

3.9 Visual Quality

This section evaluates the visual impact of the proposed SR 167 project. The visual character of a project area consists of the built and natural environment as perceived by residents, area workers, and those traveling through the area on the freeway or other roads. The Tier I EIS evaluated visual impacts in a general manner. The Tier II analysis provides an in-depth examination based on Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) visual impact methods.

3.9.1 Studies Performed and Coordination Conducted

This section incorporates studies documented in the *SR 167 Tier II EIS Visual Quality Discipline Report* (Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] 2001). Visual quality assessments were conducted in accordance with the FHWA Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (FHWA 1988).

Objective descriptions are used to quantify the visual impacts. Three criteria used to perform an appraisal of the landscape visual quality include vividness, intactness and unity. Each of the three criteria is independent and each is intended to evaluate one aspect of visual quality. For each criterion, the evaluator assigns a rating from 10 to 0 for very high to very low, respectively. Definitions of these terms are as follows:

Vividness: The memorability of the visual impression received from contrasting landscape elements as they combine to form a striking and distinctive visual pattern. These elements include the landform, water, vegetation and manmade development.

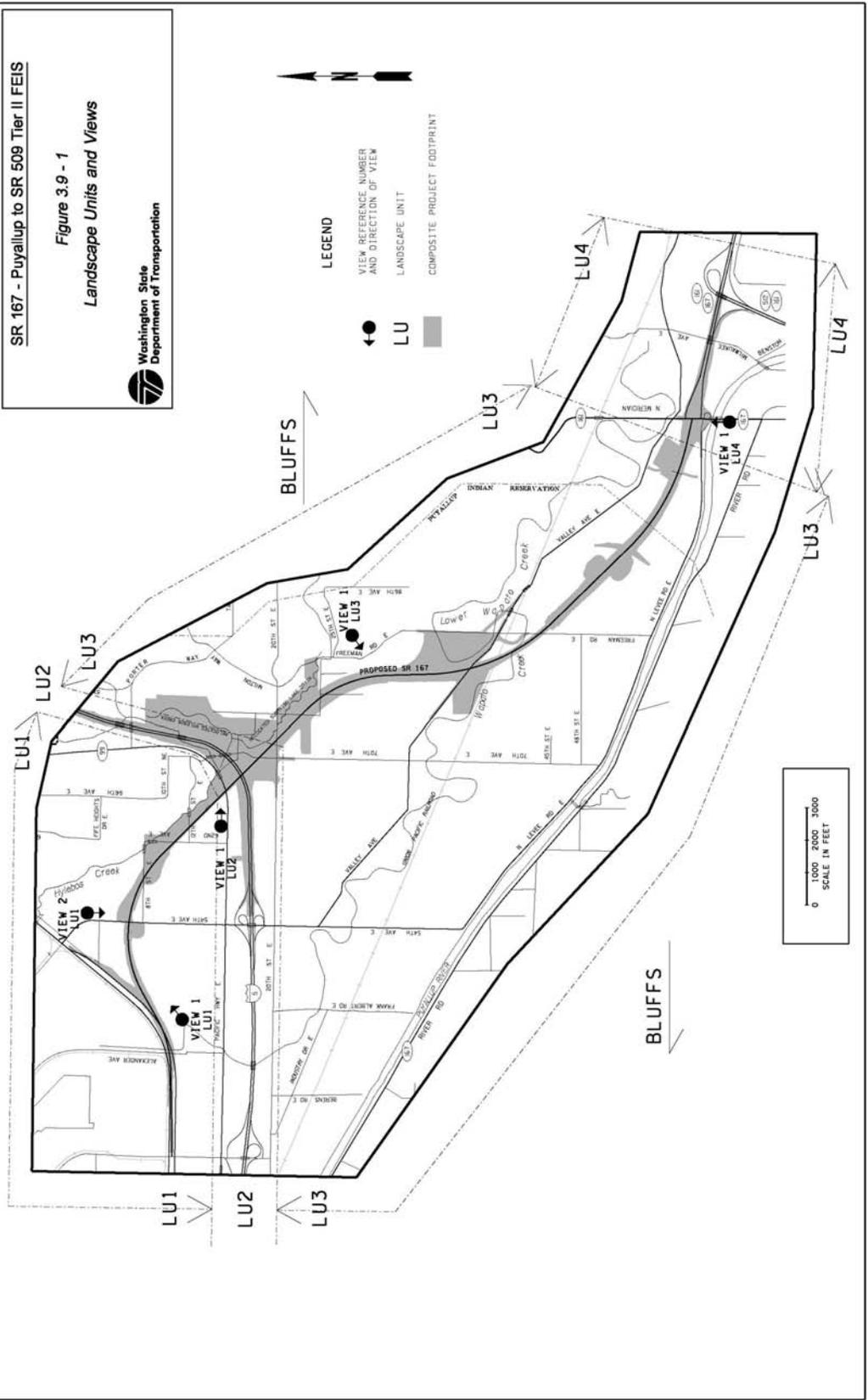
Intactness: The integrity of visual order in the natural and man-built landscape and the extent to which the landscape is free from visual encroaching features.

