

4.1 AESTHETICS

4.1.1 Setting

a. Overall Visual Character of the MBSST Network. The Master Plan corridor stretches the entire length of Santa Cruz County from the San Mateo County line north of Davenport past the Pajaro River in Watsonville to connect to Monterey County's MBSST system, and into the town of Pajaro at the rail right-of-way southern terminus. The visual character of the approximately 50-mile corridor is diverse, unique, and highly scenic. Along the primary alignment, the MBSST Network connects to the scenic coastal bluffs in the north county and traverses the rural agricultural and open space lands of the south county. Dense urban areas characterize the central portion of the proposed alignment.

The topography of the nearly 50-mile alignment varies from flat to steep and rugged. Views of Monterey Bay and the Pacific Ocean are available for much of the length of the MBSST Network. Other primary views along the trail corridor include agricultural crop production, open space, hillsides, and urban areas.

The MBSST Network corridor is divided into three reaches: northern, central, and Watsonville. The visual characteristics of each reach are discussed below.

Northern Reach. The northern reach of the MBSST Network is approximately 22.74 miles long, beginning at the San Mateo/Santa Cruz county line on Highway 1, just north of the Waddell Bluffs, and continuing south to the northern Santa Cruz city limits near Schaffer Road (refer to Figure 2-5 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). The northern reach is characterized by expansive views of the Pacific Ocean from steep coastal bluffs that extend from Waddell Creek to Yellow Bank Beach at Coastal Dairies. South of Coastal Dairies, the visual character transitions to a more rural agricultural and natural coastal mesa environment as the alignment moves south to Schaffer Road. There are numerous small coves and beach strands with informal footpaths down to the beach shore. Large sections of the coastal edge are owned by California State Parks with several scenic rest stops along Highway 1 providing passive recreation access to beaches, coastal bluffs, and inland parkland trails. Much of the land is flat south of Coast Dairies with intermittent rolling hills giving way to steep coastal cliffs further north. Typical views along the northern reach are shown in Figure 4.1-1.

Central Reach. The central reach is approximately 13.46 miles long, beginning at the City of Santa Cruz northern boundary near Shaffer Road and extending southeast to Seascapes Park just south of Aptos (refer to Figure 2-7 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). The central reach is characterized by densely populated coastal urban areas. Segment 7, in the northern portion of the central reach, includes connections to several scenic areas, including: Wilder Ranch State Park, Younger Lagoon Reserve, Antonelli Pond Park, Natural Bridges State Beach, and the Cliff Drive coastal walk. The southern portion of the central reach parallels the coast, meandering atop the steep coastal bluffs and multiple residential and resort areas. Access to coastal areas and peaks of Monterey Bay are available from a variety of areas along the central reach. Views therefore include a mix of dense urban areas and coastal vistas. Typical views along the central reach are shown in Figure 4.1-2.



View of coastal bluffs and cliffs.



View of coast line from a coastal bluff trail, facing north; segment 1.



View of rail line right-of-way; segment 5.



View of coast line from Highway 1, facing south; segment 1.

Northern Reach Visual Resources

Source: RRM, 2011.

Figure 4.1-1a

RTC



View from a coastal bluff in Capitola, looking south toward Aptos; segment 11.



View of Capitola City Beach and pier from the MBSST Network corridor; beginning of segment 11.



View of rail line right-of-way at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, facing north; segment 8.



View of rail line right-of-way in Capitola looking toward the Capitola Rail Bridge; segment 11.

Watsonville Reach. The Watsonville reach is approximately 13.43 miles long, beginning at railroad mile marker 10 near Seascapes Village Park and ending at Railroad Avenue in Monterey County (refer to Figure 2-9 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). This reach parallels the coastal edge for approximately one mile before it begins following the San Andreas Road alignment inland as it heads south and east. The landscape is primarily open space with some residential areas near Manresa, tapering off to rural farm and agricultural lands further to the south. As the trail alignment enters the City of Watsonville, the visual character transitions to a more urban environment. The visual character of the Watsonville reach is therefore distinguished by coastal vistas, expansive and intense agricultural areas, and open space in the northern portion of the reach; and urban land uses in the southern portion of the reach. Typical views along the Watsonville reach are shown in Figure 4.1-3.

b. Scenic Highways. There are no officially designated state scenic highways in Santa Cruz County. However, Highway 1 is listed as an eligible state scenic highway by the California Department of Transportation, as are Highways 9, 17, and 152. The proposed MBSST Network would parallel Highway 1 in the northern reach. Through the central reach the proposed alignment would deviate from Highway 1 until segment 11 near New Brighton State Beach, where the proposed alignment would come within 350 feet of Highway 1. Segment 12 crosses Highway 1 into Aptos Village and then crosses back over Highway 1 before heading southwest to the coastline. The proposed alignment does not encounter Highway 1 again until segment 18, where the proposed MBSST Network would cross under the highway as it enters the City of Watsonville.

The County of Santa Cruz and City of Watsonville both designate highways and roadways as locally scenic. The County of Santa Cruz designates the following roadways, which abut either the northern or Watsonville reaches, as scenic:

- *Highway 1*
- *Highway 129/Riverside Drive*
- *Bonny Doon Road (from Highway 1 to Pine Flat Road)*
- *Swanton Road (from Highway 1 at Davenport Landing to Highway 1 at Greyhound Rock)*
- *Beach Road – from Highway 1 to Palm Beach*
- *Bonita Drive and San Andreas Road – from Highway 1 to Beach Road*
- *Buena Vista Drive – from San Andreas Road to Larkin Valley Road*
- *Sand Dollar Drive*
- *Sunset Beach and Shell Road*

The City of Watsonville designates Highway 1 and Riverside Drive/Highway 129 (from Highway 1 to Salsipuedes Creek/San Benito County) as scenic highways. Neither the City of Santa Cruz nor the City of Capitola designates additional local roadways in the central reach as scenic.



View of agricultural land adjacent to the MBSST Network corridor; segment 17.



View of La Selva Beach parking lot from the MBSST Network corridor; beginning of segment 15.



