



Visual Impact Assessment and Discipline Report

SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment

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Project Information

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AVE	Area of Visual Effect
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
MP	Milepost
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
SEPA	Washington State Environmental Policy Act
SR	State Route
WSDOT	Washington State Department of Transportation

Glossary of Terms

Area of Visual Effect (AVE) – The area in which views of the project would be visible as influenced by the presence or absence of intervening topography, vegetation, and structures.

Key View – A location from which a viewer (traveler or neighbor) can see either iconic or representative landscapes of the project corridor, with or without the highway. Usually there is at least one key view for each landscape unit.

Landscape Unit – An area of distinct landscape character within the AVE that forms a spatially enclosed unit at ground level, differentiated from other areas by its slope and its pattern of land cover. A unique segment of the landscape. Typically, the spatial unit used for assessing visual impacts.

Viewers – Neighbors who can see the proposed project and travelers who would use it.

- **Neighbors:** Viewers who occupy or will occupy land adjacent or visible to the proposed project.
- **Travelers:** Viewers who use the existing or would use the proposed transportation project, including motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Viewer Sensitivity – The viewer’s variable receptivity to the elements within the environment they are viewing. Sensitivity is affected by two factors – viewer exposure and viewer awareness.

- **Viewer exposure:** A measure of proximity (the distance between viewer and the visual resource being viewed), extent (the number of viewers viewing), and duration (how long of a time visual resources are viewed). The greater the exposure, the more viewers will be concerned about visual impacts.
- **Viewer awareness:** A measure of attention (level of observation based on routine and familiarity), focus (level of concentration), and protection (legal and social constraints on the use of visual resources). The greater the attention, the more viewers will be concerned about visual impacts.

Viewshed – All the surface areas visible from an observer’s viewpoint.

Visual Quality – Character of the landscape, which generally gives visual value to a setting. Different viewers may evaluate specific visual resources differently based on their interests in natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence. Neighbors and travelers may, in particular, have different opinions on what they value or dislike about a scene.

- **Natural harmony:** What a viewer likes and dislikes about the natural environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the natural environment as being either harmonious or inharmonious. Harmony is considered desirable; disharmony is undesirable.
- **Cultural order:** What a viewer likes and dislikes about the cultural environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the cultural environment as being either orderly or disorderly. Orderly is considered desirable; disorderly is undesirable.
- **Project coherence:** What the viewer likes and dislikes about the project environment. The viewer labels the visual resources of the project environment as being either coherent or incoherent. Coherent is considered desirable; incoherent is undesirable.

Visual Resources – Components of the natural, cultural, or project environments that are capable of being seen.

- **Natural visual resources:** The land, water, vegetation, and animals that compose the natural environment. Although natural resources may have been altered or imported by people, resources that are primarily geological or biological in origin are considered natural. A grassy pasture with rolling terrain, scattered trees, and grazing cows, for example, is considered to be composed of natural visual resources, even though it is a landscape created by people.
- **Cultural visual resources:** The buildings, structures, and artifacts that compose the cultural environment. These are resources that were constructed by people.
- **Project visual resources:** For highway transportation projects, the geometrics, structures, and fixtures that compose the project environment. These are the constructed resources that were or will be placed in the environment as part of the proposed project.

Executive Summary

This Visual Impact Assessment and Discipline Report was conducted for WSDOT's proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project. The purpose of this report is to document the existing conditions, the potential impacts of the project, and potential mitigation measures in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). This analysis used the assessment methodology provided in the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) publication, *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*.

The project area was divided into three landscape units. Landscape Unit 1 included the area surrounding the southern project terminus; Landscape Unit 2 included the forested central portion of the proposed corridor; and Landscape Unit 3 included the area surrounding the northern project terminus. The landscape units were broken down into key views that were selected to represent the visual environment of the project area. Visual impacts were determined by identifying the existing visual resources, assessing existing visual character and quality, determining visual changes that would occur as a result of the project, and evaluating the projected visual quality at project completion. The existing and projected visual quality at each viewpoint was compared, and potential viewer response to predicted changes was evaluated.

The SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project would produce changes to the footprint of SR 3 that could be seen by adjacent viewers and people traveling on SR 3 in the vicinity of MP 22.81 and MP 29.49, where the proposed freight corridor would connect into the existing highway. Changes would also occur along the proposed freight corridor alignment, which is currently largely forested.

There would also be substantial but temporary visual impacts during project construction, including visual impacts resulting from additional signage, roadway fill, lighting during nighttime demolition, and the presence of construction materials and equipment onsite. These activities would be contained within the staging and construction limits, and their visual impacts would be temporary.

A discussion of project design measures that would minimize or avoid visual effects that may result from project development, in accordance with WSDOT's *Roadside Policy Manual*, is provided in Section 4.

1 Introduction

Visual resources are an important aspect of environmental quality. They can influence a viewer's perception of an area, provide a sense of community, and contribute to overall quality of life. Transportation projects can change the visual characteristics of an area, thereby impacting people's visual perception. Potential visual changes resulting from road construction include changes to vegetation, new features in the visual landscape, light and glare, and night sky impacts.

This discipline report documents a Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) conducted for WSDOT's proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project. The analysis was conducted to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as well as the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). This report describes the methods used to perform the analysis, the existing conditions in the project area, potential impacts of the project during construction and operation, and potential mitigation measures.

1.1 Project Description

The proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project would construct a two-lane 6.5 mile limited access highway with a design and posted speed of 50 miles per hour (mph) on a new alignment approximately 3,000 feet to the east of existing State Route (SR) 3. The major portion of the highway would run through Mason County while the northern end would be located in Kitsap County. The proposed alignment would begin at MP 22.81 on SR 3 and connect back to the existing SR 3 alignment at MP 29.49 (see Figure 1). The south end connection to existing SR 3 is proposed just south of the intersection with SR 302, and the north connection is just north of SW Lake Flora Road. The proposed bypass highway would carry regional through traffic from Shelton to Bremerton and would be the mainline for SR 3. The existing SR 3 would become a "Business Loop" serving downtown Belfair with connections to SR 106, SR 300, and the Old Belfair Highway.