Unity: The degree to which the visual resources of the landscape join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern. Unity refers to the compositional harmony or inter-compatibility between landscape elements.

The study area was divided into four Landscape Units (LUs), which are shown in Figure 3.9-1. The LUs are based on viewshed areas that have similar characteristics. The following are the geographic areas used:

- Landscape Unit 1 - SR 509 to Pacific Hwy. E. (SR 99)
- Landscape Unit 2 - I-5 vicinity
- Landscape Unit 3 - south and west of I-5 to just west of North Meridian (SR 161)
- Landscape Unit 4 - vicinity of North Meridian to end of study area at SR 512

Figure 3.9 - 1
Landscape Units and Views



Views within each of the LUs were selected to examine the visual conditions of the project corridor and to assess the visual quality of the roadway. Several throughout the study area were analyzed to assess the change in visual quality between current and proposed conditions. Five of the key views are included in the document. The locations were chosen to show the general visual quality of a given LU and also to take a look at potential changes based on the proposed project. Other criteria that were used for selecting a key view location include: visibility of the project area from the viewpoint, frequency of the public viewing, and the similarity of the view to a larger section of the project.

3.9.2 Affected Environment

The following paragraphs describe the four LUs.

Landscape Unit 1 – (SR 509 to SR 99)

Landscape Unit 1 includes commercial and industrial areas that are primarily Port of Tacoma related. There are one- and two-story warehousing buildings, rail facilities and large automotive storage facilities. Overhead lighting and power lines are dispersed throughout the area. The area where the proposed SR 167 would connect with SR 509 is mainly undeveloped or sparsely developed. A large open field is located in the vicinity of 4th Street East and east of 54th Avenue East. The majority of the vegetation is scotch broom and grasses. Views of the bluffs to the north are dominant due to the limited amount of large trees. Views of the downtown Tacoma area are available throughout this LU.

Landscape Unit 1 includes the residential area located above Pacific Avenue known as Fife Heights Ridge. From this location on the bluff, views of the port, downtown Tacoma and the valley are present from varying locations. The area appears to be in transition from farmlands to commercial development. There are small groves of trees scattered throughout the area. The bluffs are well vegetated with plant species indigenous to the area.

Landscape Unit 2 – (I-5 Vicinity)

Landscape Unit 2 encompasses the commercial areas along Pacific Highway East and I-5 between the 54th/I-5 interchange and the King County Line. Just north of the proposed SR 167/I-5 Interchange and west of SR 99 is the transitional area between commercial establishments and rural residential areas. The area is bordered along the northwest side by a bluff. The bluff will remain vegetated with a mixture of conifers and deciduous trees and shrubs as it is not suitable for building. Along Pacific Avenue, the majority of the plant material is ornamental varieties used for commercial landscapes. Power poles, telephone lines and billboard signs are dominant.

I-5 is a dominant component of this LU. Views of the freeway are available, at least in part, in this area. Views from the freeway include the bluffs, relocated Hylebos Creek to the east, the Cascade Mountains to the southeast, Mt. Rainier and the Puyallup Valley, and commercial businesses. Advertisement signs, overhead power lines and lights are also dominant in the viewshed.

The I-5 corridor consists of numerous commercial buildings, business signs, luminaries for the highway, directional and informational highway signs and the bluffs in the distance. The area is disjointed, and has little vividness, intactness, or unity.