View of Harkins Slough from the MBSST Network corridor; segment 17.



View of rail line right-of-way, adjacent open space, and agriculture.

Watsonville Reach Visual Resources

Source: RRM, 2011.

Figure 4.1-1c

RTC

c. Lighting. The extent of existing lighting varies along the length of the proposed MBSST Network corridor. Within the northern reach, existing adjacent lighting is minimal and limited to residences and businesses in and near Davenport. In the central reach, adjacent urban lighting, including from roadways and crossings, illuminates portions of the rail corridor. In the Watsonville reach, night lighting is limited to lighting associated with adjacent residential areas near Manresa State Beach and the City of Watsonville. The rail corridor itself does not currently contribute to night lighting or daytime glare in the project vicinity.

d. Landscaping. Currently there are existing segments of the MBSST Network corridor that follow highly urbanized areas with landscape treatments existing along street corridors, parks, adjacent open space, harbor edges, and beachfront areas. In less urbanized area, the MBSST Network corridor does not currently include landscaping.

e. Regulatory Setting.

Santa Cruz County.

Santa Cruz County General Plan. The Conservation and Open Space Element of the Santa Cruz County General Plan includes objectives and policies to protect visual resources. The objectives and policies applicable to this project are discussed below.

Policy 5.10.2 *Development Within Visual Resource Areas. Recognize that visual resources of Santa Cruz County possess diverse characteristics and that the resources worthy of protection may include, but are not limited to, ocean views, agricultural fields, wooded forests, open meadows, and mountain hillside views. Require projects to be evaluated against the context of their unique environment and regulate structure height, setbacks and design to protect these resources consistent with the objectives and policies of this section. Require discretionary review for all development within the visual resource area of Highway One, outside of the Urban/Rural boundary, as designated on the GP/LCP Visual Resources Map and apply the design criteria of Section 13.20.130 of the County's zoning ordinance to such development.*

Policy 5.10.3 *Protection of Public Vistas. Protect significant public vistas as described in policy 5.10.2 from all publicly used roads and vista points by minimizing disruption of landform and aesthetic character caused by grading operations, timber harvests, utility wires and poles, signs, inappropriate landscaping and structure design. Provide necessary landscaping to screen development which is unavoidably sited within these vistas.*

Policy 5.10.4 *Preserving Natural Buffers. Preserve the vegetation and landform of natural wooded hillsides which serve as a backdrop for new development. Also comply with policy 8.6.6 regarding protection of ridgetops and natural landforms.*

Policy 5.10.5 *Preserving Agricultural Vistas. Continue to preserve the aesthetic value of agricultural vistas. Encourage development to be consistent with the agricultural character of the community. Structures appurtenant to agricultural uses on agriculturally designated parcels shall be considered to be compatible with the agricultural character of surrounding areas.*

- Policy 5.10.6 *Preserving Ocean Vistas. Where public ocean vistas exist, require that these vistas be retained to the maximum extent possible as a condition of approval for any new development.*
- Policy 5.10.7 *Open Beaches and Blufftops. Prohibit the placement of new permanent structures which would be visible from a public beach, except when allowed on existing parcels of record, or for shoreline protection and for public beach access. Use the following criteria for allowed structures:*
- (a) Allow infill structures (typically residences on existing lots of record) where compatible with the pattern of existing development.*
 - (b) Require shoreline protection and access structures to use natural materials and finishes to blend with the character of the area and integrate with the landform.*
- Policy 5.10.8 *Significant Tree Removal Ordinance. Maintain the standards in the County's existing ordinance which regulates the removal of significant trees and other major vegetation in the Coastal Zone, and provide appropriate protection for significant trees and other major vegetation in areas of the County located within the Urban Services Line.*
- Policy 5.10.11 *Development Visible from Rural Scenic Roads. In the viewsheds of rural scenic roads, require new discretionary development, including development envelopes in proposed land divisions, to be sited out of public view, obscured by natural landforms and/or existing vegetation. Where proposed structures on existing lots are unavoidably visible from scenic roads, identify those visual qualities worthy of protection (see policy 5.10.2) and require the siting, architectural design and landscaping to mitigate impacts on those visual qualities.*
- Policy 5.10.12 *Development Visible from Urban Scenic Roads. In the viewsheds of urban scenic roads, require new discretionary development to improve the visual quality through siting, architectural design, landscaping and appropriate signage.*
- Policy 5.10.13 *Landscaping Requirements. All grading and land disturbance projects visible from scenic roads shall conform to the following visual mitigation conditions:*
- (a) Blend contours of the finished surface with the adjacent natural terrain and landscape to achieve a smooth transition and natural appearance; and*
 - (b) Incorporate only characteristic or indigenous plant species appropriate for the area.*
- Policy 5.10.14 *Protecting Views in the North Coast and Bonny Doon. In order to preserve the agricultural and coastal grassland vistas of the North Coast and Bonny Doon Highway 1 view corridor, prohibit the division of all grassland habitat as mapped on the County's Resource Constraints Map.*
- Policy 5.10.17 *Swanton Road Coastal Special Scenic Area. In the Swanton Road Scenic area (north of Last Chance Road toward Highway 1), require new development to be hidden from public view. Utilize parcel recombinations and other techniques as appropriate to accomplish this; and at a minimum, require dense landscape screening when it would be impossible to locate otherwise permissible development*

so as to place it out of public view. Vegetative screenings shall be consistent with patterns and type of existing vegetation and comprised of indigenous species.

Policy 5.10.18 *Signs Visible from Scenic Roads. Actively discourage the placement of signs which will be visible from scenic roads; where allowed, require compliance with the County Sign ordinance to minimize disruption of the natural scenic qualities of the viewshed. Give priority to sign abatement programs from scenic roads.*

Policy 5.10.19 *Highway One Signage in Rural Areas. In the rural Highway 1 corridor, allow only Caltrans standard directional, access, and business identification signs except for the commercial area at Davenport.*

Policy 5.10.20 *Highway One Signage in Urban Areas. In the urban Highway 1 corridor, allow signage where consistent with the Sign ordinance and any applicable village, town, community, or specific plan.*

Policy 5.10.22 *Requirement for Sign Plans. Require new project submittal applications to include standard road sign designs for directional, access, and business identification and designate appropriate locations for these signs consistent with the County Sign ordinance and Caltrans requirements.*

In addition, Policy 5.10.10 designates scenic roads and highways in the County, and requires that public vistas from these roads be afforded the highest level of protection. Refer to Section 4.1.1(b) (Scenic Highways) for a list of designated scenic roads and highways in the County.