The typical cross-section of the proposed improvement is shown in Figure 2 and its construction elements would include the following:

- Two 12-foot travel lanes with 8-foot shoulders.
- Stormwater treatment facilities – natural dispersion and infiltration, compost-amended vegetated filter strips, and treatment wetlands.
- Acquiring right-of-way and implementing managed access.
- Two roundabouts to connect the south end of the new corridor to the existing SR 3 corridor at SR 302.
 - The western roundabout would provide access to the existing SR 3 corridor.
 - The eastern roundabout would provide access to SR 302 and the proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor.
- A roundabout at the north end of the alignment to connect the existing SR 3 corridor to the new corridor at Lake Flora Road.
- Right-in-right-out access to provide access to North Mason High School and Belwood Lane.

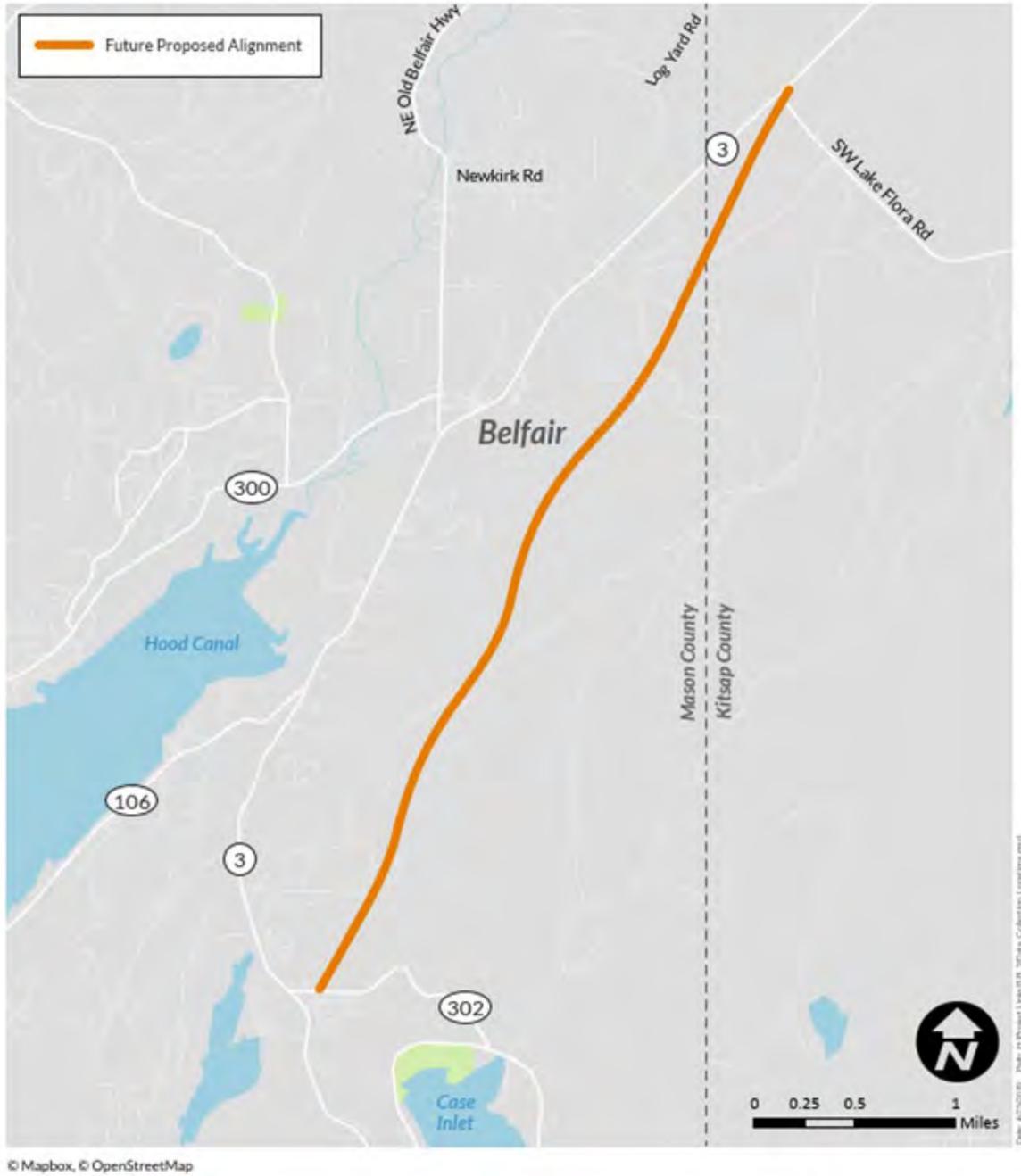


Figure 1. SR 3 Freight Corridor Project Vicinity

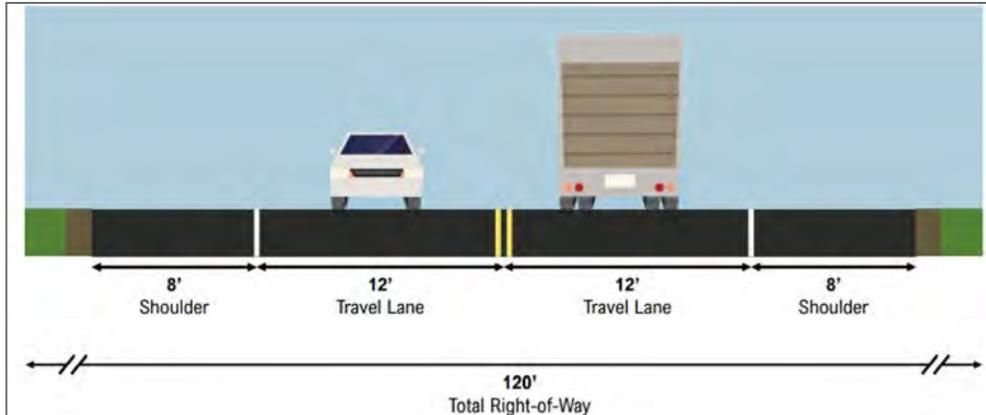


Figure 2. SR 3 Proposed Highway Cross-section

1.2 What is the Purpose of this Project?

The purpose of constructing a Freight Corridor around the Belfair urban area is to provide a reliable high speed regional route between Kitsap and Mason Counties. The Freight Corridor project ensures the efficient movement of freight, commuter trips and other regional traffic between Shelton and Bremerton in a manner that bypasses the urban center of Belfair. The project would provide a solution to the immediate and long-range regional transportation mobility needs of the SR 3 corridor through the design year of 2050 by reducing congestion and lowering the existing crash rate on SR 3 through Belfair. It would provide an alternate route during recurring highway closures resulting from vehicular crashes and other incidents. It would provide safe and reliable regional access to jobs, goods, and services; accommodate seasonal influxes of tourist traffic; and improve efficiencies for all public services.

