

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

STATE ROUTE 85 EXPRESS LANES PROJECT, SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

EA 4A7900; EFIS 0400001163

US 101 PM 23.1–28.6

SR 85 PM 0.0–24.1

US 101 PM 47.9–52.0

Prepared for

State of California
Department of Transportation
District 4
111 Grand Avenue
Oakland, CA 94612

and

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
3331 North First Street
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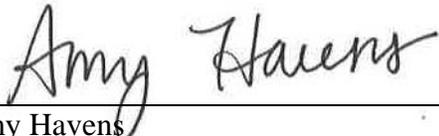
Prepared for
California Department of Transportation
and
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
by



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April 24, 2013

Date



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The following abbreviated Visual Impact Assessment was prepared to evaluate the effects of the State Route 85 (SR 85) Express Lanes Project in accordance with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Visual Impact Assessment Guide (Caltrans 2008).

Caltrans, in cooperation with the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), proposes to convert the existing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on SR 85 to High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes (hereafter known as express lanes). The express lanes would allow HOVs to continue to use the lanes without cost and eligible single-occupant vehicles (SOVs) to pay a toll. The express lanes would be implemented on northbound and southbound SR 85 from US 101 in southern San Jose to US 101 in Mountain View in Santa Clara County (see Figures 1 and 2). The express lanes would continue for 3.3 miles of a 5.5-mile segment on US 101 in southern San Jose. Express lane advance notification signage would also be added in a 4.1-mile segment of US 101 in Mountain View, for a total project length of 33.7 miles.

The proposed express lane facility would have one lane between US 101 in southern San Jose and SR 87, two lanes between SR 87 and I-280, and one lane between I-280 and US 101 in Mountain View. In the section between SR 87 and I-280, where the median width is approximately 46 feet, pavement widening would be conducted in the median to accommodate the second express lane. The median would be paved, and the existing three-beam barrier would be replaced with a Type 60 concrete barrier.

SR 85 bridge decks would be widened at Almaden Expressway (northbound side only), Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and Saratoga Avenue, as well as at the San Tomas Aquino Creek and Saratoga Creek crossings. The existing gaps between the northbound and southbound bridges at these locations would be closed except at Almaden Expressway, where the northbound bridge would be widened on the inside (toward the median).

The project would also install new signage (including dynamic message signs [DMS]), tolling equipment, and striping. The overhead signs and tolling devices would be installed in the median on cantilever structures supported on piles. Trenching would be conducted along the outside edge of pavement for installation of conduits. Some Traffic Operations Systems (TOS) equipment such as traffic monitoring stations, Closed Circuit Televisions, cabinets, and controllers would be installed along the outside edge of pavement within the existing right-of-way. Maintenance pullouts would be installed in shoulder areas to allow access to the TOS equipment. The specific locations of these features would be developed during final project design.

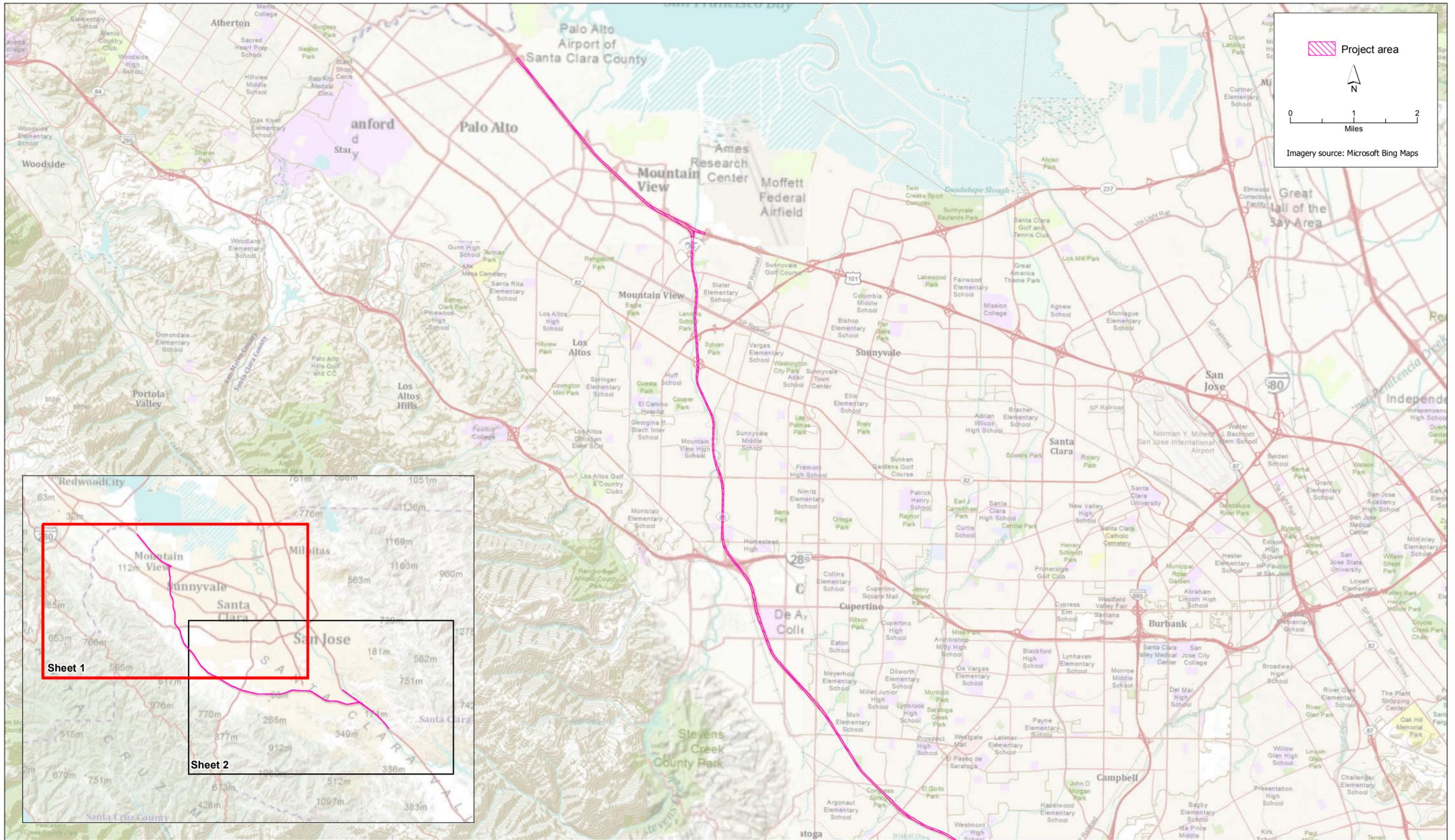
An auxiliary lane would be added to a 1.1-mile segment of northbound SR 85 between the existing South De Anza Boulevard northbound on-ramp and Stevens Creek Boulevard northbound off-ramp. The existing pavement would be widened by up to 14 feet to the outside (northeast) and sections of the existing abutments at the South Stelling Road and McClellan Road overcrossings adjacent to northbound SR 85 would be removed and replaced by new retaining walls.