Landscape Unit 3 – (I-5 to SR 161)

Landscape Unit 3 is located on the south side of I-5, and it has some commercial and industrial complexes but is still primarily rural farm area. The majority of the area is flat agricultural land bounded by bluffs on the east and west sides. Individual homes, small clusters of housing developments, farm buildings and warehouses are scattered throughout the area. Most elements in this LU are unobtrusive although large structures such as two-story barns are part of the viewshed. Groves of trees are sparsely located throughout the valley. The densest stands of trees are northeast of the intersection of North Levee Road and Freeman Road. Wet or muddy areas occur between 70th Avenue East and 54th Avenue East, and west of 54th Avenue East and in wooded areas adjacent to the Union Pacific Railroad yard. Heavily vegetated bluffs occur on the east and west borders of the study area. Mount Rainier can be seen in the distance. Views of I-5 are limited. Two lane rural roads crisscross the valley floor. Overhead power poles and luminaries are limited in this area.

Views from the east bluffs (Milton) include the valley, the bluffs to the west and I-5. These views are somewhat limited by existing vegetation along the bluffs. Residences on the west bluff have views across the valley towards Milton and Mt. Rainier.

The Puyallup River and Wapato Creek are present in this LU, but are not dominant factors. The Puyallup River is located within a levee system; Wapato Creek's small size limits its dominance. The Union Pacific Railroad also is not a dominant element, even though it runs down the middle of the valley.

The Puyallup Recreation Center is located in this LU. It consists of several buildings and baseball fields. The facility is bordered by farmland with views of the valley to the northwest, bluffs to the west and large commercial buildings to the south. In the vicinity of the Milwaukee Avenue and the existing SR 167 interchange the area is highly developed with commercial and retail businesses. Advertisement signs, overhead power lines and luminaries are present.

Landscape Unit 4 – (SR 161 to SR 512)

Landscape Unit 4 is in the vicinity of the existing SR 167/SR 512 Interchange. Views of the Puyallup River are limited to the bridge crossing area. Despite the proximity of the Puyallup River, views of the water are limited because of the containment levee. Vegetation and buildings block most other views of the river.

In the vicinity of Milwaukee Avenue and the existing SR 167 Interchange, the area is highly developed with commercial and retail businesses. Advertisement signs, overhead power lines and luminaries are present.

The SR 167/SR 512 Interchange is a large scale and dominating entity. The locally significant Carson chestnut tree is located just inside the interchange. This large tree is a focal point when heading eastbound on SR 167.

3.9.3 Impacts of Operation

Visual impact analysis is done on the landscape with and without the facility. For this reason, only the impacts of operation are considered. The visual impacts of construction are considered temporary in nature and include elements such as night construction lights, bridge scaffolding, construction signs, detour roads and miscellaneous construction vehicles.

Cumulative impacts to visual quality are not discussed because the proposed transportation project is not likely to contribute, either positively, negatively, nor is it likely to alter the magnitude of other foreseeable impacts.

No Build Alternative

The visual impacts of adding a slightly to substantially elevated freeway to the existing landscape would be avoided. Changes in visual character would reflect changes in land use, primarily, conversion of farmland and undeveloped areas to commercial/industrial facilities. Local jurisdictions and WSDOT would continue making improvements to their respective facilities. These improvements may include park-and-ride lots, intersection signalization, lane widening, and non-motorized travel improvements. The visual impact of these improvements would incrementally alter the views within the study area.

Build Alternative (Preferred)

Table 3.9-1 summarizes visual quality ratings for the key views under existing and proposed conditions. Descriptions of existing key views are presented below with subsequent discussions on impacts.

Table 3.9-1: Visual Quality Ratings for Key Views under Existing (E) and Proposed (P) Conditions

View	Vividness	Intactness	Unity	Average
	E/P	E/P	E/P	E/P
1, LU1	5/4	6/4	7/4	6/4
2, LU1	4/4	4/3	4/3	4/3.3
1, LU2	5/4	5/3	4/3	7/3.3
1, LU3	7/5	8/5	8/6	7.7/5.3
1, LU4	4/3	3/3	3/3	3.3/3

Ranking: 10 very high – 0 very low

Landscape Unit 1 – (SR 509 to SR 99)

Mainline

The proposed alignment will be built on a raised embankment throughout most of this LU. This new visual line element will be dominant and will lessen the overall vividness in the unit. However, due to the amount of existing manmade elements, including structures and other roads, this LU already ranks low in intactness.

Visual unity in those areas where the mainline traverses agricultural land will be negatively impacted. In urban/industrial areas, the mainline will also create negative impacts due to its visual dominance on raised embankments over buildings, roadways and power lines.