Policy 5.10.16 additionally designates the Bonny Doon sandstone formations and the area enclosed by the Swanton Road and Highway 1 scenic roads as Coastal Special Scenic Areas. The area enclosed by Swanton Road and Highway 1 is easterly adjacent to the MBSST Network corridor in the northern reach.

Santa Cruz County Municipal Code. Chapter 13.20.130 (Design criteria for Coastal Zone developments) of the Santa Cruz County Municipal Code outlines design criteria for projects sited anywhere in the Coastal Zone. Criteria applicable to the MBSST Network include:

- 1) Visual Compatibility. All new development shall be sited, designed and landscaped to be visually compatible and integrated with the character of surrounding neighborhoods or areas.*
- 2) Minimum Site Disturbance. Grading, earth moving, and removal of major vegetation shall be minimized. Developers shall be encouraged to maintain all mature trees over six inches in diameter except where circumstances require their removal, such as obstruction of the building site, dead or diseased trees, or nuisance species. Special landscape features (rock outcroppings, prominent natural landforms, tree groupings) shall be retained.*
- 3) Ridgeline Development. Structures located near ridges shall be sited and designed not to project above the ridgeline or tree canopy at the ridgeline. Land divisions which would create parcels whose only building site would be exposed on a ridgetop shall not be permitted.*
- 4) Landscaping. When a landscaping plan is required, new or replacement vegetation shall be compatible with surrounding vegetation and shall be suitable to the climate, soil, and ecological characteristics of the area. The County's adopted landscape criteria shall be used as a guide.*

- 5) *Fences, walls, and hedges shall be sited and designed so that they do not block significant public views and so that they do not significantly adversely impact significant public views and scenic character.*

Section 13.20.130(C) further defines design criteria for projects located in designated rural scenic resource areas. Criteria relevant to the MBSST Network include:

- 1) *Location of Development. Development shall be located, if possible, on parts of the site not visible or least visible from the public view. Development shall not block views of the shoreline from scenic road turnouts, rest stops or vista points.*
- 2) *Site Planning. Development shall be sited and designed to fit the physical setting carefully so that its presence is subordinate to the natural character of the site, maintaining the natural features (streams, major drainage, mature trees, dominant vegetative communities). Screening and landscaping suitable to the site shall be used to soften the visual impact of development in the viewshed.*
- 3) *Signs. Signs shall minimize disruption of the scenic qualities of the viewshed.*
 - a) *Materials, scale, location and orientation of signs shall harmonize with surrounding elements.*
 - b) *Directly lighted, brightly colored, rotating, reflective, blinking, flashing or moving signs are prohibited.*
 - c) *Illumination of signs shall be permitted only for State and County directional and informational signs, except in designated commercial and visitor serving zone districts.*
 - d) *In the Highway 1 viewshed, except within the Davenport commercial area, only Caltrans standard signs and public parks, or parking lot identification signs, shall be permitted to be visible from the highway. These signs shall be of natural unobtrusive materials and colors.*

Section 13.20.130(D) defines design criteria for projects located on blufftops and visible from beaches, including:

- 1) *Blufftop Development. Blufftop development and landscaping (e.g., decks, patios, structures, trees, shrubs, etc.) in rural areas shall be set back from the bluff edge a sufficient distance to be out of sight from the shoreline, or if infeasible, not visually intrusive. In urban areas of the viewshed, site development shall conform to subsections (C)(2) and (3) of this section.*
- 2) *Beaches. The scenic integrity of open beaches shall be maintained:*
 - a) *No new permanent structures on open beaches shall be allowed, except where permitted pursuant to Chapter 16.10 (Geologic Hazards) or 16.20 SCCC (Grading Regulations).*
 - b) *The design of permitted structures shall minimize visual intrusion, and shall incorporate materials and finishes which harmonize with the character of the area. Natural materials are preferred.*

City of Santa Cruz Regulations.

City of Santa Cruz General Plan 2030. The Community Design chapter of the City of Santa Cruz General Plan includes several policies and actions aimed at preservation of natural features and provision of appropriate design. These policies and actions are listed below.

Policy CD1.1 *Preserve natural features that visually define areas within the city.*



- Action CD1.1.2 *Protect the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary and the shoreline and views to and along the ocean, recognizing their value as natural and recreational resources.*
- Policy CD1.2 *Ensure that the scale, bulk, and setbacks of new development preserve important public scenic views and vistas.*
- Policy CD1.3 *Ensure that development is designed to be in harmony with natural topography and vegetation.*
- Policy CD1.4 *Ensure that development adjacent to open space lands maintains visual and physical connections to that open space.*
- Policy CD1.5 *Ensure that new development adjacent to the San Lorenzo River relates to the river in its design.*
- Action CD1.5.1 *Enhance the prominence of the San Lorenzo River as a natural feature that provides structure, orientation, and recreational enjoyment by including it in surrounding area and management plans.*
- Action CD1.5.2 *Provide incentives for new development adjacent to the San Lorenzo River that includes patios overlooking the river, enhanced connections to the levee trails, and other design features that connect the built environment to the river*
- Policy CD3.1 *Develop and maintain physical and visual linkages between key areas in the city.*
- Action CD3.1.1 *Strengthen the linkage between Downtown, the Beach Area, and San Lorenzo River through amendments to corresponding Area Plans and the Zoning Ordinance.*
- Policy CD3.4 *Encourage new development to incorporate “universal design” principles.*
- Action CD4.1.4 *Protect and enhance historic street patterns, rail lines, walls, and pedestrian walkways to emphasize historic routes and help define districts and neighborhoods.*
- Action CD4.1.5 *Maintain the visual prominence of important city landmarks and destinations as viewed from major circulation routes and public viewpoints when possible.*
- Policy CD4.3 *Ensure attractive, functional, and appropriate landscaping throughout the city.*
- Policy CD5.2 *Require new development to include elements that relate to the pedestrian scale.*
- Action CD5.2.2 *Encourage the incorporation of public benches and natural seating areas along public walkways and in public plazas and parks.*