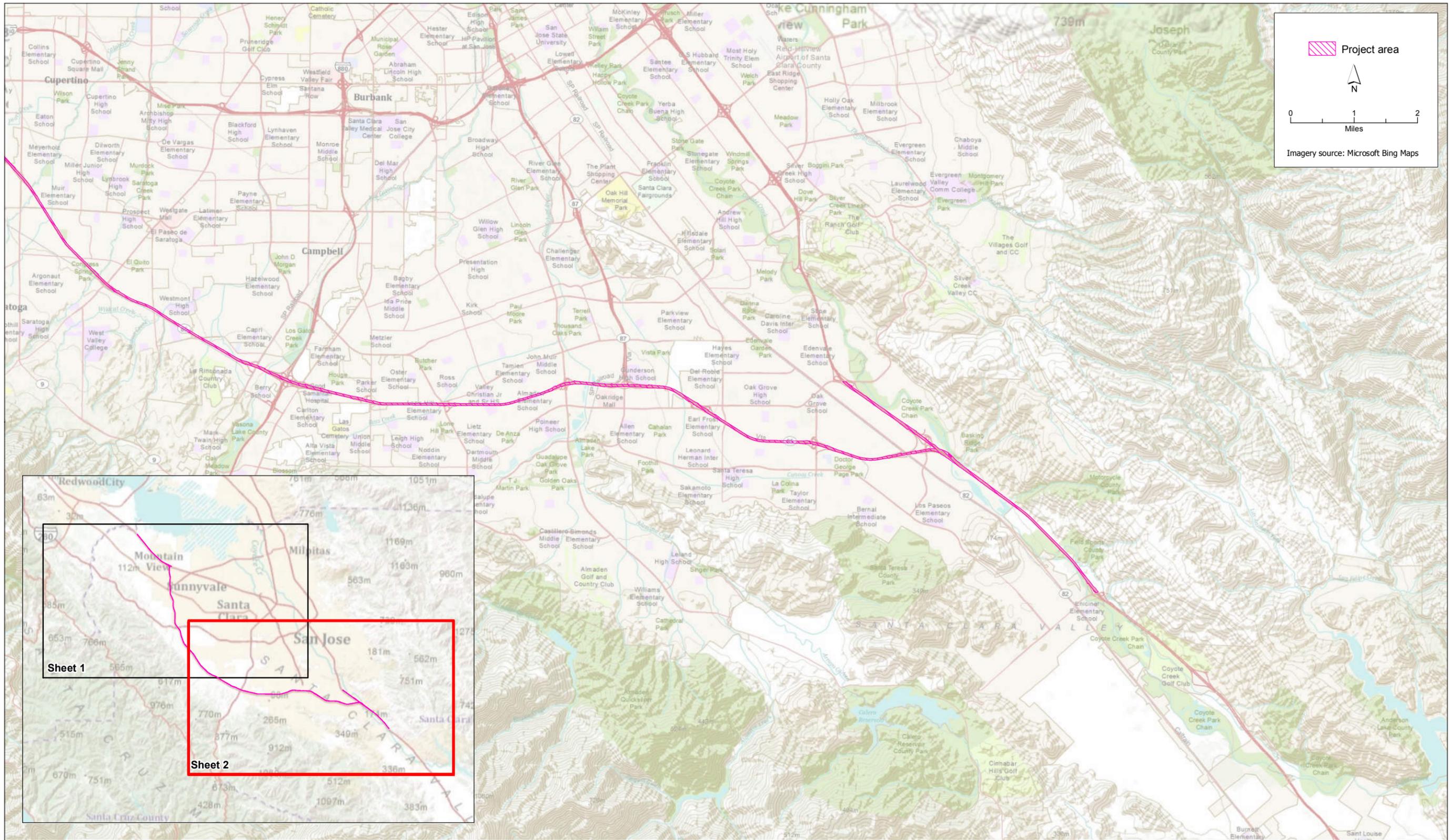
Work on the US 101 segments will mainly consist of striping and signing and will not include widening or any changes in system or HOV lane access. All work would be done in the existing right-of-way on both sides of the road and in the median. No work would be done in waterways in or adjacent to the project area. The project does not require any right-of-way acquisition.



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Figure 1
Project Location and Regional Setting





2.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

2.1.1 Scenic Resources in the Project Area

According to the Caltrans California Scenic Highway Mapping System, SR 85 in the project corridor is not designated or eligible for designation as a state scenic highway (Caltrans 2007). SR 85 is identified as a scenic urban corridor in the City of San Jose General Plan (San Jose 2011), but it is not identified as a scenic highway or scenic corridor in any of the other general plans that apply to the project area (Santa Clara County, Campbell, Saratoga, Los Altos, Sunnyvale, Mountain View and Los Gatos).

US 101 in the project corridor is also not designated or eligible for designation as a state scenic highway (Caltrans 2007). However, the Santa Clara County General Plan identifies the South Valley Freeway (US 101 from the SR 85/US 101 interchange to Gilroy) as a County Scenic Highway and proposes it to be added to the *California Master Plan of Scenic Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation* (Santa Clara 1994). In addition, the City of San Jose General Plan designates the segment of US 101 between Metcalf Road and Bailey Avenue in the project limits as a Rural Scenic Corridor. The City of San Jose General Plan states that “development along designated Rural Scenic Corridors [should preserve] significant views of the Valley and mountains, especially in, or adjacent to, Coyote Valley, the Diablo Range, the Silver Creek Hills, the Santa Teresa Ridge and the Santa Cruz Mountains” (San Jose 2011, Policy CD-9.3).

The portion of US 101 between just north of San Antonio Road and south of the Oregon Expressway is bordered on the east by Palo Alto Baylands Park and marsh areas of San Francisco Bay. The Bay Conservation and Development Commission has established design guidelines for roads along the Bay shoreline (including marshlands).

