widening of the south side of the roadway, a 10-foot bike path with a 2-foot parkway along the south side and streetscape landscaping.

Buildout of the proposed project would change the visual character of the approximately 92.8-acre site, which currently is predominantly vacant. The project site is surrounded by existing development, including the Rainbow Glen residential community to the east, Golden Valley High School to the south,

and Golden Valley Road to the west. The proposed extension is designated in the City's Circulation Element of the General Plan as a Major Arterial Highway providing alternate east/west travel through the City. The project would be consistent with the surrounding area. Future travelers along the Via Princessa extension would be able to view the Sierra Pelona Mountains to the north as they are not currently available.

Development of the proposed project would result in the loss of open area. The open area contains habitat for various biological species including, but not limited to, California annual grasslands, California sagebrush scrub, chamise chaparral, and riparian areas all of which contribute to the existing views of the project site. As described in **Section 4.2, Biological Resources**, the habitat is suitable for various special status plant and wildlife species. Special status plant species would include Peirson's morning glory, Moran's nosegay and protected oak trees. Special status wildlife species would include Vernal pool fairy shrimp, Rosy boa, and Coast horned lizard.

Oak trees contribute to the visual qualities of travelers along roadways. (It should be noted that none of the oak trees were visible in the viewpoints chosen for visual simulations.) Any replacement oak trees, as a result of the project, would be planted in the number necessary to comply with the requirements stipulated in the Oak Tree Permit issued by the City. Compliance with the permit conditions and implementation of **Mitigation Measure MM 4.2-10** (oaks not removed shall be enclosed during construction) would reduce impacts to oak trees to below a level of significance. Therefore, visual impacts pertaining to oak trees would be mitigated to less than significant impacts.

In areas where riparian habitat must be disturbed, the project would require such areas to be mitigated through restoration and enhancement activities (**MM 4.2-1** through **MM 4.2-6**). The character and vegetation composition of the restored/enhanced vegetation communities is intended to be consistent with the character and vegetation composition of the existing riparian scrub. Therefore, visual impacts pertaining to riparian habitat would be mitigated to less than significant impacts.

The project site's primary scenic resource, the southern ridgeline, would be retained and enhanced with native vegetation. The proposed extension would be designed in a fashion consistent with applicable development codes and developed consistent with landform contour grading to the extent feasible. Additionally, natural topographic features will be preserved to the extent feasible to blend manufactured slopes with natural topography.

Additionally, the proposed landscaping and improvements to the surrounding hillside would enhance, as opposed to degrade, the existing visual quality of the project site. However, the proposed project

would still grade the on-site hillsides, thus creating adverse visual impacts from Golden Valley Road and Via Princessa. For these reasons, the proposed project's visual impacts are considered to be significant.

Mitigation Measures

The roadway could be redesigned and/or reduced in footprint to avoid some of the visual impacts; however, a reduced or redesigned footprint is not feasible as it would not meet project objectives as outlined in **Section 3.0, Project Description**. Therefore, no mitigation measures are feasible.

Residual Impacts

Landform grading and revegetation would limit visual impacts to the project site. However, it would not lessen the adverse impacts identified above on views from Viewpoints 1 and 4. As a result, impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

Impact Threshold 4.11-4 Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

Construction

During construction of the proposed project, nighttime lighting would be maintained on the project site for security purposes. Such lighting on or near the site boundary could generate light spillover onto adjacent residential properties, which are considered light sensitive. The Rainbow Glen Community to the east of Sheldon Avenue is the nearest light-sensitive uses to the project site. Therefore, the residences near or along Via Princessa east of Sheldon Avenue are susceptible to light spillover from the project site during construction. Implementation of **Mitigation Measures MM 4.11-1** and **MM 4.11-2** would limit the use of construction security lighting to those planning areas requiring illumination, and require all security lights to be properly shielded and projected downwards. Furthermore, construction lighting would be temporary and removed upon completion of construction activities.

Construction activities are not anticipated to create sources of glare that could affect visibility in the area since construction is not expected to involve bright light sources that would be visible from off site or other materials that could directly or indirectly generate glare.

Accordingly, with implementation of mitigation, impacts due to light and glare generation during construction is considered less than significant.