- Policy CD5.3 *Encourage increased access to existing community facilities, such as schools, to serve as neighborhood parks and open space.*
- Policy LU3.11 *Protect open spaces that provide scenic, recreational, educational, and environmental benefits.*
- Action LU3.11.1 *Continue to recognize and protect the Pacific Ocean, Monterey Bay, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary as natural resources and valuable open space.*
- Policy PR1.11 *Improve the scenic and recreational value of the Riverfront.*

The Hazards, Safety, and Noise chapter of the City of Santa Cruz General Plan additionally includes the following goal, policy, and action related to light pollution.

- Goal HZ5 *Minimal light pollution*
- Policy HZ5.1 *Reduce light pollution.*
- Action HZ5.1.3 *Consider appropriateness of lighting when reviewing proposed development or renovation of parks and recreation facilities.*

City of Capitola.

City of Capitola General Plan. The Capitola General Plan is currently being updated, and a Public Review Draft General Plan is anticipated for June 2013. The current General Plan was adopted in 1989. The Open Space, Parks and Recreation chapter of the existing Capitola General Plan contains the following goals and policies related to visual resources.

- Goal 1 *To preserve the existing significant natural features within the community including: the coastal bluffs, beach area, creekways, gulches, and major tree cover.*
- Goal 5 *To conserve and enhance the waterfront area for public use and views.*
- Policy 1 *The following significant natural features are of ecological, visual and safe well being to the community and should be included in the Open Space system in essentially their natural state:*
- *The waterfront area except for modifications needed for cliff stabilization, beach maintenance, and wharf improvements,*
 - *The coastal bluffs with modifications needed for stabilization and public safety.*
- Policy 15 *No new permanent structures shall be permitted on the open, sandy beach area of Capitola because of their potential impact on visual resources, hazards and public recreation, except for facilities required for public health and safety (lifeguard stands, approved beach erosion control structures).*
- Policy 16 *Permitted development shall not block or detract from the public view to and along Capitola's shoreline.*

Capitola Municipal Code. Chapter 17.29 of the Capitola Municipal Code outlines requirements for the Parks and Open Space zoning district. The purpose of this zone is to designate areas which:

- A. *Are to be set aside or have been previously set aside as permanent scenic easements, forest preserves, riparian corridors, public waterfront or beach areas, public parks, or similar public open space; or*
- B. *Are to be set aside by the owners as buffer areas separating district from recreational, open space/scenic or natural resource areas; or*
- C. *Should be retained in their existing and undeveloped open character because of excessive danger from flood, fire and erosion.*

Pursuant to Section 17.29.060, the development standards for parks and open space districts are:

- A. *Architectural and site review committee approval is required for all buildings and structures which are accessory to permitted uses of the land;*
- B. *Any structure or use or removal of any vegetation or natural materials that, in the opinion of the planning commission, would defeat the purpose of this district is prohibited;*
- C. *Development in this district shall be subordinate to its recreational, scenic, or natural resource purpose consistent with all applicable local coastal program policies. Natural resource protection shall include protection of arroyos, creeks and riparian corridors, woodlands and other environmentally sensitive habitats; and*
- D. *No new permanent structures shall be permitted on the open, sandy beach area of Capitola except for facilities required for public health and safety (i.e., lifeguard stands, approved beach erosion control structures). (Ord. 677 § 16 (part), 1989)*

City of Watsonville.

City of Watsonville General Plan. An updated City of Watsonville General Plan was adopted by the City Council in January 2013, but was subsequently challenged in court and is on hold until resolution on the legal issues can be reached. Therefore, at this time, the 2005 General Plan remains in effect. The existing 2005 General Plan, adopted in 1994, identifies nine scenic roadways in the City, including two in the vicinity of the MBSST Network: Riverside Drive/Highway 129 (from Highway 1 to Salsipuedes Creek) and Highway 1. The goals, policies, and implementation measures applicable to this project are discussed below.

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|-----------------|--|
| <u>Goal 5.1</u> | <i>Visual Resources. Preserve and enhance the built and natural visual resources within Watsonville.</i> |
| <u>Goal 5.2</u> | <i>Community Appearance. Blend new development with recognized values of community appearance and scenic qualities, and ensure that new development enhances, rather than detracts from, its surroundings.</i> |
| <u>Goal 5.5</u> | <i>Viewscape. Preserve scenic rural qualities surrounding the urbanized portions of the Planning Area.</i> |
| <u>Goal 5.9</u> | <i>Scenic Corridors. Protect and enhance the views of and from the scenic streets and highways in Watsonville and the Planning Area.</i> |

- Goal 5.10 *Natural Scenic Resources. Conserve and enhance natural resources that contribute to the visual, recreational, and educational aesthetics of Watsonville. Such resources include: wetlands, sloughs, rivers, lakes, hillsides and stands of vegetation.*
- Impl. 5.A.5 *Scenic Resources. The City shall, through its design review process, consider the impact of the development on both the visual quality of the built environment and the scenic quality of natural features including sloughs, wetland, rivers, lakes, hillsides and stands of vegetation.*
- Policy 5.C *Sign Control. The design review process shall be used to ensure that signs (materials, size, color, lettering and location) are aesthetically pleasing and compatible with surroundings.*
- Policy 5.I *Scenic Natural Resources. The City shall conserve and enhance natural resources that contribute to the visual, recreational, and educational aesthetics of Watsonville. Such resources include: wetlands, sloughs, rivers, lakes, hillsides, and stands of vegetation.*
- Goal 9.2 *Open Space Preservation. Preserve the open space and agricultural land uses surrounding the urban limit line which contribute to the economic base, provide scenic vistas, and offer opportunities for scientific exploration.*

Monterey County. Segment 20 of the proposed MBSST Network project, which is 0.74 miles long, would be located in Monterey County. The purpose of this segment is to provide a regional connection to the Monterey County section of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. Implementation of this section would require cooperation and coordination with the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and the County of Monterey. Monterey County General Plan goals and policies, as well as Monterey County Municipal Code regulations, would apply to this segment.