The proposed roadway will create a dominant feature in the viewshed and block views across the valley floor to the bluffs in the distance for a few residences. The area just to the north of the proposed roadway is proposed for a large riparian restoration site. This will require the removal of most of the manmade structures between the roadway and Hylebos Creek, including a portion of 8th Street East and 62nd Avenue East, creating a substantial open space in the area. The removal of the existing structures will open views of the roadway for those residences located on the bluffs to the west.

54th Avenue East Partial Interchange

Preferred Loop Ramp Option.

The southbound off ramp and northbound on ramp both are elevated to match the mainline at one end and terminate at existing street grade at the other end. The northbound loop ramp is a relatively compact alignment but the raised embankment will still visually dominate the surrounding area negatively impacting vividness and intactness. The southbound off ramp, at least for the raised embankment portion, will create a dominant linear visual element that will also negatively impact vividness and intactness.

Half Diamond Option.

The southbound off ramp and northbound on ramp both are elevated to match the mainline at one end and terminate at existing street grade at the other end. The southbound diamond off ramp is the same as in the loop ramp option. The visual impact for the southbound ramp is also the same. The northbound diamond on ramp is much more linear in form than in the loop ramp option. The longer ramp would create a very dominant feature. The ramp would be located in a relatively open area where the raised linear embankment would negatively impact vividness, intactness and unity.

Figure 3.9-2 shows the vicinity of Alexander Avenue and SR 509, looking north east. The new interchange connection between SR 509 and SR 167 will be elevated in this area, and the views from the current SR 509 will change. Bridge structures and embankment structures will dominate the viewshed from SR 509, lowering the overall intactness. From the houses on the bluffs to the east, the viewshed will change, but the new road will not be a dominant structure, due to the viewing distance. Locations on the elevated roadway will provide views of Commencement Bay, the bluffs, the Port of Tacoma area, and Mt. Rainier.



EXISTING VIEW



CONCEPTUAL VIEW OF ROADWAY



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**

SR 167 - Puyallup to SR 509 Tier II FEIS

Figure 3.9-2

View 1, LU1: Vicinity of Alexander Road and State Route 167/509 Interchange

Gx1136

Figure 3.9-3 depicts the vicinity of 54th Avenue East and 4th Street East, looking south. The roadway will be on fill material up to 54th Avenue East where it becomes a bridge structure. The area currently is disjointed with manmade elements including commercial buildings, residential houses, power lines, signs, luminaries, etc. The new roadway, due to its mass and height, will stand out as a key element. The roadway will be out of human scale for the residential houses that are not removed as part of the project. The roadway embankment will block views, although limited, to the north and south. However, it will provide an element of continuity within the viewshed. The roadway will have a negative impact on the viewshed.

The lines of this structure somewhat follow the lines of the existing background hills, which lend to an increased sense of unity to the viewshed, but detracts from the existing vividness and intactness. Lighting from the structure and from headlights will alter the viewshed at night. There would be a negative visual impact to the viewshed.

Landscape Unit 2 – (I-5 Vicinity)

Mainline

The proposed alignment will be built on a structure and raised embankment throughout this LU. This new visual line element will be dominant and will lessen the overall vividness in the unit. However, because of the amount of existing manmade elements, including structures and I-5, this LU already ranks low in intactness.

The Hylebos creek located east of Interstate 5 and north of proposed State Route 167 is currently mostly open area. The use of this area for relocation of Hylebos creek will not add additional manmade elements to the view shed. Limited views of the relocated Hylebos Creek will be possible from several of the elevated structures at the interchange.

Interstate 5 Interchange

The proposed ramps and structures will create substantial negative visual impacts in the area. The three levels of new elevated roadway will block views from nearby hillside homes. These new structures lower vividness, intactness and unity due to their mass and scale.

Views from I-5 itself will be negatively impacted as well. The relatively flat open spaces currently allow motorists panoramic views both northbound and southbound. These vistas will be curtailed by the new structures. Where existing I-5 motorists had felt sunshine and seen open sky, they now will experience a shaded, concrete canopy over the interstate through the proposed I-5 interchange.



54TH AVENUE EAST

EXISTING VIEW



PROPOSED ROADWAY

CONCEPTUAL VIEW OF ROADWAY

SR 167 - Puyallup to SR 509 Tier II FEIS

Figure 3.9-3

View 2, LU1: Corner of 54th Avenue East and 4th Street, Looking South



Gx1136