Caltrans has classified most of the project corridor as Landscaped Freeway, a designation that is used to control the placement of outdoor advertising displays in landscaped areas adjacent to freeways (California Business and Professions Code Section 5440; Caltrans 2011). The eight portions on SR 85 classified as Landscaped Freeway total approximately 22.35 miles, and the five portions on US 101 total approximately 5.08 miles, for a grand total of 27.43 miles of the 33.7-mile project limits.

No scenic resources as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) exist along the project corridor. According to the City of San Jose General Plan, “The City of San José has many scenic resources which include the broad sweep of the Santa Clara Valley, the hills and mountains which frame the Valley floor, the baylands and the urban skyline itself, particularly high-rise development” (San Jose 2008).

2.1.2 Scenic Quality of SR 85

Most of the SR 85 corridor is bordered by dense suburban and urban development. Development along the freeway includes commercial and industrial buildings, residential communities, shopping centers, parking lots, hospitals, and schools. Freeway facilities including sound walls and embankments, local street and railroad overcrossings, major interchange structures, pedestrian overcrossings, and signage gantries and cantilever structures dominate the viewshed along the corridor. Along with typical freeway signage, SR 85 has four large changeable

SECTION TWO

Existing Conditions and Project-Related Changes

message signs (CMS) used to display commute time and emergency alert information. Infrastructure along the corridor includes overhead utility lines (both parallel and perpendicular to the freeway), high-voltage transmission towers, telephone poles, and VTA light rail tracks and overhead cables.

Views of the development along SR 85 are largely shielded by sound walls, high berms or embankments, trees, or a combination. Sound walls are present along approximately 20 miles of the 24.1-mile SR 85 corridor. Between the Cottle Road interchange in San Jose and the northern terminus of SR 85, the longest freeway segment without sound walls is approximately 0.25 mile. South of the Cottle Road interchange, there are two longer segments without sound walls – 1 mile on the northbound side and 0.75 mile on the southbound side.

The elevation of SR 85 in relation to surrounding development varies from at-grade (particularly north of I-280 and south of SR 87; Exhibit A), to elevated by up to approximately 25 feet (where it crosses major interchanges such as Almaden Expressway; Exhibit B), to depressed by as much as approximately 25 feet (in many segments between I-280 and SR 87; Exhibit C). Through Los Gatos and Saratoga, SR 85 is entirely depressed below the grade of surrounding development.



Exhibit A. At-grade section of SR 85, viewed from northbound SR 85 east of Blossom Hill Road interchange in San Jose. VTA light rail tracks and overhead lines are in the median, and sound walls border the freeway



Exhibit B. Elevated section of SR 85, northbound direction, viewed from just west of Almaden Expressway interchange in San Jose



Exhibit C. Depressed section of SR 85, viewed from northbound SR 85 west of Camden Avenue in San Jose

Depending on the location, the SR 85 median contains a metal barrier with sparse ruderal disturbed vegetation, pavement with a concrete median barrier, or VTA light rail tracks and related facilities. The VTA tracks, overhead cables, and three light rail stations (Cottle, Snell, and Blossom Hill stations) occupy approximately 3 miles of median in the southern segment of the project corridor. Shoulder vegetation primarily consists of ruderal California annual grasses and landscaping (nonnative shrubs and horticultural trees).

The SR 85 corridor has moderate visual quality. Motorists on SR 85 generally observe sound walls (which in some locations are covered in ivy or other vegetation), mature trees and other landscaping, berms and embankments, overhead utilities, and multistory development. Along some portions of the corridor, northbound motorists have distant views to the west and northwest of the west valley hills and the Santa Cruz Mountains, and southbound motorists have distant views of the foothills of the Mount Hamilton Range (a portion of the Diablo Range) to the southeast. In the southernmost segment of the corridor, from the SR 85/US 101 interchange to the Cottle Road interchange, undeveloped lots and businesses with large parking lots border the freeway and relatively clear views are available of the Santa Teresa foothills to the west.

2.1.3 Scenic Quality of US 101

US 101 between the SR 85/US 101 interchange in San Jose and the southern project limit at Bailey Avenue is in an area of grasslands and rolling hills, with residential development to the east of US 101 for the first mile south of the interchange. The 50-acre PG&E Metcalf Substation immediately lies immediately to the west of US 101 approximately midway between the SR 85/US 101 interchange and the southern project limit. The substation contains several tall high-voltage transmission towers bearing lines that connect with similar towers west of the freeway and east of the substation. These facilities and the overhead lines dominate the viewshed for approximately 1.5 miles of this 3.3-mile segment of US 101 (Exhibit D).

No sound walls are present along US 101 in San Jose. The median is mostly paved with a concrete median barrier; from just north of Metcalf Road to the southern project limit, the median contains ruderal disturbed vegetation. Northbound US 101 has two overhead sign gantries (one is shown in Exhibit E) that span the northbound lanes and are prominent to viewers

on and around those segments. Motorists on this portion of the corridor observe high-voltage transmission towers and overhead lines, grasslands and trees, and residential development to the east of US 101. In some locations, the Coyote Parkway lakes are visible to the west, along with distant views of the Santa Teresa Hills. The portion of US 101 in the southern project corridor has moderate visual quality.



Exhibit D.
Northbound US 101 north of Bailey Avenue in southern San Jose. The PG&E Metcalf Substation is just west (left) of the southbound lanes



Exhibit E.
Northbound US 101 south of SR 85 interchange in southern San Jose, with gantry in the foreground and residential development to the east (center and right side of photo)

The majority of US 101 from the SR 85/US 101 interchange in Mountain View to the northern project limit at Embarcadero Road in Palo Alto is bordered by commercial and industrial facilities and dense residential development. Sound walls, chain link fences, and low concrete walls are present along very short segments of US 101; for the most part, tall trees and other vegetation border the roadway and block surrounding views (Exhibit F). The median is paved and has either a concrete or metal median barrier, depending on the location. Motorists primarily observe tall vegetation and development along the corridor. A few portions of the corridor have distant views to the southwest of the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. US 101 between just north of San Antonio Road and south of the Oregon Expressway is bordered on the east by Palo Alto Baylands Park and marsh areas of San Francisco Bay (Exhibit G); however, views of this area are mostly blocked by tall vegetation east of the freeway. The US 101 corridor from the SR 85/US 101 interchange in Mountain View to Embarcadero Road in Palo Alto has low to moderate visual quality.