1.3 Why is the Project Needed?

A new Freight Corridor around Belfair is needed to improve regional mobility for freight, passenger vehicles, and transit. The improvements would increase mobility, reduce congestion through Belfair, and improve safety.

Increase Mobility

SR 3 in the Belfair urban area experiences chronic traffic congestion and declining operational Levels of Service (LOS) for traffic. Because SR 3 is the major north-south link between Mason and Kitsap counties, Belfair is a choke point on this regional highway and serves as the only freight route through southwest Kitsap and northeast Mason Counties. SR 3 is designated as a critical rural freight corridor and is part of the National Highway Freight Network (NHFN). SR 3 is also identified as a National Highway System (NHS) route and as a Highway of Statewide Significance (HSS). The National Highway System route designation extends from the Hood Canal Bridge in the north to Shelton in the south, passing through the Belfair urban area, the City of Bremerton, the Puget Sound Industrial Center - Bremerton (PSIC - B), and connecting with SR 16.

SR 3 carries most of the daily commute trips from SR 106, SR 300 and populated coastal areas in Mason County north to Bremerton and via SR 16 to points in Pierce and King Counties. Regional traffic using SR 3 must pass through the commercial area of Belfair having numerous access points with high turning

volumes. Southbound traffic destined for Shelton, Grays Harbor, and Olympia also must pass through Belfair.

Reduce Congestion

A combination of freight, commute, and recreational traffic volumes cause severe congestion through the Belfair urban area. Congestion is occurring during peak commute hours (7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM), weekends, holidays, and during the tourist season (May-September).

SR 3 had an average of 19,000 vehicles per day in 2018 south of Lake Flora Road. Highway LOS analysis shows the one-mile segment of SR 3 north of Lake Flora Road, the signalized intersection at NE Clifton Lane, and the unsignalized intersection at Old Belfair Highway, are all failing LOS standards (see also the SR 3 Freight Corridor Transportation Discipline Report).

Several studies conducted over the last decade have shown that traffic congestion and safety concerns will overwhelm SR 3 in the near future. The operational analysis of the project area indicates that the roadway currently operates below minimum acceptable service standards on this portion of the highway. Without the Freight Corridor, operational performance for freight and regional through traffic on the portion of existing SR 3 through Belfair will continue to decline to the point of chronic failure by 2045. If no action is taken, travel times in the project area are expected to get worse as future traffic volumes increase.

The current highway does not support regional transportation needs. This route experiences seasonal fluctuations from tourist traffic and recreational users and is the most direct and expedient alternate land route for traffic from Bremerton to Interstate 5 if SR 16 or the Tacoma Narrows Bridge becomes blocked. Southbound traffic destined for Shelton, Grays Harbor, and Olympia must pass through Belfair. As land located in the corridor continues to be developed, and regional trips continue to increase, traffic congestion through Belfair will be exacerbated. The Bremerton Economic Development (BED) Study for US 101, SR 3 and SR 16 in Mason and Kitsap Counties (WSDOT 2012a) showed the Freight Corridor project was the top priority project for the local communities and stake holders.

If the Freight Corridor project is not built, the SR 3 would be an important regional facility that will fail to provide efficient regional and local traffic mobility. A bypass would improve the roadway system around Belfair and would reduce travel time.

Improve Safety

Crash records in the study area indicate that the type and severity of crashes appears to be consistent with congested urban conditions. Rear-end and property damage only (PDO) or non-injury crashes account for the greatest number of crashes. The number of crashes tends to increase under congested conditions, but the severity of those crashes is generally lower, due to lower speeds. In the study area, between January 2018 and December 2022, 402 crashes were reported. Two were fatal crashes and eight were serious injury crashes. One serious injury crash was at the intersection of at the Lake Flora Rd intersection (MP 28.78). The remaining two fatal crashes and seven serious injury crashes. During this time, 330 crashes occurred between the study intersections with the majority occurring between Lake Flora Road to NE Clifton Lane (42%) and between NE Clifton Lane to SR 106 (40%).

Support of Local Plans

The area is developing based on local agency comprehensive plans and zoning. However, the area lacks a completed transportation network appropriate for the community. The Bremerton Economic Development (BED) Study showed the SR 3 Freight Corridor is the top priority project for the local communities and stakeholders. The Freight Corridor has been included in the transportation elements of the Mason County and the City of Bremerton comprehensive plans.

1.4 Description of Project Alternatives

Alternative 1: No Build (No Action) Alternative

Under the No Build Alternative, the proposed project would not be constructed. Only routine maintenance, repair, and minor safety improvements would take place on SR 3 in the study area over the next 20 years. WSDOT is evaluating the No Build Alternative to provide a reference point for comparing the effects, both positive and negative, associated with the proposed build alternative.

Alternative 2: Build Alternative (Project Action)

The proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project would construct a two-lane 6.5 mile limited access highway with a design and posted speed of 50 miles per hour (mph) on a new alignment approximately 3,000 feet to the east of existing State Route (SR) 3. The major portion of the highway would run through Mason County while the northern end would be located in Kitsap County. The proposed alignment would begin at MP 22.81 on SR 3 and connect back to the existing SR 3 alignment at MP 29.49 (see Figure 1). The north end connection to existing SR 3 is proposed just north of SW Lake Flora Road, and the south connection is just south of the intersection with SR 302. The proposed bypass highway would carry regional through traffic from Shelton to Bremerton and would be the mainline for SR 3. The existing SR 3 would become a “Business Loop” serving downtown Belfair with connections to SR 106, SR 300, and the Old Belfair Highway.

2 Methodology

The methodology and terminology used in this VIA for identifying and assessing visual impacts is based on the 2015 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA-HEP-15-029) and Chapter 459 of the WSDOT *Environmental Manual* (M 31-11.14).

