# 4.17 VISUAL QUALITY AND AESTHETICS

## 4.17.1 INTRODUCTION

The preliminary engineering design phase focused on defining the functional aspects of Phase 1. As such, the architecture assumed in the station design visual simulations is conceptual only. The purpose of the visual simulations is to depict the general mass of key station elements as they relate to the surrounding areas. Architecture for the stations will be developed with the city partners and will be defined in the next phase of design.

## 4.17.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The existing conditions specific to visual quality and aesthetics have changed since certification of the SEIR-1. This section provides updated and more detailed information relative to the existing visual environment.

### 4.17.2.1 Methodology for Assessing Existing Conditions

The methodology used to conduct the visual analysis has not changed since certification of the FEIR or the SEIR-1. However, additional information is provided to further clarify the methodology for assessing existing conditions.

Where appropriate, the visual analysis includes more distant visual elements, but these are rare along the corridor and did not warrant expanding the study area. Areas outside the corridor, such as park-and-ride lot locations north of Santa Clara County, were not identified because construction of these lots is either part of a proposed or approved BART station or is being analyzed in a separate environmental document. However, the park-and-ride lots supporting additional bus service to the Milpitas and Berryessa Stations were considered, but are assumed not to result in new significant visual impacts due to their small size and mass.

The visual analysis considers the visual character of the region, which includes Alameda and Santa Clara counties and the cities of Fremont, Milpitas, and San Jose. It characterizes the Phase 1 viewshed in terms of “visual analysis areas” that correspond to the cities through which the corridor travels. These visual analysis areas have a consistent or cohesive visual or physical character. Visual quality, prominent features, and scenic resources within these visual analysis areas are described.

The evaluation of existing visual resources and viewing conditions in the study area was comprised of three elements:

1. Objective identification of visual features and resources in the landscape.

2. Assessment of the character and quality of these resources relative to the overall regional and local visual character.

3. Identification of the importance to people, sensitivity, or view of visual resources in the landscape or viewshed.

### 4.17.2.2 Corridor Visual Character

**Alameda County**

The FEIR and SEIR-1 did not include a discussion of the existing visual character of Alameda County. The existing visual character in Alameda County within the vicinity of Phase 1 is described below.

The visual character of Alameda County is comprised of a mix of natural and manmade urban features. In the vicinity of Phase 1, Alameda County is characterized by land that gently slopes towards the San Francisco Bay to the west. Low level rectangular commercial and industrial structures and associated asphalt-paved surface parking areas are located immediately west of the Phase 1 alignment, with views of the San Francisco Bay and undeveloped baylands in the background. Low level residential structures and associated landscaping are located immediately east of the Phase 1 alignment, which views of grass-covered rolling hills in the distance. Key visual features in Alameda County include the expansive vistas of the East Bay hills and the San Francisco Bay.

**City of Fremont**

The FEIR and SEIR-1 did not include a discussion of the existing visual character in Fremont. The existing visual character in Fremont is described below.

Fremont is framed by "water and San Francisco Baylands on the west, coastal foothills and Mission Peak to the east, and Alameda Creek and associated open space areas on the north."[1] Major thoroughfares, such as Fremont Boulevard and Grimmer Boulevard, are wide and tree-lined with well-maintained landscaping. Residential neighborhoods primarily consist of one- to two-story single-family homes along narrow suburban roadways, with scattered public parks. The Fremont business community is comprised of eight major business districts that primarily contain contemporary biotech and high-tech office space, automotive dealerships, hotels, restaurants, and expansive retail centers and shopping districts. Views to the south of the approved BART Warm Springs Station site include areas associated with the Irvington Business District, which is characterized by rail, commercial, and industrial uses.

[1] City of Fremont General Plan, pp. 9–45.

**Santa Clara County**

The existing conditions within Santa Clara County have not changed since certification of the SEIR-1.

**City of Milpitas**

The existing conditions within Milpitas have not changed since certification of the SEIR-1.

