

3.14 Visual Resources

The following text describes the existing visual character within the HCLE Corridor study area and how it is categorized for the impact evaluation in Section 4.14 of this document.

3.14.1 Existing Setting

Topography in the HCLE Corridor study area consists of a variety of landforms and topography, including gently sloping agricultural lands, rolling hills and valleys, steeper foothills and knolls, and urban developed areas within existing communities. There are several typical vantage points throughout the study area ranging from large areas that are visible from long distances to vantage points where there are views only immediately adjacent to the viewer, because of existing development.

Generally, long-range views exist throughout the entire HCLE Corridor study area, with the exception of views that are blocked by development or foothills. Foothills and valley views are visible from and across the study area in all directions, depending on the location of the vantage point within the study area.

Existing land uses within the study area include residential, commercial, and retail land uses within the urbanized areas. The rural areas consist of a few residential land uses with primarily vacant and unutilized land, as well as dry and irrigated farming.

Due to the limited number of structures and urbanized land uses within the rural areas of the HCLE Corridor study area, visual intrusions and impacts, including light and glare, are minimal. The developed areas have substantially more visual intrusions, including artificial lighting associated with highways and existing commercial and retail businesses.

3.14.1.1 Visual Distance Zones

The following distance zones characterize the dominant views from each vantage point and describe them in terms that can be analyzed and compared. As discussed below, sensitivity of views modified from the natural environment is defined in order to establish criteria for the analysis of potential visual impacts resulting from the implementation of a new transportation facility within the HCLE Corridor study area.

Foreground Views. These views include elements that can be seen at a close distance and that dominate the entire view. Impacted views at this distance are generally considered to be potentially adverse when viewed by a sensitive viewer group.

Middle Ground Views. These views include elements that can be seen at a middle distance and that partially dominate the view. Impacted views at this distance are generally considered to be potentially adverse when viewed by a sensitive viewer group.