Exhibit F.
Northbound US 101
south of
Embarcadero Road
in Palo Alto



Exhibit G.
Northbound US 101
north of San Antonio
Road; Palo Alto
Baylands Park to the
east (right side of
photo)

2.2 PROJECT-RELATED CHANGES

The project would change the appearance of SR 85 and US 101 through lane restriping and pavement widening, SR 85 bridge widening, and installation of project signage and tolling equipment. No new sound walls or changes to existing sound walls are currently proposed. These project activities are described further below.

2.2.1 Lane Restriping and Pavement Widening

The existing HOV lanes would be converted to express lanes on SR 85, on the US 101/SR 85 HOV-only direct connector in San Jose, and on the segment of US 101 from south of the SR 85 interchange in San Jose to Metcalf Road. As noted in Section 1, the express lane facility would have one lane between US 101 in San Jose and SR 87, two lanes between SR 87 and I-280, and one lane between I-280 and US 101 in Mountain View. The express lanes would be separated from the general purpose lanes by a striped 2-foot-wide buffer. The existing HOV-only direct connector would become an express lane direct connector.

In the segments of SR 85 between US 101 in San Jose and SR 87 and between I-280 and US 101 in Mountain View, the 2-foot-wide buffer would be created by reducing the width of the express lane and the inside mixed-flow lane from 12 feet to 11 feet. In the segment of SR 85 between SR 87 and I-280, where the median width is approximately 46 feet, pavement widening would be conducted in the median to accommodate the second express lane. The median would be paved and the existing three-beam barrier would be replaced with a Type 60 concrete barrier. Pavement

widening would permanently remove less than 0.2 acre of ruderal California annual grassland in the median of northbound SR 85 just west of Almaden Expressway (URS 2013).

An auxiliary lane would be added to a 1.1-mile segment of northbound SR 85 between the existing South De Anza Boulevard northbound on-ramp and Stevens Creek Boulevard northbound off-ramp. The existing pavement would be widened by up to 14 feet to the outside (northeast). To accommodate the auxiliary lane, sections of the existing abutments at the South Stelling Road and McClellan Road overcrossings adjacent to northbound SR 85 would be removed and replaced by new retaining walls to support the embankments behind them.

The 1.1-mile segment of northbound SR 85 where the auxiliary lane is proposed is up to 25 feet lower in elevation than surrounding development. In the majority of this segment, retaining walls extend along the toe of the slope by approximately 14 feet beyond the northbound shoulder, and sound walls exist at the top of the slope along the edge of the right-of-way. Widening for the proposed auxiliary lane would occur in the area between the northbound shoulder and the retaining walls or toe of the slope. The new retaining walls at the South Stelling Road and McClellan Road overcrossings would replace existing slope areas adjacent to northbound SR 85. The existing retaining walls would not be affected.

Ornamental landscaping between the retaining walls and sound walls in this segment would not be affected by the auxiliary lane addition. In some places, landscaping is sparse or absent. Approximately 0.3 acre of landscaped shrubs and trees between the retaining walls or toe of the slope and the northbound shoulder between South De Anza Boulevard and Stevens Creek Boulevard would be removed to accommodate the auxiliary lane.

When completed, the restriping, pavement widening, construction of retaining walls, and median changes would be visually compatible with the existing freeway corridor. These activities would represent a low level of change to the existing environment.

2.2.2 SR 85 Bridge Widening

The project would close the existing spaces between the separate northbound and southbound SR 85 bridges over Almaden Expressway (northbound side only), Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and Saratoga Avenue, as well as at the San Tomas Aquino Creek and Saratoga Creek crossings. The existing spaces would be closed by widening the bridges toward the median, also known as inside widening.

At each bridge location, the bridge decks would likely be extended in width from the existing structures using precast, prestressed concrete beams and supported by new abutments on either end to free-span the roads or creeks underneath. Table 1 lists the existing bridge dimensions and the proposed width of inside widening at each location.

Table 1
Proposed SR 85 Bridge Widening Locations and Dimensions

Bridge Location	Existing Bridge Dimensions (feet; approximate)	Proposed Inside Widening (feet; approximate)
Almaden Expressway (Northbound only)	237 x 83 (width varies) (NB)	12
Camden Avenue	208 x 60 (NB) 204 x 90–113 (varies) (SB)	45
Oka Road	97 x 62 (average) (NB) 102 x 60 (average) (SB)	33
Pollard Road	183 x 60 (NB) 196 x 60 (SB)	23
Saratoga Avenue	192 x 60 (NB) 190 x 60 (SB)	23
San Tomas Aquino Creek	105 x 60 (both NB and SB)	23
Saratoga Creek	100 x 56 (both NB and SB)	23

NB = Northbound

SB = Southbound

As shown in Table 1, the proposed inside widening ranges from 12 to 45 feet and is approximately 23 feet in most locations. No new bridge supports are proposed to be added in the roadway medians or in the creeks underneath the bridges. No dewatering or water diversion is proposed at the creek crossings; the bridge widening work would be conducted from the banks or the existing freeway median areas.

The bridges that cross Almaden Expressway, Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and Saratoga Avenue are in areas where existing transportation facilities (roadways, bridges, and embankments) dominate the immediate viewshed. At San Tomas Aquino and Saratoga creeks, most views of the proposed inside widening would be obstructed from surrounding areas by the bridges themselves, dense trees and other riparian vegetation, or existing sound walls (see Exhibits H and I). A small number of trees may need to be removed from the creek banks between the northbound and southbound bridges to allow for abutment work. The proposed bridge work and potential tree removal would represent a low level of change to the visual setting.



Exhibit H. San Tomas Aquino Creek Bridge downstream of SR 85 bridges (looking north/upstream)



Exhibit I. SR 85 bridges over Saratoga Creek (from northbound SR 85 on-ramp west of Saratoga Avenue)

2.2.3 Project Signage and Tolling Equipment

Project signage would introduce a low to moderate level of change to the existing environment. In the southbound direction of the project corridor, express lane signage would begin on SR 85 just north of the Moffett Boulevard interchange and end on US 101 just north of Metcalf Road in southern San Jose. In the northbound direction, express lane signage would begin on US 101 just north of the Bailey Avenue interchange in southern San Jose and end on SR 85 just south of Moffett Boulevard. No signs are currently proposed on US 101 north of the SR 85 interchanges in southern San Jose or on US 101 in Mountain View and Palo Alto.

In general, each set of access zones for the express lanes would have the following signs:

- “Express lane entrance 1 mile,” with a separate sign panel mounted on the same structure for local exits served by the upcoming access zone.
- Express lane entrance toll, with the current toll rate shown in a DMS panel for single-occupant vehicle use of the express lanes (see Exhibit J, below).
- “Express lane entrance” (see Exhibit K, below), with a separate sign panel mounted on the same structure for local exits served by the upcoming access zone (see Exhibit L, below).
- FasTrak or HOV +2 only (see Exhibit L, below).