2.1 What is the Process for Evaluating Visual Impacts?

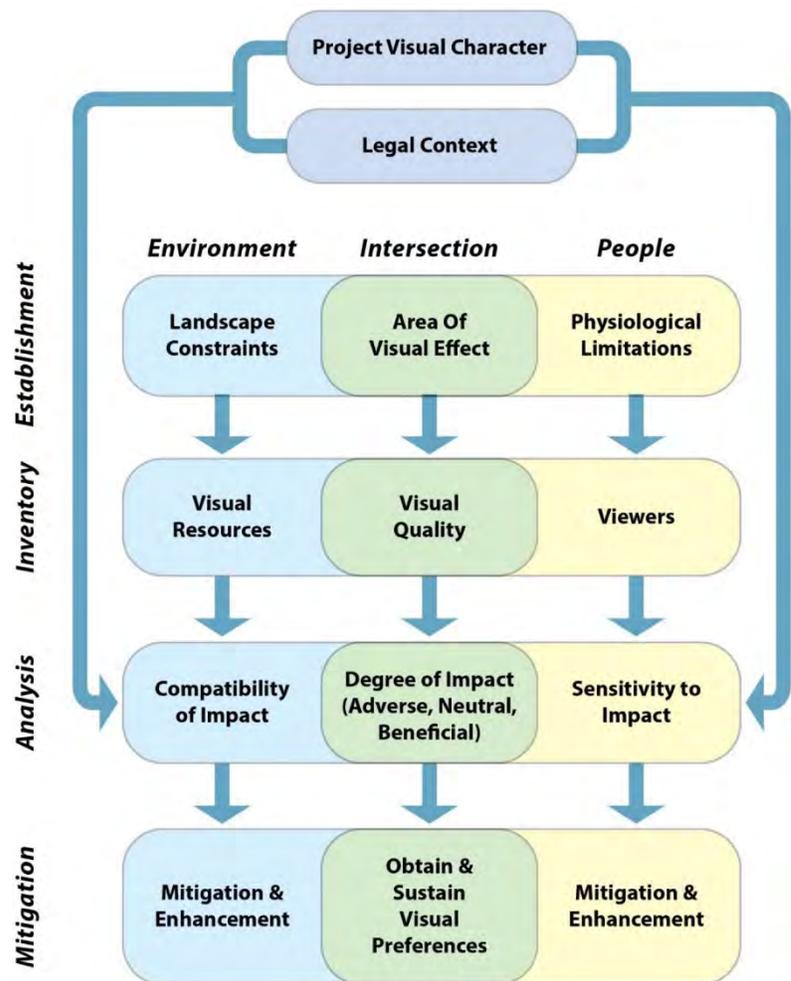
The Visual Impact Assessment process consists of four phases: establishment, inventory, analysis, and mitigation. In each of the four phases, the methodology considers the relationship between the affected environment (visual resources) and the affected population (viewers). This type of analysis stems from the idea of transactional perception in which perception (visual quality) is the result of the interaction between viewers and the environment, rather than the intrinsic characteristics of each taken in isolation. Figure 3 illustrates the process for evaluating visual impacts, which is described below.

During the establishment phase, the area of visual effect (AVE) is defined by considering the topography, vegetation, and limits of human sight that constrain the visual environment of the project.

In the inventory phase, the AVE is categorized into distinct landscape units, and viewer types are identified. Representative viewpoints are selected, and the existing visual quality is described based on each viewpoint’s natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence.

In the analysis phase, project effects are evaluated from each viewpoint by analyzing the changes to natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence that were identified during the inventory phase. These impacts are then categorized as beneficial, adverse, or neutral.

Finally, during the mitigation phase, methods for avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating for adverse impacts



Source: FHWA *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*

Figure 3. Diagram Illustrating Visual Impact Assessment Process

are identified, yielding a description of how the project might lessen or eliminate any undesirable visual effects.

2.2 How Was Information Collected for this Report?

Existing conditions were analyzed using a combination of GIS mapping, field investigations, photographs, and a review of preliminary engineering plans and past visual quality analyses. This analysis also included a review of the existing zoning codes and comprehensive plans for each of the jurisdictions that would be affected by the project to understand each jurisdiction's future land use plans and urban design goals.

2.3 What Is the Study Area and How Was it Determined?

Consistent with FHWA methodology, the study area for visual resources is known as the area of visual effect (AVE). The AVE encompasses areas from which changes associated with the project would be potentially visible. The project area includes landscapes ranging from dense stands of trees which restrict views along much of the route, to wide-open spaces containing buildings and landscaped areas. Given this variety of landscape types within the project area, the AVE varies by location. For this project, the AVE is considered to consist of areas along both sides of the proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor alignment that are within approximately 0.25 miles of the project footprint.

2.4 What Is Visual Quality?

The evaluation of the potential aesthetic impact of a project is based on an evaluation of the likely change the project would create to a value called *visual quality*. The landscape itself has a particular visual character; viewers of the landscape have different sensitivities to aesthetics. Visual quality is a measure of how viewers perceive the aesthetic value of the landscape.

Different viewers may evaluate specific visual resources differently based on their interests in natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence. Neighbors and travelers may, in particular, have different opinions on what they value or dislike about a scene.

The impact analysis for a project includes evaluation of the existing visual quality of the project setting, the anticipated changes that would result from the project (both positive and negative), and the sensitivity of typical viewers to change. The evaluation of the existing visual quality of the project area focuses on natural harmony and cultural order. Project coherence is discussed further as part of the evaluation of impacts.

3 Affected Environment

3.1 What Is the Existing Visual Setting for the Project?

The proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor project is primarily located in the northeast corner of Mason County, with the northern terminus of the project located in the southwest corner of Kitsap County within the city limits of Bremerton. Land use types in the project area vary and include residential, commercial, vacant or undeveloped, and resource lands. Existing land use types in the project vicinity are shown in Figure 4.