Operation

The construction of the Via Princessa extension would generate additional paved surfaces. Vehicles traveling along the proposed roadway would temporarily generate light and glare. Light and glare impacts of the proposed project are expected to be similar to other road projects. Roadway and sign lighting for night visibility are necessary features in design of the proposed project. The development of a road through the western portion of the project site would increase the number of light and glare sources on the site over current levels, which are currently low to nonexistent.

The presence of intervening landscaping would inhibit new sources of potential daytime glare from affecting on-site uses or activities. Furthermore, the creation of nighttime glare would be minimized with implementation of **Mitigation Measure MM 4.11-3**. Therefore, project-related glare impacts would be less than significant.

The City Municipal Code provides guidance and regulation for street lighting and illuminated signs as to size, extent, and direction of lighting. Type and placement of directional signs for the travelers should be sensitive to the direction of natural light and the sun's glare particularly at critical hours in order to provide readable information. Light-sensitive receptors near the project would include the residences located adjacent to the northeast corner of the project site. Street lighting occurs along Via Princessa from Rainbow Glen Drive west to Sheldon Avenue. Street lighting would follow the City's standards.

Proposed lighting would be used to create a safe, adequately illuminated nighttime environment on the project site by illuminating the street and trail. Lighting along Via Princessa is expected to generate the highest light levels on the project site. As described in **Section 4.2**, implementation of **Mitigation Measure MM 4.2-18**, in conjunction with **Mitigation Measures MM 4.11-1** through **MM 4.11-3** and the City's Municipal Code for street lighting (Section 16.21.130), would reduce potential nighttime lighting impacts to less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

MM 4.11-1 The City, or designee, shall require that the use of nighttime lighting during project construction be limited to only those features on the construction site requiring illumination.

MM 4.11-2 The City, or designee, shall require that all security lights be properly shielded and projected downwards during construction, such that light is directed only onto the work site.

MM 4.11-3 The City, or designee, shall require that all lighting along the project site boundary consist of low-intensity downlights, or be equipped with louvers, shields, hoods, or other screening devices, in accordance with the City's Municipal Code.

Residual Impacts

Impacts would be less than significant with mitigation.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Many of the aesthetic impacts created by individual development projects have been avoided or minimized due to the project's site design, avoidance of significant visual features, and appropriate building, lighting, and landscape standards.

The proposed project is located in an area largely surrounded by existing and planned development in the City of Santa Clarita. The proposed project is an implementation of the City of Santa Clarita OVOV General Plan policies and circulation plan. The circulation system represents the cumulative projects that, when combined with the effects of the proposed project, would cumulatively impact visual resources. Major impacts would include the change of character to a suburban landscape from undeveloped open space; disturbance to ridgelines and landforms by the grading necessary for the planned communities, businesses, and public facilities; and the introduction of lighting and glare into natural areas changing their character. The encroachment of development into hillside areas and the placement of high-density development in close proximity to visually prominent areas would contribute to the change in the character of the Valley.

Similarly, development in close proximity to roadways that currently provide views for motorists of undeveloped land and hillsides could interrupt the natural, sweeping views provided, particularly if such development is high-density or involves tall structures that obscure long-range views. Development throughout the Valley would continue to introduce additional sources of nighttime light leading to increases in skyglow and light overspill. Therefore, continued development in the Valley would result in significant cumulative impacts. Furthermore, the project would not obstruct views of the San Gabriel Mountains, Sierra Pelona Mountains, and the Angeles National Forest from Sierra Highway, Golden Valley Road and Newhall Ranch Road, which roadways offer the most prominent views of those features. Nevertheless, due to the overall change in visual character associated with the proposed project together with the related existing and proposed development in the vicinity of the project site, the project's contributions to cumulative visual character and quality and to light and glare impacts are considered to be significant and unavoidable.

CUMULATIVE MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are feasible because the cumulative projects are reviewed on a case-by-case basis for visual resources impacts.

UNAVOIDABLE SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Project development would significantly alter the visual characteristics of the project site through the introduction of a roadway on land that is primarily undeveloped. These impacts are considered significant and unavoidable.

Cumulative development would significantly alter the overall change in visual character in the vicinity of the project site and within the Santa Clarita Valley. These cumulative impacts are considered to be significant and unavoidable.