The overhead signs would be mounted on cantilever structures in the median, and the tops of the signs would be approximately 26 feet in height. Appendix A contains figures illustrating the conceptual sign locations and appearance of the signs.



Exhibit J. Representative view of an entrance/toll sign with DMS (from I-680 southbound express lanes in Fremont)



Exhibit K. Representative view of an express lane entrance sign (from I-680 southbound express lanes in Fremont)

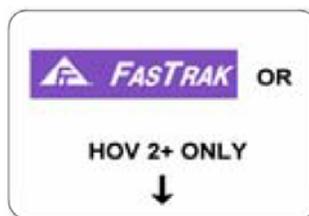


Exhibit L. Sample express lane exit sign, left, and FasTrak or HOV +2 only, right

Smaller signs would also be mounted on the median barrier. The signs would be the same as or similar to existing HOV lane signage but in different locations. Some existing HOV lane signage will be removed.

The project would also construct cantilever structures mounted with toll collection equipment (see Exhibit M, below). The toll structures would also be approximately 26 feet in height. FasTrak electronic tolling system equipment mounted on the cantilever arms would communicate with the FasTrak transponders in single-occupant vehicles in the express lanes to record and charge for trips. The tolling structures would have a relatively slender profile and represent a low level of change to the existing environment.



**Exhibit M.
Representative view
of a toll structure
(from I-680
southbound express
lanes in Fremont)**

Approximately 15 sets of express lane signs and 15 tolling structures are anticipated to be installed over the 33.7-mile project corridor. The overhead signs and tolling structures would be installed within the medians of SR 85 and US 101. In some locations, the express lane signs would replace existing signs or be added to existing overhead gantries. The exact number and locations of these features will be determined during the project design phase in coordination with the toll system design.

SR 85 and the segment of US 101 south of the SR 85/US 101 interchange in San Jose already contain overhead signs, including CMS and gantry structures with multiple signs, as well as other infrastructure such as VTA light rail facilities and overhead utility lines. The overall level of change to the existing environment in these segments is considered low.

No project signage or tolling structures are proposed in the segment of US 101 north of the SR 85/US 101 interchange in Mountain View. Therefore, these project features would not change the existing visual environment in that segment.

As noted in Section 1, some TOS equipment such as traffic monitoring stations, Closed Circuit Televisions, cabinets, and controllers would be installed along the outside edge of pavement within the existing right-of-way. The specific locations of these features would be developed during final project design. The equipment would be small in scale and consistent with a freeway facility and the existing visual character of the project corridor.

3.1 PROJECT IMPACTS

This section describes the potential effects of project-related changes on nearby viewers and the visual environment.

3.1.1 Scenic Vistas, Scenic Resources, and Visual Quality

3.1.1.1 Lane Restriping and Pavement Widening

Lane restriping, pavement widening, retaining wall construction, and median barrier replacement would be primarily noticeable to motorists during the construction period only. These changes would not affect viewers outside of the freeway corridor. The removal of less than 0.2 acre of ruderal California annual grassland in the median of northbound SR 85 just west of Almaden Expressway and approximately 0.3 acre of landscaped vegetation on the northbound side of SR 85 between South De Anza Boulevard and Stevens Creek Boulevard would not result in an adverse visual impact. The entire project corridor within the State right-of-way contains approximately 148 acres of naturally occurring vegetation (including 82 acres of ruderal California annual grassland) and 375 acres of landscaped vegetation (URS 2013), and the area along the northbound side of SR 85 between South De Anza Boulevard and Stevens Creek Boulevard contains approximately 3 acres of landscaped vegetation. Overall, removal of these sections of vegetation is not expected to affect views for motorists on SR 85 or viewers outside of the freeway corridor. These project activities would not affect scenic vistas, scenic resources, or visual quality in or around the project corridor.

In accordance with Caltrans policy, landscaping and irrigation that is damaged or removed during project construction would be replaced in kind. In the 1.1-mile auxiliary lane segment of northbound SR 85, replacement landscaping and irrigation would be considered between the existing retaining walls and sound walls, in areas where landscaping is now either sparse or absent. Detailed landscape and irrigation replacement plans would be developed during final project design.

3.1.1.2 SR 85 Bridge Widening

The project would close the existing gaps between the northbound and southbound bridges on SR 85 at Almaden Expressway (northbound side only), Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and Saratoga Avenue, as well as at the San Tomas Aquino Creek and Saratoga Creek crossings. The proposed bridge work would be visible to motorists on SR 85 and, to a lesser extent, to nearby viewers outside of the freeway corridor.

Widening the SR 85 bridges would not substantially change the visual quality in those areas for motorists on SR 85, viewers on the streets beneath the bridges, or viewers in areas surrounding the creek channels. Foreground views of the bridge areas from SR 85 would be fleeting at freeway speeds. The bridges would be widened toward the median rather than toward the outer edges of the freeway, thereby reducing potential visual impacts for long-range views on SR 85 and viewers outside of the SR 85 corridor. Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and Saratoga Avenue under the bridge crossings are depressed below the grade of the surrounding development; therefore, the bridge work would not be highly visible to nearby viewers except for those approaching or passing under the bridge crossings, either during or after construction. The bridge crossings at Almaden Expressway, Camden Avenue, Oka Road, Pollard Road, and

Saratoga Avenue are in areas that are already dominated by views of transportation facilities. The proposed bridge widening would not degrade views for people approaching or passing under the bridges.

There is no public access to San Tomas Aquino Creek at the SR 85 crossing, and views of the bridge widening toward the median would be largely obstructed from surrounding residential development by the existing northbound and southbound bridge decks and side walls. Although a public recreation trail (Joe's Trail at Saratoga De Anza) crosses over Saratoga Creek approximately 200 feet southwest of SR 85, trees and other vegetation would block most views of the bridge work. The proposed bridge widening would not degrade views near the bridges over creek crossings.