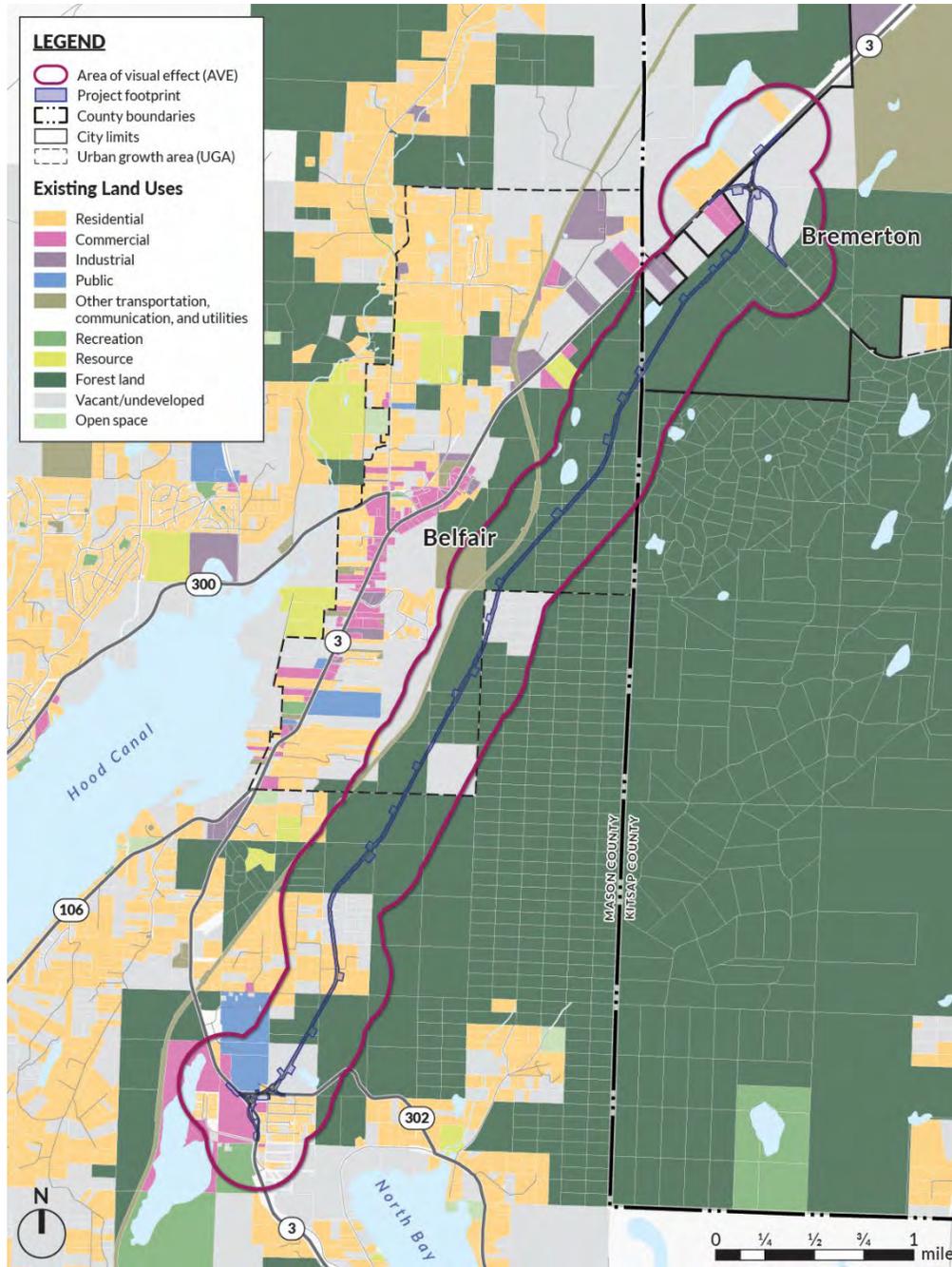


Figure 4. Existing Land Uses in the Project Vicinity

Despite increasing populations in urban growth areas (UGAs) in recent decades, the majority of the AVE lies primarily in a rural environment. Much of the area in both Mason and Kitsap Counties is undeveloped forest land.

3.2 What Landscape Units Were Defined in the AVE?

Consistent with FHWA's methodology, the AVE was divided into a series of landscape units defined by viewshed and landscape type. Landscape units are visually distinct areas, each with a relatively homogeneous visual character and viewer type. Landscape units often correspond to land use types, since these tend to have a particular visual identity and generally correspond with viewer sensitivity.

The project's AVE contains three landscape units that represent the distinct visual environments existing within the project area:

- **Landscape Unit 1:** The southern terminus of the project alignment, from the southern end of the AVE to approximately 0.25 mile north of SR 302.
- **Landscape Unit 2:** The central portion of the project alignment, from just north of SR 302 to just south of Log Yard Road.
- **Landscape Unit 3:** The northern terminus of the project alignment, from approximately 0.25 mile south of Log Yard Road to the northern end of the AVE.

These three landscape units are described in Section 3.4 below. The location of each landscape unit is shown in Figure 5.

3.3 What Representative Views Were Evaluated?

Within each landscape unit, key views were selected to document the existing visual conditions in the landscape unit and to analyze potential visual impacts of the project. The following viewpoints were used for this analysis:

- **View A:** Looking west toward SR 3 from SR 302, located in Landscape Unit 1.
- **View B:** Looking toward the southern entrance of North Mason High School from SR 302, located in Landscape Unit 1.
- **View C:** Looking south toward the entrance to the Belwood Estates neighborhood from SR 302, located in Landscape Unit 1.
- **View D:** View within existing forested corridor, located in Landscape Unit 2.
- **View E:** Looking west toward SR 3 from Lake Flora Road, located in Landscape Unit 3.

These viewpoints represent the views of travelers and neighbors in areas where visual changes from the project would be most noticeable and where viewer sensitivity is relatively high. Photos of these key views can be found in Section 3.4 below, and their specific locations are shown in Figure 5.

3.4 What Is the Existing Visual Quality of the AVE?

For each landscape unit, this inventory identifies visual resources, describes visual character, and evaluates the visual quality of existing views associated with the landscape unit. Visual quality was evaluated using the principles of landscape assessment identified in the FHWA guidance. The following variables were considered when evaluating the visual quality of each view:

