

## 4.6 Aesthetics

This section describes the environmental setting (existing conditions and regulatory setting) for aesthetics related to the proposed project, the impacts on aesthetics that may result from the proposed project, and mitigation measures that would be required to reduce these impacts.

The following analysis focuses on the visual character and quality of the project corridor and surroundings, including street trees. Impacts to scenic vistas, scenic resources, views, and lighting are not anticipated to result and are not discussed further.

### 4.6.1 Environmental Setting

#### Existing Setting

The project alignment consists of 9.9 miles of the Wilshire corridor, which is a highly developed urban corridor of Los Angeles. Wilshire Boulevard stretches from downtown Los Angeles to the City of Santa Monica and passes through or near many major activity centers and destinations and generally consists of low to high density commercial development, as well as both low and high density multi-family neighborhoods. Wilshire Boulevard contains a variety of architecture styles that contribute to the character of the project corridor.

Sensitive land uses include the mid- and high-rise towers located along Wilshire Boulevard between the Los Angeles Country Club and Malcolm Avenue along Wilshire Boulevard, and portions of Wilshire Boulevard in the Wilshire Community Plan Area, which contains interspersed multi-family residential areas and recreational facilities, such as Museum Row, Hancock Park, and La Brea Tar Pits. These sensitive land uses, particularly those in the Westwood area, have views from various angles of the six historic resources that were determined eligible for listing on the National Register, Chateau Colline (listed on the National Register), and the VA Medical Center (previously determined eligible on the National Register as a historic district). In addition to being visible to these sensitive land uses, these resources are also currently visible from other areas along the corridor and contribute significantly to the visual character of the corridor. Observation of the project corridor suggests that these resources, along with other architecturally, culturally, and socially significant structures and places, are heavily utilized by the public and are likely of high public interest.

Several portions of the project corridor contain street trees and various types of landscaping that line Wilshire Boulevard. The portion of the project corridor that lies in the Westwood community area, near Comstock and Malcolm Avenues, is lined with a maximum of 40 magnolia trees, within existing landscaping features on curb jut-outs, and a maximum of 30 small jacaranda trees within an existing median between I-405 and Federal Avenue

in the County portion of the corridor. Figure 4.6-1 shows the existing landscaping along a typical jut-out located in the Westwood area.

## 4.6.2 Regulatory Setting

Various plans, policies, standards, and guidelines apply to the aesthetics and visual aspects of development on the project site. These include the City of Los Angeles General Plan and the Los Angeles Municipal Code. A brief summary of these documents is presented below.

### City of Los Angeles General Plan

#### Westwood Community Plan

The majority of the project corridor (9.1 miles) lies within the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles and is subject to the policies and designations of the City of Los Angeles General Plan. The portion of the project site that may require removal of up to 40 trees lies in the Westwood Community Plan Area of the City of Los Angeles. For further discussion about the Westwood Community Plan area, see Section 4.5.

The Westwood Community Plan is one of 35 components of the City's General Plan Land Use Element, which is collectively comprised of the City's 35 community plans.

The Westwood Community Plan includes community design and landscaping guidelines and standards that serve to improve the community environment both aesthetically and physically. The guidelines address street trees as follows:

1. Select species which; (a) enhance the pedestrian character, and convey a distinctive high quality visual image (b) are drought and smog tolerant, fire resistant and complement existing trees.
2. Establish a hierarchy for street trees which include:
  - a. Major Accent Trees. These trees should be located at entry points, intersections, and activity centers.
  - b. Ornamental or Special Plantings. At special areas along street frontages, such as linkages to pedestrian walkways and plazas and outdoor dining areas, ornamental trees providing shade and color can emphasize and focus attention on those places.
3. Provide for the installation of street trees along public sidewalks defining the types and spacing in accordance with a Street Tree Master Plan.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> City of Los Angeles. n.d. Westwood Community Plan. Available: <<http://cityplanning.lacity.org/complan/pdf/wwdcptxt.pdf>>. Accessed: April 10, 2010.