By closing the existing gaps between northbound and southbound SR 85 bridges, the project would decrease natural light on short segments of the local streets and sidewalks directly under SR 85. Except for Oka Road, the areas surrounding the bridge widening locations are relatively free of tall buildings and other overhead structures that cast substantial shadows or obstruct natural light. A total of six overhead structures (the northbound and southbound SR 85 bridges and four SR 17/SR 85 connector ramps) cross Oka Road within approximately 0.12 mile. The project would contribute to the loss of natural light from overhead structures in this area. However, this segment of Oka Road does not have features such as benches or parks that encourage people to linger and where natural light is beneficial. Overall, the visual change that would result from closing the bridge gaps would be minor and consistent with similar freeway crossings in the local and regional area. The loss of small areas of natural light from bridge widening would not affect viewers on or above the grade of SR 85 and would not substantially degrade views for those on the local streets below the bridge crossings.

To allow for construction of abutments and new bridge decking, small amounts of landscaped and ruderal vegetation may need to be removed from embankments between existing northbound and southbound bridge abutments, and some trees may need to be removed from the creek areas. The loss of small amounts of vegetation in these areas would not substantially affect the visual quality of these areas. In accordance with Caltrans policy, landscaping and irrigation that is damaged or removed during project construction will be replaced in kind and in the same general location.

3.1.1.3 Project Signage and Tolling Equipment

The proposed roadside TOS equipment and median barrier-mounted signs would be small in scale and consistent with the corridor's existing visual character. These project elements are expected to have little, if any, effect on visual quality.

As noted in Section 2.2, SR 85 and the segment of US 101 south of the SR 85/US 101 interchange in San Jose already contain overhead signs, including CMS and gantry structures with multiple signs. The proposed overhead signs and tolling structures would be consistent with the visual context of the existing freeway setting and with existing signage in the corridor and in Santa Clara County. These project features would be visible in the foreground of motorists' distant views of Santa Teresa Hills to the west, the Mount Hamilton Range to the southeast, and the west valley hillsides (foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains) to the west and northwest, but views would be short in duration for motorists moving at freeway speeds.

The majority of the project signs and tolling structures (an estimated 9 of 15 sets; Appendix A) would be on SR 85 between I-280 and SR 87, where large sections of roadway are as much as 25 feet lower in elevation than surrounding development and bordered by berms or embankments topped by sound walls. In many such sections (such as between east of Camden Avenue and west of Union Avenue, and west of SR 17), the height differential would fully or partially block views of the signs and tolling structures to observers outside of the freeway corridor. In other depressed sections (such as east of the SR 17 interchange), the upper stories of homes and other development along the freeway could have views of the tops of signs and tolling structures. Partial views of these project features would not be highly conspicuous or intrusive, and would not substantially change the visual quality of the setting.

The signs and tolling structures would also be visible to viewers at various land uses adjacent to both sides of SR 85 and US 101 in locations where the freeway corridor is not shielded by sound walls, trees, or development. The signage and tolling structures would be visually compatible with this highly trafficked and developed corridor. The scale of the signs would be relatively small in the context of the existing viewshed and would not block long-range views of the hills and ridgelines to the west, northwest, and southeast.

SR 85 is identified as a scenic urban corridor in the City of San Jose General Plan (San Jose 2011). The General Plan does not set forth specific goals or policies for scenic urban corridors, although Policy CD-10.7 states that the city will work with Caltrans and VTA to ensure that freeways “are maintained and enhanced to include a high standard of design, cleanliness, and landscaping to create a consistent and attractive visual quality.” The project signage and tolling equipment would not conflict with Policy CD-10.7 or other City of San Jose General Plan goals for SR 85.

The segment of US 101 south of the SR 85/US 101 interchange in southern San Jose has been designated as a County Scenic Highway (southward to Gilroy; County of Santa Clara 1994) and a City of San Jose Rural Scenic Corridor (from Metcalf Road to Bailey Avenue; City of San Jose 2011). As noted in Section 2.1.3, the viewshed of approximately 1.5 mile of this 3.3-mile segment is dominated by high-voltage transmission towers and lines on both sides of the freeway (Exhibit D), and particularly by the PG&E Metcalf Substation immediately west of US 101. Northbound US 101 in that segment contains prominent roadway signage, including two sign gantries that span the northbound lanes, one of which is shown in Exhibit E. Southbound US 101 contains an exit sign for the existing double HOV lane connector from SR 85, which would be replaced with an exit sign for the express lane facility. The modification of existing signage or addition of a small number signs in this area would not substantially affect the visual quality of this segment. The project signage and tolling equipment would not conflict with Santa Clara County General Plan or City of San Jose General Plan scenic preservation goals for this segment of US 101.

No project signage or tolling structures are proposed in the segment of US 101 north of the SR 85/US 101 interchanges in southern San Jose or in Mountain View. Therefore, these features would not affect the visual quality of US 101 in those areas or conflict with Bay Conservation and Development Commission visual guidelines for roads along the Bay shoreline.

The project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway, or substantially degrade the existing visual quality of the project corridor.

3.1.2 Light and Glare

Lighting associated with the overhead signage is not expected to result in light intrusion or glare to motorists on SR 85 or US 101 or to residents along the freeway. The DMS components of the signage will have sensors that automatically adjust the brightness of the toll cost numbers to ambient light conditions, so that the light-emitting diode (LED) components are no brighter than needed for motorist visibility at any time.

Lighting for non-DMS signage would be activated by photocell sensors and would have a fixed level of brightness. Signs listing upcoming exits and distances, as well as other roadway signs that do not direct motorist actions, are not required to be illuminated unless the signs are illegible without fixed lighting (Caltrans 1999). Toll structures would not be illuminated.