**City of San Jose**

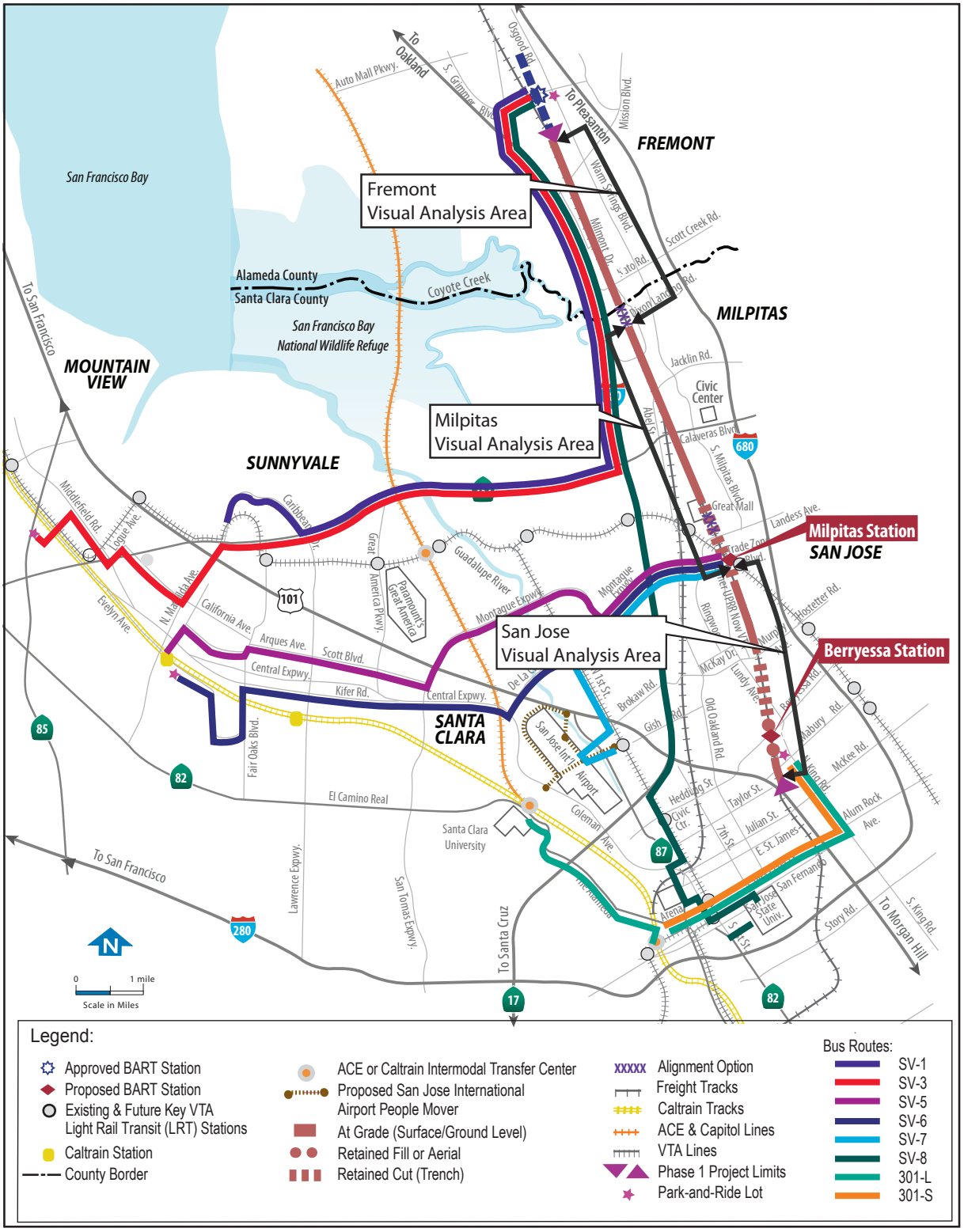
The existing conditions within San Jose have not changed since certification of the SEIR-1.