**Figure 4.6-1. Existing Jut-Out and Associated Landscaping Located Along the Wilshire Corridor**



Photo: ICF International, 2009

## Conservation Element

In addition to the General Plan Framework, the Conservation Element of the City's General Plan also identifies objectives, policies, and programs to address the landforms and scenic vistas, and scenic resources.<sup>124</sup>

## Los Angeles Municipal Code

The Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) codifies the regulatory and penal ordinances of the City for the preservation of the public peace, health, and safety. There are several regulations in the LAMC pertaining to visual resources, including removal, relocation, and replacement of street trees.<sup>125</sup>

### 4.6.2 Thresholds of Significance

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would have a potentially significant effect on aesthetics if it would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

The *Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds Guide* provides more specific guidance to determine, not just the potential for significance, but to establish thresholds by which a potential aesthetic impact can be measured. The *Los Angeles CEQA Thresholds Guide* recognizes the subjectivity brought to such an analysis and states that a determination of significance is to be made on a case-by-case basis based on the following considerations:<sup>126</sup>

- The amount of relative proportion of existing features or elements that substantially contribute to the valued visual character or image of a neighborhood, community, or localized area, which would be removed, altered, or demolished.

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<sup>124</sup> City of Los Angeles. n.d. *City of Los Angeles General Plan, Conservation Element*. Available: <<http://cityplanning.lacity.org/cwd/gnlpln/consvelt.pdf>>. Accessed: April 10, 2010.

<sup>125</sup> City of Los Angeles, Special Order (SO18-0372): Policies for the installation and preservation of landscaping and trees on public property. March 27, 1972. Donald C. Tillman, City Engineer, City of Los Angeles. Under Special Order SO18-0372, removed trees should be relocated where possible in the nearby vicinity, and should be replaced on a two to one basis, either locally, or if more appropriate, on an area-wide basis. Discretion is allowed for the responsible agency in applying these Special Order replacement guidelines for any specific project.

<sup>126</sup> City of Los Angeles. 2006. *L.A. CEQA Thresholds Guide*. Available: <<http://www.ci.la.ca.us/EAD/programs/Thresholds/A-Aesthetics%20and%20Visual%20Resources.pdf>>. Accessed April 10, 2010.

### 4.6.3 Environmental Impacts

#### Impact A1: Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

*Impacts related to the visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings would be considered less than significant with mitigation incorporated.*

The proposed project would convert existing curb lanes on Wilshire Boulevard to bus and right-turn only operation in the peak periods on weekdays. This would result in the repair or reconstruction of curb lanes. All proposed improvements would occur in an existing transportation corridor. The proposed project would not include structures or other elements that would potentially obstruct views of far-off scenic features or structures and places that contribute to the visual character of the corridor, such as the potentially historic or historically significant cultural resources.

A segment of the project site located in the community of Westwood is lined with landscaping and magnolia trees. This area of the project corridor consists of low to high density commercial development, as well as both low and high density multi-family neighborhoods.

Under the proposed project, the removal of jut-outs along the segment of the project corridor between Comstock Avenue and Malcolm Avenue would result in the removal of up to 40 magnolia trees. However, magnolia trees are not designated as protected under City of Los Angeles guidelines. Nevertheless, under the proposed project, a detailed landscape plan would be developed in the Preliminary Engineering phase to identify the trees to be displaced and the location and number of new trees to be replanted along this segment of Wilshire Boulevard. The relocating or replanting of trees would help maintain the existing aesthetic quality of the corridor.

In addition, an existing median immediately west of I-405 supports up to 30 small jacaranda trees. Under the proposed project, the extension of the eastbound left-turn pocket at Sepulveda Boulevard and street widening in the area would result in the removal of these trees.

The proposed improvements would comply with all local construction standards and guidelines, including design guidelines for roadways, streetscape, landscaping, and City/County of Los Angeles requirements for the preservation or replacement of street trees. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure A-1** would result in a less than significant impact.

### 4.6.4 Mitigation Measures

The proposed project involves the removal of a maximum of 40 magnolia trees along Wilshire Boulevard between Comstock Avenue and Malcolm Avenue and a maximum of 30 small jacaranda trees between I-405 and Federal Avenue. The following mitigation measure shall be implemented to

ensure that the impact related to tree removal would be reduced to a less than significant level:

- A-1** Wherever feasible, trees within the existing jut-outs and median shall be preserved or relocated and incorporated into the landscape plan where space permits.

#### 4.6.6 Level of Significance After Mitigation

The implementation of **Mitigation Measure A-1**, preserving, replacing or moving the affected street trees, would ensure conformity with City and County of Los Angeles requirements for protection and preservation of the street trees. This would ensure a less-than-significant impact would occur relative to potential impacts to the visual character of the project site.