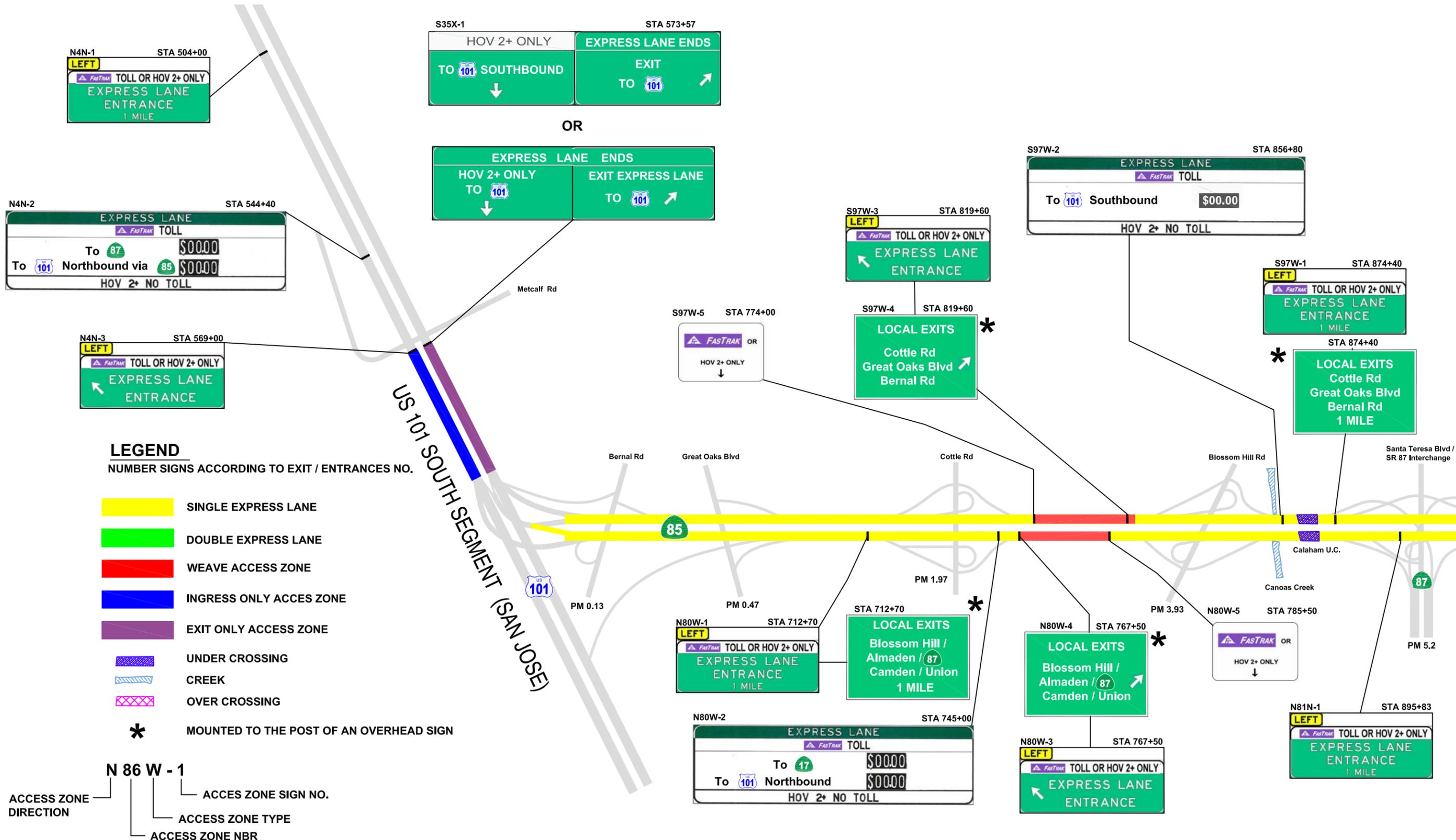
There is residential development adjacent to SR 85 and US 101 along many portions of the project corridor. As stated previously, the majority of SR 85 (approximately 20 miles of the 24.1-mile corridor) has sound walls, and large sections of SR 85 are depressed below surrounding development. Elsewhere, trees provide visual shielding. Daytime or nighttime glare or light intrusion is not anticipated outside of the freeway corridor. The signage would be illuminated as needed for motorist visibility and safety and would not result in inappropriate intensities of light and glare.

3.2 AVOIDANCE, MINIMIZATION, AND/OR MITIGATION

As the project is not expected to result in visual impacts, no avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are proposed.