### 4.17.2.3 Visual Analysis Area Visual Character

The FEIR and SEIR-1 provided a description of the visual character of the visual analysis area by landscape unit, or distinct segments of the corridor that have a consistent or cohesive visual or physical character. For the purposes of this SEIR-2, the visual analysis areas relate to the cities through which the corridor travels. The visual analysis areas include the viewshed within the cities of Fremont, Milpitas, and San Jose. **Figure 4.17-1** shows the visual analysis areas for Phase 1. Viewer groups in the study area consist of residents; workers at office or industrial sites; and pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers using roadways in the vicinity of the proposed alignments.

**City of Fremont Visual Analysis Area**

The Fremont visual analysis area extends from Warm Springs Road to Dixon Landing Road. This area is characterized by a gradual transition from agriculture to modern office developments with interspersed heavy-industrial uses. The built environment consists of low- to mid-rise commercial and industrial office buildings (six stories or less) painted in neutral colors. In general, these areas are surrounded by perimeter landscaping (trees, bushes, and groundcover) and parking areas. Exceptions to this type of development include the former New United Motor Manufacturing Incorporated Plant—a large industrial complex that includes several office buildings, parking lots, truck containers, and large parcels of undeveloped land adjacent to Kato Road (north and south of Mission Boulevard). No identified scenic resources are located in this area. Mission Hills and Mission Peaks, which are unique visual resources, are located to the east of the alignment. The California Department of Transportation's California Scenic Highway Mapping System identifies Interstate 680 to the north of Mission Boulevard as an officially designated state scenic highway. Viewers in this area who could be impacted by Phase 1 include office and industrial workers, motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists.




Source: VTA, 2010.

Figure 4.17-1: Visual Analysis Areas

### City of Milpitas Visual Analysis Area

The Milpitas visual analysis area extends from Dixon Landing Road to Montague Expressway. The northern portion of this area is characterized by single-family residential development and recreational land uses (parks and open space). Business development in this area is small scale (low level buildings), consistent with single-family residential land uses. Building shapes, sizes, and color vary in this area. The distinctive rolling hills of the Diablo Range to the east of this area constitute a scenic resource. Viewers in this area who could be impacted by Phase 1 include residents, motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists.

The southern portion of this area is characterized by low- to mid-rise industrial and commercial office development. In general, industrial and commercial office buildings are large and boxy in construction and are painted in neutral colors. The buildings are typically surrounded by landscaping (trees, bushes, and groundcover) and parking areas. The area immediately south of Calaveras Boulevard is dominated by surface parking lots associated with the Union Pacific Railroad's Milpitas Yard. There are no identified scenic resources or officially designated scenic highways within this visual analysis area. Viewers in this area who could be impacted by Phase 1 include office and industrial workers, motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists.

### City of San Jose Visual Analysis Area

The San Jose visual analysis area extends from Montague Expressway to just south of Mabury Road. South of Trade Zone Boulevard, development to the west of the alignment consists of low- and mid-rise commercial office buildings, and east of the alignment is residential development. The residential areas consist of one- and two-story single-family homes in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. These residences are surrounded by landscaping (lawns, bushes, groundcover, and backyards), fences, and neighborhood streets. No identified scenic resources are located in this area. Near the San Jose Flea Market and north of US 101, the visual character on the west transitions to commercial land uses, including parking lots and vendor stalls, and on the east to large, low-rise warehouses surrounded by parking lots and landscaping. There are no officially designated scenic highways within this visual analysis area. Viewers in this area who could be impacted by Phase 1 include residents living in nearby communities, motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists traveling on Berryessa Road, and shoppers and merchants at the San Jose Flea Market.

## 4.17.3 REGULATORY SETTING

The methodology used to assess visual impacts at specific viewpoints generally follows guidance provided in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) *Environmental Impact Statement Visual Impact Discussion*. Refer to Section 4.17 of the FEIR for a discussion of these guidelines. No changes to the FHWA's visual impact assessment guidance have been made since certification of the SEIR-1.