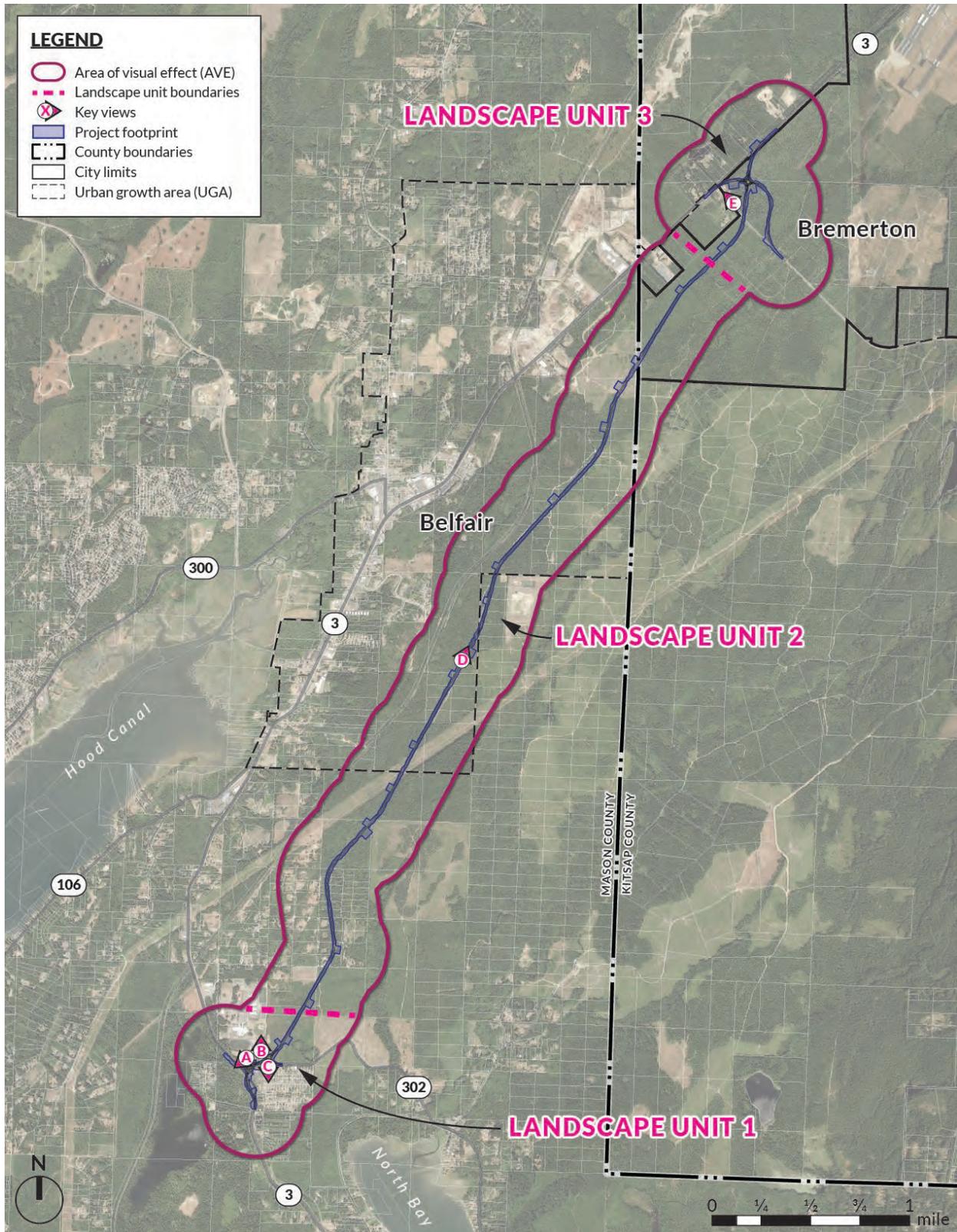


Figure 5. Location of Landscape Units and Key Views

- The view's natural features and degree of natural harmony
- The view's cultural features and degree of cultural order
- The relationship of the existing roadway features to the landscape setting in terms of degree of project coherence

The views in each landscape unit are described for both travelers and neighbors. Travelers would be temporary viewers traveling along SR 3 and connecting roads in the project area, including motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Neighbors include everyone who would be looking toward the proposed alignment, rather than traveling on it. The exposures, awareness, and sensitivity of the viewers are also described.

Landscape Unit 1

The character of this landscape unit is lightly developed and somewhat forested, typical of a rural state highway. A few commercial/public land uses, including the North Mason School District campus and the LDS church, are located near the intersection of SR 3 and SR 302. Some sparse residential development is also present in this landscape unit, including the Belwood Estates development south of SR 302.

Travelers in this landscape unit would be exposed to the landscape for a relatively short duration. Their awareness of and sensitivity to changes in the landscape would be low.

Neighbors in this landscape unit include visitors to North Mason High School and the LDS church (students, teachers, parishioners) as well as motorists and pedestrians along SR 302 and nearby roads. These neighbors would be exposed to the landscape on a near-daily basis, and their awareness of and sensitivity to changes in the landscape would be high.

View A – SR 3 from SR 302

View A is shown in Figure 6. This view looks west toward SR 3 at its intersection with SR 302, near where the southern end of the new alignment will connect into the existing highway. The foreground and middle ground both show native forest vegetation with SR 3 dissecting the viewshed. In the background is the forested roadside with utility lines that impact the middle ground view. The view has a high degree of natural harmony and an average degree of cultural order.



Figure 6. View A – Looking West toward SR 3 from SR 302

View B – North Mason High School from SR 302

View B is shown in Figure 7. The foreground and middle ground of this photo show a forested setting with the built environment as a component blending into the natural setting. The school is located in the background, largely obscured by mature vegetation. This is an intact landscape with limited visual encroachment by the school. The view has a high degree of natural harmony and an average degree of cultural order.



Figure 7. View B – Looking toward the Southern Entrance of North Mason High School from SR 302

View C – Belwood Estates from SR 302

View C is shown in Figure 8. The view toward the Belwood Estates neighborhood is typical of that along SR 302 in the project area. This intersection is located in the vicinity of the eastern proposed roundabout at the southern corridor terminus. This particular area has been cleared relatively recently to make way for the construction of the residential neighborhood. A planted coniferous landscape buffer is visible in the foreground, with the built environment of the residential neighborhood largely obscured in the background. The view has an average degree of natural harmony and an average degree of cultural order.



Figure 8. View C – Looking South toward the Entrance to Belwood Estates from SR 302

Landscape Unit 2

This landscape unit is forested, largely with second- and third- growth coniferous forest. The alignment is partially cleared through some of the proposed project area, as shown in Figure 5. However, the cleared portion is currently only about 20 feet wide; this corridor would need to be widened and further cleared to accommodate the proposed highway.