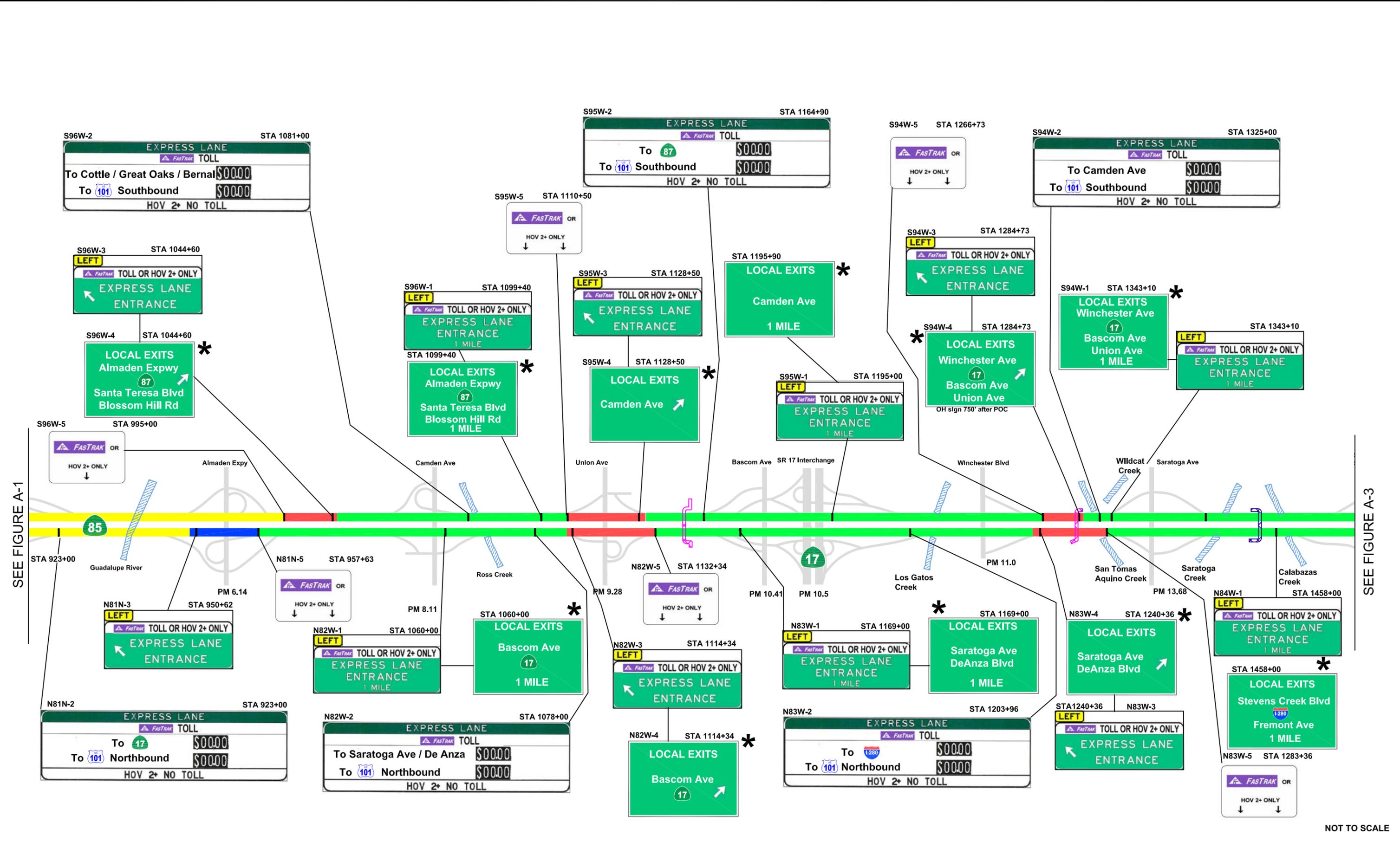
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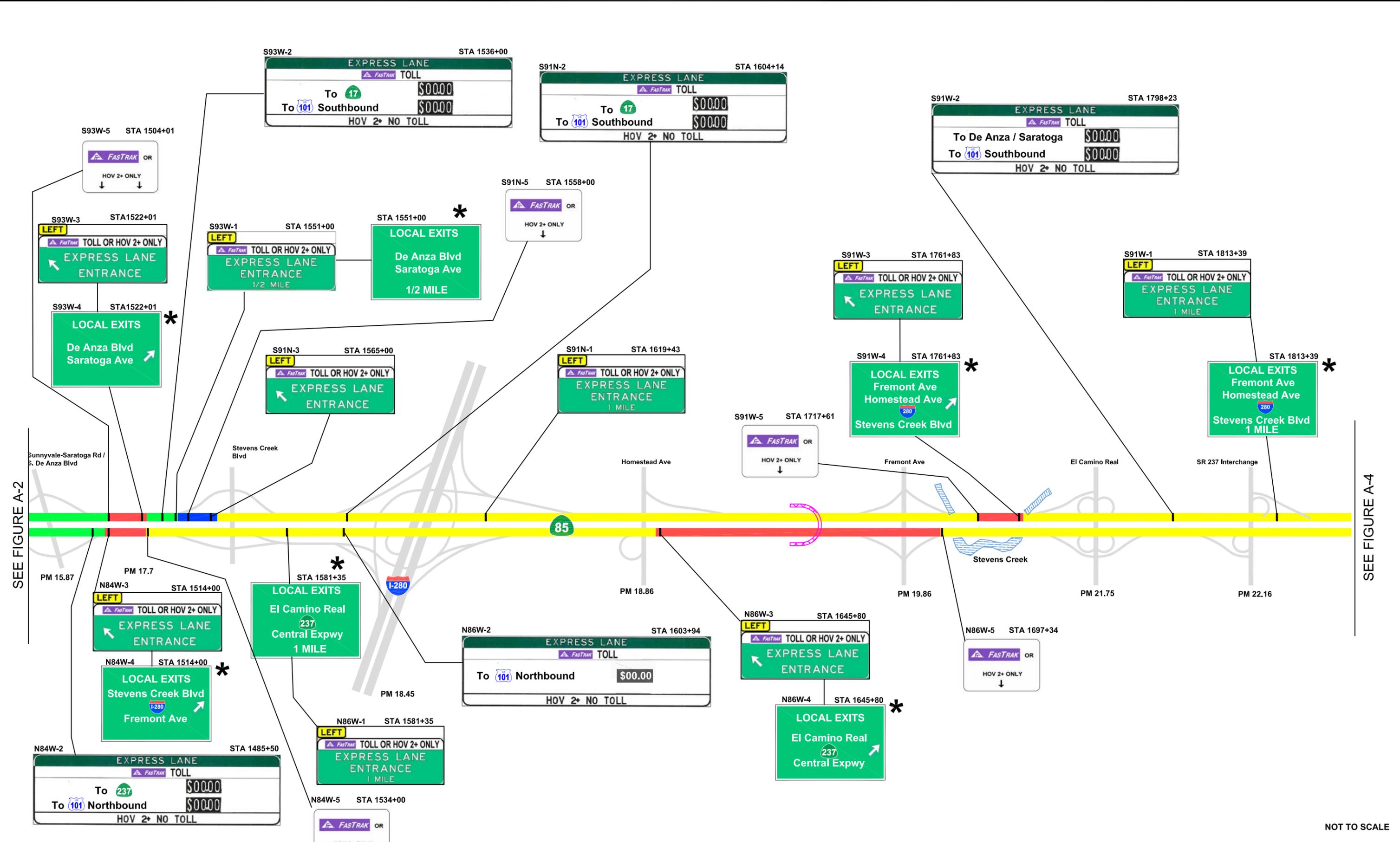
Appendix A
Conceptual Sign Locations



SEE FIGURE A-2

NOT TO SCALE

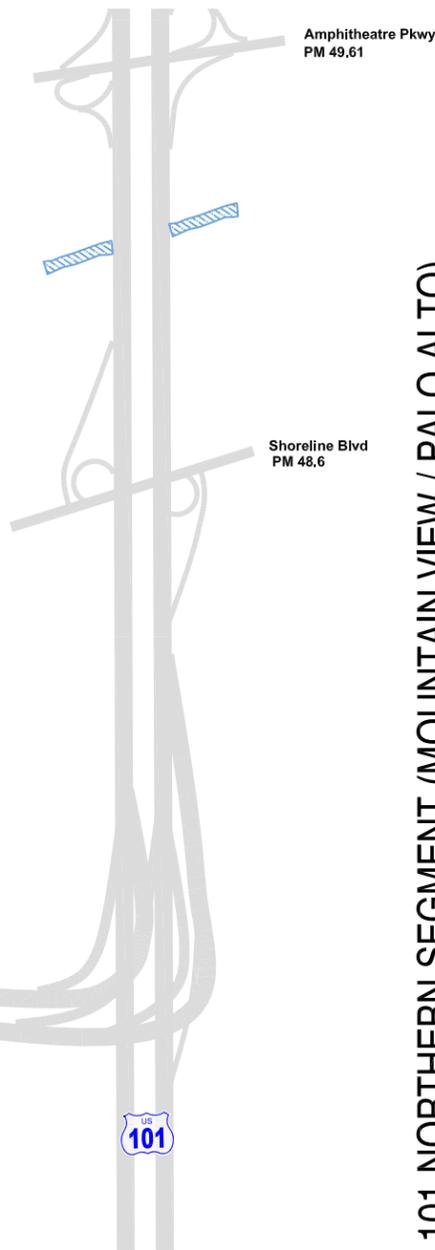




NOT TO SCALE



OR



SEE FIGURE A-3

NOT TO SCALE