## 4.17.4 PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Phase 1 would result in the removal of trees, especially near the station sites. Removal of trees could degrade the existing visual quality in each applicable visual analysis area. The following mitigation measure would ensure that the overall visual quality in each visual analysis area would not be degraded as a result of tree removal.

> **Mitigation Measure VIS-1:** Removal of trees will be replaced at a 1:1 ratio within the relevant visual analysis area.

Since certification of the SEIR-1, six of the 23 design changes under Phase 1 could result in impacts relative to visual quality and aesthetics. These changes are discussed below.

### 4.17.4.1 Design Change 1. Phasing of BART Silicon Valley

Phase 1 would require four park-and-ride parking lots for additional bus services, including park-and-ride lots at the approved Warm Springs and proposed Berryessa stations, at the Evelyn Light Rail Transit (LRT) Station in Mountain View, and in downtown Sunnyvale. **Figures 3-2** through **3-5** in **Chapter 3, Project Description**, of this SEIR-2 identify the locations of the park-and-ride parking lots. All park-and-ride lots would be surface parking lots, with the exception of a two-story parking structure at the Sunnyvale park-and-ride lot. The park-and-ride lots would be developed on existing surface parking areas and would be surrounded by urban development and would maintain consistency with the existing visual environment. The two-story Sunnyvale park-and-ride lot would be surrounded by existing multi-story development and would not degrade or alter the existing visual character or block any scenic resources.

### 4.17.4.2 Design Change 3. Systems Facilities Alternate Location A (STA 28+00)

Under Alternate Location A, the High Voltage Substation SRC and Switching Station SRR would be relocated from an area of Milpitas that has an existing asphalt parking lot surrounded by large warehouse-style buildings, a railroad corridor, and nearby residential viewer groups to an area in Fremont that has similar surface parking areas and large warehouse-style buildings. Alternate Location A would be immediately adjacent to the existing UPRR Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) Warm Springs Yard, which has a utilitarian visual character related to the railroad and yard facilities. There are no nearby residential viewers.

At Alternate Location A, an 80-foot-high, tapered, tubular steel tower would be installed at the system facilities site to provide connection to the existing 115-kV line, as compared to the 60-foot-high tower under the approved project. However, Alternate Location A would be within an existing industrial area with

similar types of utilitarian visual features, and the addition of an 80-foot-high tower and system facilities would not significantly degrade the visual character and quality of the surroundings or block scenic vistas. Impacts related to visual quality and scenic vistas would be less than significant.

There are no designated scenic highways near Alternate Location A; therefore, no impacts related to scenic resources within a state scenic highway would occur.

Although Alternate Location A would introduce new sources of daytime glare and nighttime lighting associated with the system facilities buildings, metal towers, and external building lighting, the system facilities would be surrounded by similar types of development with similar sources of light and glare. Impacts related to light and glare would be less than significant.

#### 4.17.4.3 Design Change 10. Systems Facilities Alternate Location B (STA 260+00)

Alternate Location B would shift the High Voltage Substation SRC and Switching Station SRR slightly south (less than 100 feet) of the system facilities identified under the approved project. No new scenic resources or vistas have been identified in the area, nor has the existing visual character of the area changed since certification of the SEIR-1. Thus, Alternate Location B would not result in any new impacts to visual quality or aesthetics beyond those already considered in the SEIR-1, and the SEIR-1 discussion remains applicable to this SEIR-2. Alternate Location B would have a less-than-significant impact related to scenic vistas, the existing visual character, scenic resources, and light and glare.

#### 4.17.4.4 Design Change 11. Eliminate South Calaveras Future Station (STA 292+00)

Under the approved project, the South Calaveras Future Station area would be located in midtown Milpitas, south of Calaveras Boulevard and on the east side of the UPRR ROW. The visual impacts of the South Calaveras Future Station were considered in Section 4.17 of the FEIR. The FEIR concluded that the South Calaveras Future Station would not significantly degrade the visual quality or character of the site or its surroundings and would not significantly impact day or nighttime views in the area. While no significant visual impacts were identified in the FEIR, the elimination of the South Calaveras Future Station as part of this SEIR-2 would eliminate the possibility of any visual impacts at this location, and no mitigation or design guidelines would be required.