4.1.2 Impact Analysis

a. Methodology and Significance Threshold. A significant effect on the environment is generally defined as a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in the physical environment (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15358). “Environment” in this instance is meant to include objects of aesthetic significance (both natural and man-made). The assessment of aesthetic impacts involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. This analysis focuses on adopted aesthetic policies and the questions in the recommended *State CEQA Guidelines* checklist concerning Aesthetics in order to make determinations.

Evaluation Criteria. A significant impact would occur if the proposed MBSST Network project would result in any of the following conditions:

- 1) *Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;*



- 2) *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;*
- 3) *Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and/or*
- 4) *Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.*

b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

Impact AES-1 **There are no officially designated state scenic highways in Santa Cruz County. Therefore, the proposed MBSST Network project would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway. Impacts would be Class III, less than significant.**

There are no officially designated state scenic highways in Santa Cruz County. Four highways are listed as “eligible” by the California Department of transportation: Highway 1, Highway 9, Highway 17, and Highway 152. The proposed MBSST Network corridor would be visible from portions of Highway 1, particularly in the northern reach. However, because this highway is not an officially designated scenic highway, impacts to scenic resources within a state scenic highway would be less than significant.

It should be noted, however, that several highways and roadways in the vicinity of the MBSST Network are designated as scenic by the County of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville, including Highway 1. Impacts related to scenic vistas from these locally-designated scenic roads are addressed under Impact AES-2, below.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AES-2 **Portions of the proposed MBSST Network would be visible from locally-designated scenic roadways as well as from public viewing areas with access to scenic vistas. However, the project would not result in a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas. Impacts are therefore Class III, less than significant.**

The proposed project is a multi-use recreation trail that would generally follow the Santa Cruz Branch Rail line right-of-way through Santa Cruz County. Views would vary along the nearly 50-mile corridor, including coastal and agricultural vistas in the northern reach, urban and coastal views in the central reach, and agricultural vistas in the Watsonville reach. Potential impacts to these views, including from locally-designated scenic roadways, are described below.

Northern Reach. The proposed MBSST Network would parallel Highway 1 in the northern reach, which is designated as a scenic highway by the County of Santa Cruz. Two other roadways in the northern reach are designated as scenic by the County of Santa Cruz: Bonny Doon Road (from Highway 1 to Pine Flat Road) and Swanton Road (from Highway 1 at

Davenport Landing to Highway 1 at Greyhound Rock). Portions of segment 5 would be visible from Bonny Doon Road where it intersects with Highway 1 and portions of segment 2 would be visible from Swanton Road where it intersects with Highway 1 near Greyhound Rock. The Swanton Road intersection with Highway 1 at Davenport Landing is the transition point from segment 3 to segment 4. Existing views along the northern reach include steep coastal bluffs and coastal mesas, rural agriculture, and the Pacific Ocean. Vistas along this route are considered highly scenic.

Structural improvements along the northern portion of the northern reach (segments 1 and 2) would be limited, as the trail would consist of a Class III on-street/road shoulder bike route, much of which is currently in place. Improvements would therefore be limited to routine road edge clearing, signs, and shoulder pavement striping. The County of Santa Cruz General Plan Policy 5.10.18 discourages the placement of signs which would be visible from scenic roads, but allows limited signage that complies with the County Sign Ordinance and Caltrans standards. Signs along the MBSST Network corridor would be designed to meet all of the required and recommended signing and marking standards developed by Caltrans in Chapter 1000 of the Highway Design Manual and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). Limited signage along segments 1 and 2 would be consistent with the County Sign Ordinance and would not be expected to substantially degrade scenic vistas of the Pacific Ocean, as viewed from Highway 1.

Beginning in segment 3, the proposed MBSST Network would include a new multi-use paved path adjacent to Highway 1. This path would be an approximately twelve foot wide paved surface with center lane striping in some areas. Structural improvements may include: various types of trail fencing; trail furnishings such as benches and seating areas, trash receptacles, bike racks, and picnic and shade shelters; landscaping; night lighting (in some areas); and signage. In addition, parking lot improvements to an existing dirt lot near the Davenport Overlook would be implemented along sub-segment 5.1. Some of these improvements may be visible from Highway 1 and other County-designated scenic roadways. However, much of the trail would be screened from view by existing topography and vegetation, particularly in the southern portion of the northern reach (sub-segment 5.3), where the existing railroad right-of-way deviates from Highway 1. Landscaping would be used as needed to screen the trail from view, in accordance with Santa Cruz County General Plan Policy 5.10.3. The intermittent visibility of the proposed trail and associated structural improvements would not constitute a substantial adverse effect to a scenic vista, as existing views of coastal mesas/bluffs, agriculture, and the Pacific Ocean would not be obstructed.

The northern reach also includes 4.61 miles of coastal bluff trails. These trails would be five to six feet wide, unpaved, and blended into the site character and slope. These unpaved trails would not include structural improvements that could block views from Highway 1 or other public areas. These paths would improve public access to scenic viewing areas and may therefore be considered an improvement rather than a detriment to scenic vistas.

Central Reach. The central reach traverses portions of the unincorporated Santa Cruz County, the City of Santa Cruz, and the City of Capitola. The County of Santa Cruz designates Highway 1 as a scenic highway for the entire length of the county. Neither the City of Santa Cruz nor the City of Capitola designates additional local roadways as scenic. Views from

Highway 1 along the central reach include urban development (particularly through the City of Santa Cruz), transitioning to rolling hills and vegetation as the highway travels south.