As this landscape unit is not currently developed, there are no travelers experiencing this landscape unit currently. There are a handful of neighbors – motorists and pedestrians near the north and south ends of this landscape unit, as well as some residents nearby, mostly toward the southern end. Though neighbors in this landscape unit are few, their exposure to the landscape would be high, and they would have a high degree of awareness and sensitivity to changes in the landscape.

View D – Existing Forested Corridor

View D is shown in Figure 9. This photo is a typical representation of the native vegetation that occurs throughout the proposed corridor area in landscape unit 2. The photo shows a natural environment with minimal visible disturbances from development. The landscape has a high degree of natural harmony and a low degree of cultural order.



Figure 9. View D – View within Existing Forested Corridor

Landscape Unit 3

This landscape unit is lightly developed and somewhat forested, typical of a rural state highway. It is less developed than landscape unit 1; there are very few residential neighbors in the area. There are some existing industrial uses to the west of the landscape unit, along the existing SR 3 corridor.

Travelers in this landscape unit would be exposed to the landscape for a relatively short duration. Their awareness of and sensitivity to changes in the landscape would be low.

Neighbors in this landscape unit include visitors and workers at the industrial uses in the area, as well as motorists and pedestrians along Lake Flora Road and other nearby roads. These neighbors would be exposed to the landscape on a fairly regular basis, and their awareness of and sensitivity to changes in the landscape would be average to high.

View E – Lake Flora Road

View E is shown in Figure 10. This photo shows the view from Lake Flora Road, near the northern terminus of the proposed alignment, looking toward SR 3. The third- and fourth-growth vegetation is typical of that near the proposed northern terminus of the project. The landscape has an average degree of natural harmony and an average degree of cultural order.



Figure 10. View E – Looking West toward SR 3 from Lake Flora Road

4 Potential Impacts

The SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project would produce changes to the footprint of SR 3 that could be seen by adjacent viewers and people traveling on SR 3 in the vicinity of MP 22.81 and MP 29.49, where the proposed freight corridor would connect into the existing highway. Changes would also occur along the proposed freight corridor alignment, which is currently largely forested.

4.1 What Is the Visual Character of the Project?

The project would construct a two-lane, 6.5 mile limited access highway on a new alignment. The majority of the new highway would run through existing second- and third-growth coniferous forest. Very little development has occurred in the vicinity of this central portion of the proposed highway. The north and south termini of the project, where the new highway would connect into the existing SR 3 corridor, would be located in more developed areas. A single-lane roundabout at the north end of the alignment would connect the new corridor to the existing SR 3 corridor at Lake Flora Road. Two single-lane roundabouts would connect the south end of the new corridor to the existing SR 3 corridor at SR 302; the western roundabout would provide access to the existing SR 3 corridor, and the eastern roundabout would provide access to SR 302 and the proposed SR 3 Freight Corridor.

The new highway would be generally flat, with no proposed overpass structures. The asphalt roadway would consist of two 12-foot travel lanes with 8-foot shoulders. The forested surroundings would give the overall project a somewhat natural character.

4.2 Whose Views Would the Project Affect?

The analysis of visual impacts combines an evaluation of the physical changes to the landscape with the anticipated reaction those changes may cause in viewers. Projects generally have different types of viewers, who would likely have different reactions to changes in visual quality. For example, an infrequent visitor to the project location would be expected to be less sensitive to change in the landscape than someone who viewed the project every day. An analysis of visual impacts also considers how much concern different users might have for quality. For example, a resident looking out the window at a particular project would likely be more concerned about visual quality than a delivery driver who visits the area infrequently, and who is not focused on visual quality as an important contributor to quality of life during working hours.

As discussed in the previous section of this report, the main categories of viewers in the impact analysis are travelers and neighbors. Travelers would be temporary viewers traveling along the proposed project alignment, including motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Neighbors include everyone who would be looking toward the project alignment, rather than traveling along it. Neighbors would include a variety of viewers, but the majority would include residents, workers and visitors in nearby buildings, and motorists and pedestrians on nearby streets. Both primary viewing groups, neighbors and travelers, would likely come to the project area with the expectation that the visual character of the area would be lightly developed and somewhat natural, typical of a rural state highway.

Travelers

Travelers along the roadway would experience the project area differently than employees and patrons of local commercial and institutional buildings. Travelers move through the project area, and would see

the project from different vantage points. For travelers, the project area is part of a larger experience as they move through the landscape. Travelers are sensitive to views of the roadway; however, an important part of their experience is also the views available from the roadway to the surrounding landscape.

Most travelers along SR 3 currently, and thus most potential travelers along the proposed freight corridor, would be in motor vehicles, but there is also the potential for pedestrians and bicyclists. Compared to neighbors of the project, there would be many more travelers; however, travelers would not experience the project with the same duration and frequency. Many travelers through this area are expected to be regular visitors, either as part of their commute, to visit a local business, or for commercial travel. During the summer months, a large number of travelers through the area are expected to be passing through for tourism-related purposes. Travelers through the project area have more opportunities than neighbors to experience the most positive aspects of views from the site, including the surrounded natural forest views.

Travelers through the project area would be expected to be less sensitive to visual quality than neighbors, primarily because of the lower frequency and shorter duration of their exposure to views.

Neighbors

The largest portion of neighbors would likely consist of workers and visitors in nearby buildings (e.g. the North Mason School District Campus or the LDS church near the intersection of SR 3 and SR 302) or motorists and pedestrians on nearby streets (e.g. people traveling to their homes nearby). These neighbors would likely view the project area on a near-daily basis, so would likely be more sensitive to change in the landscape than would travelers through the area.

Only a very small number of neighbors are expected to be residents. There are only a handful of residences within the AVE, and most of these would be at least separated from the project by vegetation. While these viewers would be the most sensitive to changes in the landscape, they also represent the smallest number of viewers in the project area.

4.3 How Would the Project Affect Visual Quality during Construction?

The project would create temporary visual impacts for SR 3 users and neighbors during construction. Construction activities typically detract from visual quality because construction sites are by nature dynamic and hectic. These activities would include clearing and grading, which would detract from the visual character of the roadside and nearby areas. Impacts on visual resources are typically highest during the construction phase of the project.

Construction activities could cause increases in dust levels that could partially obscure views. If construction takes place after sundown, viewers could be exposed to glare and increased ambient nighttime light levels from heavy equipment and temporary lighting. Construction would comply with local policies and regulations regarding construction mitigation activities, such as earth wetting, fencing, and light shielding, which would reduce the overall visual effect of construction activities.