#### 4.17.4.5 Design Change 15. Milpitas Station (STA 372+00)

The Milpitas Station was referred to as the Montague/Capitol Station in the FEIR and SEIR-1. While the location of the Milpitas Station has not changed since publication of the FEIR and SEIR-1, several design changes have been made to

the station site plan. These changes would alter the visual nature of the station site by eliminating the 60-foot-high radio tower and incorporating an eight-level parking structure, as compared to the four- to eight-level parking structure considered in the SEIR-1. The Milpitas Station would introduce new visual elements associated with the eight-level parking structure at the north end of the station area (which would be visible when looking northeast from East Capitol Avenue and south from Montague Expressway).

Several transmission poles and over head lines within the station area would be relocated to a location a short distance away to avoid conflicts with proposed station facilities. The relocation of these transmission poles and overhead lines would slightly change the existing visual environment. This change would be, however, consistent with the current visual character, which already includes overhead lines near these locations, and therefore is not discussed further.

The view depicted in **Figure 4.17-2** (Viewpoint 1) is located on the VTA LRT Station platform looking northeast toward the UPRR corridor and the Milpitas Station. There are large industrial and storage buildings to the north, and residential apartments to the south (not within view in **Figure 4.17-2**). The Great Mall and newer commercial and residential buildings, also out of view, are located to the north and east. The Mt. Diablo Range is in the background. The primary viewers in this area are commuters using the LRT. The BART station, entry nodes, eight-level parking garage, and aerial walkway connecting the BART station and LRT platform would be visible from the LRT platform. The aerial walkway and concourse would be elevated approximately 20 feet.

During the day, the Milpitas Station and aerial walkway would be a dominant visual feature from this viewpoint due to the size and proximity of these facilities. As concluded in the FEIR and SEIR-1, the Milpitas Station and aerial walkway would partly block views of the Mt. Diablo Range; however, these facilities would be consistent with the density and scale of development in the surrounding areas, which include structures such as the Great Mall. Also, a BART station at this location would not be out of context with the existing visual environment in that it would be adjacent to major transportation facilities and visual features (e.g., the VTA LRT aerial trackway, LRT station, Montague Expressway, and Capitol Avenue). At nighttime, the lighting of the structure would combine with the lighting of the LRT station, but would not have a significant visual impact due to the existing urban and developed aesthetic context.

**Figure 4.17-3** (Viewpoint 2) is located at “The Crossing at Montague” apartment complex. The figure illustrates a view looking northwest towards an industrial and storage area. The foreground is dominated by existing landscaping, including shrubbery and trees. Low-rise industrial buildings and storage areas can be seen beyond the landscaping. The primary viewers in this area are residents of “The Crossing at Montague” apartment complex.

Existing View of Milpitas Station Location (view to the northeast from the VTA LRT station platform)

Visual Simulation of Milpitas Station (view to the northeast from the VTA LRT station platform)

Source: VTA, 2010.

Figure 4.17-2: Viewpoint 1, Milpitas Station

Existing View of Milpitas Station Location (view to the northwest from "The Crossings at Montague" apartment complex)

Visual Simulation of Milpitas Station (view to the northwest from "The Crossings at Montague" apartment complex)

Source: VTA, 2010.

Figure 4.17-3: Viewpoint 2, Milpitas Station

The station, aerial trackway, and eight-level parking garage would be visible from "The Crossing at Montague." However, the proposed station facilities are not immediately adjacent to scenic resources, would not block any designated scenic vistas, and they would replace a number of industrial buildings of inconsistent design. Therefore, the station would not have a significant impact on a scenic vista and would not significantly degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area or its surroundings.