Within the central reach of the proposed MBSST Network, the trail alignment would primarily diverge from Highway 1 until segment 11, where the proposed alignment would come within 350 feet of the highway near New Brighton State Beach. The trail would likely not be visible from Highway 1 in this location due to dense intervening vegetation. In segment 12, the trail would cross over to the east side of Highway 1 into Aptos Village and back over Highway 1 before heading southwest to the coastline. The crossing over Highway 1 into Aptos Village from the north is anticipated to consist of retrofitting the existing bridge to allow for pedestrian and bicycle passage. The second crossing (leaving Aptos Village to continue south) would include a new pre-engineered pedestrian and bicycle bridge adjacent to the existing rail bridge. Although new facilities would be added in these locations, they would be attached or adjacent to existing rail bridges. Therefore, the new facilities would not be expected to block views from Highway 1 to a greater extent than existing conditions.

In addition to Highway 1, numerous other scenic vistas are available from public viewing locations along the central reach. These include, but are not limited to: Wilder Ranch State Park, Younger Lagoon Reserve, Antonelli Pond Park, Natural Bridges State Beach, Neary Lagoon Park; and the Cliff Drive coastal walk in the northern portion of the central reach (segments 6 and 7); the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in segment 8; Capitola City Beach and New Brighton State Beach in segment 11; and steep coastal bluffs in segments 13 and 14. Structural improvements along the central reach would include: various types of trail fencing; trail furnishings such as benches and seating areas, trash receptacles, bike racks, and picnic and shade shelters; rest areas containing trail furnishings, kiosks with traveler information, and interpretive signage; new pre-engineered and/or retrofitted bridges; roadway and railway crossings, which may include signals, striping, signs, and/or traffic calming devices; landscaping; night lighting (in some areas); and signage.

Although the proposed MBSST Network project would include the construction of a multi-use trail and associated facilities in areas where highly scenic vistas are available, these facilities would not be expected to substantially degrade these vistas. Signs would comply with Caltrans standards and the City of Santa Cruz Sign Ordinance. In addition, the MBSST Network would not include the construction of new buildings or other large facilities that would have the potential to obstruct or substantially degrade existing scenic vistas. In fact, the trail network would improve public access to scenic viewing areas, and would provide comfort features such as benches and shade structures in these locations, which may be considered an improvement rather than a detriment to scenic vistas.

Watsonville Reach. Scenic views along the Watsonville reach primarily include expansive rural agricultural vistas. Coastal vistas are also prevalent in the northern portion of the Watsonville reach, near Manresa State Beach.

Both the County of Santa Cruz and the City of Watsonville designate Highway 1 and Riverside Drive/Highway 129 (from Highway 1 to Salsipuedes Creek/San Benito County) as scenic highways. The Watsonville reach would cross under Highway 1 in segment 18, but would otherwise not be visible from this highway. Trail improvements along segment 18 would

include a 12-foot wide paved path and adjacent six-foot wide unpaved (decomposed granite) path, fencing, landscaping, and signs. As these improvements would be at a lower elevation than Highway 1, no scenic views would be obstructed.

The MBSST Network would only be visible from Riverside Drive/Highway 129 as it intersects with this roadway at Walker Street in segment 19. Improvements along segment 19 would be limited to the addition of a Class II bike lane along Walker Street and new sidewalks on the inland side of Walker Street beginning at Riverside Drive/Highway 129. Views in this area are industrial in nature, and these improvements would not degrade an existing scenic vista.

The County of Santa Cruz additionally designates the following roadways in the vicinity of the Watsonville reach as scenic:

- *Beach Road – from Highway 1 to Palm Beach*
- *Bonita Drive and San Andreas Road – from Highway 1 to Beach Road*
- *Buena Vista Drive – from San Andreas Road to Larkin Valley Road*
- *Sand Dollar Drive*
- *Sunset Beach and Shell Road*

Beach Road and Bonita Drive are located near segment 15 in the vicinity of Manresa State Beach; Buena Vista Drive is located near the transition between segment 16 and segment 17; Sand Dollar Drive is located near segment 17; and Sunset Beach and Shell Road are located in the southern coastal segment of the Watsonville reach (refer to Figures 2-10d and 2-10e in Section 2.0, *Project Description*).

No improvements would be constructed in the southern coastal section of the MBSST Network, with the exception of the proposed on-street improvements (Class II, Class III and sidewalks) to Beach Street (refer to Figures 2-10c and 2-10d in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). For most of this area, the trail would consist of an existing shoreline beach route (low tide access). Because of the limited extent of improvements, the project would not degrade scenic vistas near Sunset Beach and Shell Road. Portions of segments 15 through 17 would be visible from the remaining designated roadways, and would include 7.55 miles of a multi-use paved path. Structural improvements in this area would include: various types of trail fencing; trail furnishings; at-grade road crossings; rail bridge/culvert crossings; new pre-engineered rail bridge crossings; landscaping; night lighting (in some areas); and signage. Although located in the vicinity of locally-designated scenic roadways, these facilities would be relatively minor and would not be expected to substantially degrade or obstruct scenic vistas.

Mitigating Design Features. The proposed MBSST Network Master Plan contains design guidelines that would limit potential adverse effects to scenic vistas. Specifically, the Master Plan outlines the types of trail fencing to be used in various environments along the trail network, and recommends that fencing along the trail corridor be used conservatively to maintain the open feel and views of the coastal environment. With the exception of privacy fencing – which would be used to provide trespass prevention, security, and privacy for adjacent landowners in urban areas – and provision of fencing where agricultural food safety and security concerns exist, trail fencing would be designed to allow open visibility of the surrounding landscape, thus maintaining access to scenic vistas.

A uniform sign design and logo theme would be provided along the trail. Elements such as bollards to prevent unauthorized trail access, mile post markers to identify specific locations along the trail, directional signs to various places of interest and user services, informational and traffic control signs and a trail logo would all provide necessary information and help to unify the design. Signs along the trail would be designed to meet all of the required and recommended signing and marking standards developed by Caltrans in Chapter 1000 of the Highway Design Manual. In addition, all signs and markings would conform to the standards developed in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). However, signs would be a smaller scale than highway signs, and thus would be unlikely to block scenic vistas.