Other temporary visual impacts would include the presence of heavy construction equipment, materials, signage, and staging areas in the construction zone that would contrast with the vegetated background of the project area and reduce the visual quality of the immediate area during construction. Removal of

trees in certain areas would result in temporary debris piles that would not be consistent with the visual character the area and would temporarily reduce visual quality. The presence of materials yards, concrete forms, and roadway fill would also have temporary impacts to the overall visual quality of the AVE.

4.4 How Would the Project Affect Visual Quality Long-Term?

The project would result in permanent changes to the visual environment for SR 3 users and neighbors in the AVE. The changes for each landscape unit are described below.

Landscape Unit 1

The project would eliminate acres of native vegetation buffer adjacent to the North Mason School District, the LDS church, Log Yard Road, and adjacent residential locations. As noted below, by removing these buffers, the project corridor would be more visible to neighbors. Travelers would also be more aware of the surrounding built environment. Headlight glare may be more apparent to neighbors.

Overall, impacts would be minor and would become less noticeable over time as vegetation replanted consistent with WSDOT's *Roadside Policy Manual* becomes mature.

View A – SR 3 from SR 302

The roadway in this view would be widened to accommodate the western roundabout at the southern terminus of the new highway.

View B – North Mason High School from SR 302

With the new alignment, this secondary entrance to North Mason High School would become a right-in/right-out access, and the access would be widened to accommodate a triangular island to maintain the right-in/right-out traffic flow. Removal of vegetation to construct the new alignment would make stadium and vehicular lighting from the school grounds more visible to the surrounding neighbors.

View C – Belwood Estates from SR 302

As noted under View B, the removal of vegetation in the vicinity of North Mason High School would make stadium and vehicular lighting from the school grounds more visible to the surrounding neighbors, particularly those in Belwood Estates.

Landscape Unit 2

As described in Section 3.4 of this report, landscape unit 2 is currently largely forested. The project would eliminate many forested acres in this landscape unit to construct the new highway. Mitigation best practices would minimize impacts, but some mitigation measures (such as replanting of native vegetation) would take years to reach maximum effectiveness.

View D – Existing Forested Corridor

The view within the middle of the proposed bypass would be adversely affected with construction of the new corridor. Due to native vegetation being removed to provide for the new alignment, headlight glare would be more apparent to existing and potential neighbors. These existing and potential neighbors consist predominantly of residential neighborhoods, although existing neighbors are currently few. In

order to reduce headlight glare, the entire corridor would have to be replanted with native vegetation to provide a visual buffer between the vehicle traffic and any surrounding neighbors.

There would also be an addition of glare and light simply due to construction of a new roadway, caused primarily by vegetation removal and construction activities. The light impact will primarily have an influence on adjacent residential units, of which there are currently very few.

While the impacts to this landscape unit would be adverse due to the fact that the corridor is not currently developed, they would become less noticeable over time as vegetation replanted consistent with WSDOT's *Roadside Policy Manual* becomes mature. The proposed new highway would be consistent in character with the connecting state highways (SR 3 and SR 302).

Landscape Unit 3

The project would eliminate acres of native vegetation buffer adjacent to the existing SR 3 corridor. As noted below, by removing these buffers, the project corridor would be more visible to neighbors. Travelers would also be more aware of the surrounding built environment. Headlight glare may be more apparent to neighbors. There are currently relatively few neighbors in this landscape unit.

View E – Lake Flora Road

The roadway in this view would be widened to accommodate the roundabout and connection to SR 3 at the northern terminus of the new highway. Overall, impacts would be minor and would become less noticeable over time as vegetation replanted consistent with WSDOT's *Roadside Policy Manual* becomes mature.

5 Mitigation Measures

5.1 What Measures Would Be Taken to Mitigate Visual Quality Impacts during Construction?

In accordance with the WSDOT *Roadside Policy Manual*, the following measures would be used to mitigate for temporary adverse impacts associated with construction.

- Set limits of work areas for vehicles and equipment to minimize and prevent excessive soil compaction. Use flagging and fencing in conjunction with signs to define work areas.
- Minimize compaction during construction. Avoid heavy machinery use on saturated soil.
- Minimize site disturbance to protect trees and native soils and keep ecosystem functions intact.
- Minimize the removal of trees and shrubs and pruning needed during construction.
- Locate staging and laydown areas where there is no vegetation, undesirable vegetation (such as Himalayan blackberry), or vegetation, such as grassed road shoulders, that is easy to restore.
- Restore staging areas once decommissioned to preconstruction conditions or better by restoring natural contours, rehabilitating soils, and planting native vegetation in accordance with WSDOT's *Roadside Manual*.
- Minimize fugitive light from portable sources used during construction.

5.2 What Measures Would Be Taken to Mitigate Long-Term Visual Quality Impacts?

The project will be developed with community input to ensure that community concerns relating to visual impacts will be met early in the project. The following measures would be implemented as part of the project and in accordance with WSDOT's *Roadside Policy Manual* in order to reduce or eliminate adverse visual impacts that may result from development of the SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project:

- Grading limits would be adjusted where possible, within geometric design standards, to protect desirable vegetation; screen undesirable views or expose scenic views; provide natural habitat; and protect wetlands, sensitive areas, and cultural resources.
- Consistent design types, textures, materials, and colors would be applied to structures, lights, and signs throughout the project site to ensure they are compatible with surrounding developments.
- Additional lighting along roadways and the SR 3 corridor would be placed only in areas deemed necessary for safety. Directional and downcast lighting would be used when feasible to minimize nighttime glare in surrounding areas.
- Removal of mature vegetation would be minimized to the areas necessary for construction of the improvements.
- Areas disturbed as part of the SR 3 Freight Corridor – New Alignment project would be replanted as part of a comprehensive roadside restoration plan to restore and enhance roadside functions including screening, corridor continuity, blending of new structures, light and glare reduction, water retention and water quality protection, and view framing consistent with the WSDOT *Roadside Policy Manual* and applicable local design standards.

- Targeted use of vegetation would be employed that adheres to WSDOT *Roadside Policy Manual* guidance to mitigate corridor-wide loss of visual quality.

5.3 Would the Project Have Any Effects that Could Not Be Mitigated?

The project would not have any effects that could not be mitigated.

6 References

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