The bulk and height of the proposed station buildings would be larger than those of the existing buildings; however, the buildings are not immediately adjacent to the viewers – the station buildings would be seen in the middle ground views from "The Crossing at Monatgue." Therefore, during the day, the Milpitas Station and parking garage would only be moderately dominant. The Milpitas Station and eight-level parking structure would create a more dense urban aesthetic environment. These structures would increase the intactness[2] from this viewpoint, as they would replace a series of industrial buildings of inconsistent design as compared to the BART station and eight-level parking structure, which would be of consistent design. Since this area is transitioning from an industrial area to a more urbanized, transit-oriented area, Phase 1 would not substantially impact the visual unity of the site or its surroundings. This distance of the buildings and their location would reduce any impacts related to daytime glare to a less-than-significant level.

At night, lighting from the parking structure would be noticeable from this viewpoint. Lights from trains and the parking structure could create new sources of light and glare for residences southeast of the Milpitas Station and parking structure that could significantly impact nighttime views in the area; however, lighting would be designed to focus on the BART facilities to minimize spillover into the surrounding areas. This lighting design would ensure that the station and parking structure would not be vivid at night and would not impact the intactness, unity, or quality of nighttime views.

There are no designated scenic highways near the Milpitas Station; therefore, no impacts related to state scenic highways would occur.

Elimination of the 100-foot, tubular steel radio tower as part of this design change would further reduce visual impacts identified in the SEIR-1 related to the radio tower, since the radio tower would no longer intrude into the skyline.

### 4.17.4.6 Design Change 20. Berryessa Station (STA 533+00)

Under Phase 1, the Berryessa Station would be constructed from just south of Berryessa Road to Mabury Road. The view shown in Figure 4.17-4 (Viewpoint 3) is from the end of Salamoni Court, near a single-family housing complex;

[2] Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and manmade landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements.


Existing View of Berryessa Station Location (view to the southwest from the end of Salamoni Court)

Visual Simulation of Berryessa Station (view to the southwest from the end of Salamoni Court)

Source: VTA, 2010.

Figure 4.17-4: Viewpoint 3, Berryessa Station

this residential area looks southwest toward a nearby industrial area consisting of warehouses and parking areas. The UPRR corridor and San Jose Flea Market lie beyond the industrial area and are out of view in the figure. Primary viewers in this area include local residents, industrial workers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

As part of the Berryessa Station, an eight-level parking structure would be built on 4.3 acres at the south end of the site, east of the aerial guideway near a residential neighborhood. **Figure 4.17-4** shows a simulated view of the parking structure at the Berryessa Station. Surface parking would be built to the south of the parking garage, and the station would be located out of the view to the north.

Without appropriate screening, views from the parking structure could be of nearby homes, thus impacting the privacy of residents. However, the upper levels of the parking structure would be built with adequate screening to prevent views into residential areas to the east. Furthermore, the Berryessa Station would include a minimum 8-foot-high community wall that would screen the station area from adjacent residential areas where necessary.

A tapered, tubular steel radio tower, approximately 100 feet in height, would also be visible from the surrounding areas. This tower would be constructed adjacent to the parking garage. Since the majority of the tower's height would be absorbed into the parking structure, the visual impact on adjacent development would be minimized.

The Traction Power Substation SBE would be located south of the station building within the BART alignment footprint under the aerial structure. Adding a traction power substation at this location would not have a significant impact on a scenic vista and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area or its surroundings, as it would be located beneath the aerial structure.

Overall, the Berryessa Station would have a less-than-significant impact related to visual quality and scenic vistas. There are no designated scenic highways near the Berryessa Station; therefore, no impacts related to state scenic highways would occur.

The alignment could create a new source of light and glare where the tracks are elevated from Berryessa Road to US 101. However, because the land uses are primarily industrial in this section, the elevated tracks would not impact the scenic quality of the area, and impacts related to light and glare would be less than significant.

## 4.17.5 CONCLUSION

With the additional mitigation measure to address tree replacement, the design changes made since certification of the SEIR-1 would not result in new significant impacts related to visual quality and aesthetics or increase the severity of an already identified impact.