The trail and other related facilities – including trail furnishings and signage – would be relatively unobtrusive and would not be expected to alter or obstruct views from locally-designated scenic roadways or other public viewing areas. In fact, in many locations the proposed trail network would improve public access to scenic viewing areas, which may be considered an improvement rather than a detriment to scenic vistas. Overall, the proposed facilities would not create a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, and impacts would be considered less than significant.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AES-3 The proposed MBSST Network would introduce physical improvements in the form of a multi-purpose trail, fencing, landscaping, signage, and other facilities in highly scenic areas throughout Santa Cruz County. These features would not substantially degrade the existing character or quality of the MBSST Network corridor. Impacts would be Class III, *less than significant*.

Northern Reach. The visual character of the northern reach is rural and highly scenic, with expansive coastal bluff, Pacific Ocean, and agricultural vistas. The Santa Cruz County General Plan additionally designates Highway 1 and areas outside of the Urban/Rural boundary as a visual resource area. The proposed MBSST Network project would construct limited pedestrian and bicycle improvements to the northernmost portion of the northern reach (segments 1 and 2) and would introduce a new multi-purpose trail along the existing railroad right-of-way for the remainder of the northern reach. Unpaved coastal bluff trails would also be constructed in some segments. Various improvements would be installed along the northern reach, including fencing, trail furnishings, landscaping and signage, as described under Impact AES-2. The most visible improvements would be continuous fencing and shade shelters, since these features would be relatively tall. Fencing height and type along the trail would vary depending on the location and agreements between adjacent land owners and the RTC and whether it is required to address rail security concerns. Where excess right-of-way permits, a landscaped buffer would be provided instead of fencing in order to maintain the open feel and views of the coastal environment. Fencing types for the northern reach would likely be smooth wire fencing or concrete split rail fencing, if not landscape buffers. Smooth wire fencing would be 54 inches high

and split-rail fencing would be 48 inches tall. Shade shelters would only be placed along the trail corridor where existing park facilities are farther than ¼ mile in distance.

Vegetation removal along the corridor would be minimal, as the project would be located within an existing railroad right-of-way. Segments of the proposed trail would be landscaped, which would help to blend the paved pathway into the surrounding vegetation. The landscaping treatment along the proposed MBSST Network would vary with the setting as the trail traverses from one region to another. In areas where the trail is located in and/or adjacent to native landscape settings or rural and agricultural lands (as is the case in the northern reach), every effort would be taken to maintain native and indigenous plant species in the planting and restoration efforts.

Overall, the proposed trail, landscaping, and relatively minor structural improvements along the northern reach would be visually compatible with the coastal bluff and agricultural character of the project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed MBSST Network project would not substantially degrade the existing character or quality of the northern reach.

Central Reach. The visual character of the central reach is primarily urban, with intermittent coastal views. As described under Impact AES-2, improvements through the central reach would include fencing, trail furnishings, landscaping, signage, new pre-engineered and/or retrofitted bridges, and roadway and railway crossings.

As with the northern reach, the most visible improvements, due to their height, would be trail fencing and the occasional shade shelter. Fencing types for the central reach would vary depending on the location and agreements between adjacent land owners and the RTC. In urban and industrial areas, this may include 72 inch tall wire security fencing, 54 inch tall smooth wire fencing, 48 inch tall concrete split-rail fencing, or 72 inch tall privacy fencing. In highly scenic areas, fencing would be used conservatively to maintain the open feel. Security fencing would only be used to provide trespass prevention, security (including rail security concerns), and privacy for adjacent landowners in urban areas. In such areas, this fencing type would be consistent with the urban environment. Shade shelters would only be placed along the trail corridor where existing park facilities are farther than ¼ mile in distance. These and other improvements along the trail corridor would generally appear compatible with the urban landscape within the central reach.

Given that the project would be located within an existing railroad right-of-way, vegetation removal along the corridor would be minimal. In highly urbanized areas of the central reach, landscape treatments exist along some street corridors, parks, open space, harbor edges, and beachfront areas adjacent to the trail. The landscaping for new segments of the MBSST will vary with the setting and with the agency responsible for the design, implementation, and long-term maintenance, but would include a variety of both native and non-native drought tolerant plant palettes. Given the flexibility of plant palettes within the central reach, it is anticipated that landscaping would serve to blend the proposed trail network into the surrounding urban environment.

Overall, the proposed trail, landscaping, and relatively minor structural improvements along the central reach would be visually compatible with both the urban and coastal character of the

project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed MBSST Network project would not substantially degrade the existing character or quality of the central reach.

Watsonville Reach. The visual character of the Watsonville reach ranges from urban and industrial (in portions of the City of Watsonville) to rural agricultural. Coastal vistas are available in the northern portion of the Watsonville reach, near Manresa State Beach. However, the primary visual character of the Watsonville reach is rural agricultural.

As with the northern and central reaches, the most visible improvements, due to their height, would be trail fencing and the occasional shade shelter. Fencing types for the Watsonville reach would vary depending on the location and agreements between adjacent land owners and the RTC and whether it is required to address rail security concerns. In agricultural areas, this would likely include 54 inch tall smooth wire fencing or 48 inch tall concrete split-rail fencing. This type of fencing would allow for an open feel and would not block views of adjacent agricultural lands. Shade shelters would only be placed along the trail corridor where existing park facilities are farther than ¼ mile in distance. These and other improvements along the trail corridor would generally appear compatible with the rural agricultural landscape within the Watsonville reach.

Given that the project would be located within an existing railroad right-of-way, vegetation removal along the corridor would be minimal. Segments of the proposed trail would be landscaped, which would help to blend the paved pathway into the surrounding vegetation. The landscaping treatment along the proposed MBSST Network would vary with the setting as the trail traverses from one region to another. In areas where the trail is located in and/or adjacent to rural and agricultural lands (as is the case in the Watsonville reach), every effort would be taken to maintain native and indigenous plant species in the planting and restoration efforts.

Overall, the proposed trail, landscaping, and relatively minor structural improvements along the Watsonville reach would be visually compatible with the primarily rural agricultural nature of the project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed MBSST Network project would not substantially degrade the existing character or quality of the Watsonville reach.

Mitigating Design Features. The proposed Master Plan includes design standards to ensure that visual character and quality are maintained throughout the length of the proposed trail alignment. All trail furnishings would reflect an ocean theme through the use of wood, stone, self-weathering (rusted) steel and other rustic materials. Specific design guidelines for trail furnishings are provided in the proposed Master Plan for benches and seating areas, trash receptacles, bike racks, picnic and shade shelters, bollards, and trail fencing. Compliance with these design standards would not only facilitate a unified theme, but help ensure visual quality of the trail corridor itself.

The landscaping treatment along the proposed MBSST Network would also serve to enhance the visual character of the proposed MBSST Network, and would vary with the setting as appropriate. Landscape treatment in intense urbanized areas would include both native and non-native drought tolerant plant palettes. Areas where the trail is located in and/or adjacent to native landscape settings, or rural and agricultural lands, would include native and indigenous

plant species. Plant palettes would be determined as part of the design phase for each segment in coordination with the implementing entity.

A uniform sign design and logo theme would be provided along the trail. Elements such as bollards to prevent unauthorized trail access, mile post markers to identify specific locations along the trail, directional signs to various places of interest and user services, informational and traffic control signs and a trail logo would all provide necessary information and help to unify the design.

Finally, the proposed MBSST establishes a Trail ~~Manager~~ Ranger who would be responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the trail facility components. The Trail ~~Manager~~ Ranger would be responsible for landscape maintenance, trash clean up and disposal, graffiti removal, and repairs to trail components. The RTC board would work to identify the agency most appropriate to house a Trail Management Program and how to fund a Trail Manager, Trail Ranger, and/or an Adopt-A-Trail Coordinator position. The Trail Manager would ensure that each element described in the operations and maintenance plan is completed. The establishment of a formal trail operations and maintenance plan would help ensure adequate maintenance of the trail corridor and facilities, thereby avoiding unsightly aesthetic conditions.

Mitigation Measures. The proposed trail, landscaping, and relatively minor structural improvements would be visually compatible with the surrounding environment, while trail design guidelines and an established maintenance program would ensure that the trail maintains a high visual quality. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

Impact AES-4 **The proposed MBSST Network project would introduce new sources of lighting along some segments of the trail. Lighting guidelines in the proposed Master Plan would ensure that impacts related to night lighting would be Class III, less than significant.**

Northern Reach. Within the northern reach, existing lighting is minimal and limited to residences and businesses in and near Davenport. The proposed MBSST Network project may include lighting fixtures in certain locations, primarily where there is considerable evening pedestrian and bicycle commuter traffic. Given the rural nature of the northern reach, installation of lighting for evening bicycle commuters is not expected. However, because each segment would be implemented separately and because design features such as lighting would be at the discretion of implementing agencies, it is assumed as a worst case scenario that lighting would be included along the entire northern reach. If lighting is not designed in such a way to reduce upward directed light, nighttime lighting associated with the trail would potentially affect nighttime views in the vicinity, and could obscure views of the night sky.

Central Reach. In the central reach, adjacent urban lighting, including from roadways and crossings, illuminates portions of the rail corridor. The proposed MBSST Network project may include lighting fixtures in certain locations, primarily to be provided where there is considerable evening pedestrian and bicycle commuter traffic. Given the urbanized nature of the central reach, it is anticipated that evening commuter traffic would compel the installation

of trail lighting along all segments of the central reach. In addition, the central reach would include numerous roadway or rail crossings, some of which would include new lighted traffic or pedestrian activated warning systems. If lighting is not designed in such a way to reduce upward directed light, nighttime lighting associated with the trail would potentially affect nighttime views in the vicinity, and could obscure views of the night sky.

Watsonville Reach. In the Watsonville reach, existing night lighting is limited to lighting associated with residential areas near Manresa State Beach and within the City of Watsonville. The proposed MBSST Network project may include lighting fixtures in certain locations, primarily where there is considerable evening pedestrian and bicycle commuter traffic. Evening pedestrian and bicycle commuter traffic would be more likely within the City of Watsonville than within the rural agricultural areas of the Watsonville reach. However, as a worst case scenario this analysis assumes that lighting could be included along every segment of the Watsonville reach. If lighting is not designed in such a way to reduce upward directed light, nighttime lighting associated with the trail would potentially affect nighttime views in the vicinity, and could obscure views of the night sky.

Mitigating Design Features. The MBSST Network Master Plan requires the use of dark sky compliant lighting, which projects light downward without releasing lighting upwards into the atmosphere or outward past the intended projected path, to illuminate the trail. Such lighting would reduce the potential for nighttime lighting to obscure views of the night sky or otherwise affect nighttime views in the trail vicinity. In addition, although it is conservatively assumed that lighting would be provided along every segment of the proposed trail, lighting would more likely be concentrated in dense urban areas, where considerable nighttime pedestrian and bicycle commuter traffic would be expected. Substantial nighttime lighting already exists in these urban areas, thus minimizing the perceptibility of the additional trail lighting.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation is required beyond the Master Plan requirement that all lighting be dark sky compliant.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be less than significant without mitigation.

c. Cumulative Impacts. Additional development resulting from buildout of Santa Cruz County and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, and Watsonville would allow currently undeveloped areas adjacent to the corridor to be developed. This adjacent, cumulative development may include the conversion of some open space areas along the corridor. If this occurs, the visual quality along the trail corridor would be altered by an increasingly urbanized condition. This could have a potentially significant impact on trail users. However, if the currently proposed design features for the MBSST Network project are implemented, the proposed trail and associated amenities would not have a substantial negative effect on the aesthetic character and scenic value of the corridor. Consequently, the proposed MBSST Network project's contribution to cumulative adverse aesthetic impacts would be less than significant.