3.2 AESTHETICS/VISUAL QUALITY

This section evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed project on the existing visual conditions within MTRP. Design features proposed to reduce or avoid adverse effects to visual quality have been considered as part of the proposed project and their effectiveness is discussed. Most of the project features would be placed belowground, thus avoiding long-term visual impacts. Short-term visual impacts, however, would be evident throughout the project area.

3.2.1 Existing Conditions

In general, the visual quality of an area is defined by its physical characteristics or elements, including landforms, vegetation, water features, color, and diversity. In addition, the perceived visual quality of the region is influenced by other factors including harmony, vividness, adjacent scenery, cultural modifications, and scarcity.

The proposed project area extends from near SR-52 south to Mission Gorge Road, within and adjacent to the existing Water Authority aqueduct easement (Figure 2-3). The project area consists of a series of northeast to southwest trending ridgelines interspersed with mesas and canyons. The Water Authority’s easement is covered with native vegetation, which is dominated by Diegan coastal sage scrub. Chaparral covers the north slopes of canyon areas and southern willow riparian scrub lines the San Diego River. Slopes within the project area range from gentle to very steep, with many over 50 percent in gradient. The highest point of the project site is at an elevation of approximately 820 feet AMSL, and the lowest point is the crossing of the San Diego River at an elevation of approximately 160 feet AMSL.

In addition to the natural terrain and vegetation, the project area includes the existing Water Authority aqueduct appurtenances, including an FRS similar in size to the one proposed, SDG&E steel towers and high power lines, and a series of utility roads, fire roads, and recreational trails. The project area offers views to the north of the landscaped SR-52 fill slope and berm, to the east of Fortuna Mountain, to the south of the San Carlos and Navajo neighborhoods, and to the east of Tierrasanta.

Residential development dominates the western boundary of MTRP within the project area. This development is immediately adjacent to the Water Authority’s easement at the northern end of the project area, near the proposed North Portal, and is over 0.5 mile to the west at the southern end of the alignment, near the proposed FRS II structure (Figure 2-4). Residential development is also located on the south side of Mission Gorge Road at the intersection of Jackson Drive.

SR-52, which runs in an east/west direction just north of the project area, is not a designated California Scenic Highway, but has been designated as eligible for California Scenic Highway status by Caltrans. The North Portal may be visible to westbound motorists on SR-52 at a distance of approximately 1 mile. Views of the North Portal by eastbound motorists would be precluded by a landscaped berm.

California’s Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of land...
adjacent to those highways. When a city or county nomi-nates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. These ordinances make up a scenic corridor protection program.

Scenic corridor protection programs include policies intended to preserve the scenic qualities of the highway corridor, including regulation of land use and density of development, detailed land and site planning, control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards), careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment.

The combination of the relatively undisturbed natural open space of MTRP adjacent to residential neighborhoods results in a highly sensitive visual area where removal of vegetation, grading, and development would have the potential to result in significant aesthetic impacts.

**Regulatory Framework**

The Final PEIR for the Master Plan (Water Authority 2003) concludes that where facilities are proposed within visually sensitive open spaces areas, such as MTRP, those facilities could result in significant aesthetic impacts. Program-level mitigation measures are to be applied as appropriate to future capital improvement projects. Implementation of these mitigation measures at a project level is determined in the Final PEIR to be very likely to reduce aesthetic/visual impacts to less than significant levels. The final level of significance and the project-specific details of the mitigation for the proposed project are addressed in this site-specific EIR. Therefore, the proposed project is in compliance with the applicable mitigation measures adopted by the Water Authority in the Final PEIR for the Master Plan.

### 3.2.2 Thresholds of Significance

Thresholds used to evaluate potential aesthetic/visual quality impacts are based on applicable criteria in the State CEQA Guidelines (CCR §§15000-15387), Appendix G. A significant aesthetic/visual quality impact would occur if the project would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
3.2.3 Impact Analysis

Would the proposed project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

While no designated scenic vistas are known to be present in the project area, MTRP does provide numerous opportunities for scenic views from surrounding streets and homes. In order to address the potential aesthetic/visual impacts typical from the surrounding community, the project was evaluated for visibility from surrounding vantage points and was divided into three viewsheds. A viewshed is an analytical tool to aid in identification of views that may be affected by a proposed project. Views within an approximately 1-mile radius were considered as close enough for viewers to observe project elements such as the temporary removal of vegetation, landform modifications and the size, color, texture, and architecture of the proposed aboveground project features. Each viewshed represents an area with similar views of MTRP and the project site. The viewsheds were selected to be representative of the greatest number of potential viewers. The selected viewsheds are: 1) the north-facing residences in the Navajo and San Carlos neighborhoods, south of MTRP, that have views of the Water Authority’s easement, including the twin tall blue vent stacks at Elliott Vent #5; 2) the portions of MTRP from which the Water Authority’s easement is visible, including Fortuna Mountain and the Visitor’s Center; and 3) the residential areas of Tierrasanta that have views to the east of MTRP that include the Water Authority’s easement. Fifteen Key Observations Points (KOPs) were identified within the three viewsheds (Figure 3.2-1). Figures 3.2-2 through 3.2-16 provide photographs taken from each KOP. The following paragraphs describe the existing views from each KOP and the potential for short- and long-term changes that would result from project construction. Conclusions are then made regarding whether or not the changes would be considered substantial and adverse.

Navajo/San Carlos Viewsheds – South of MTRP

**KOP 1 – Hemingway Avenue** (Figure 3.2-2). This KOP is located at the northern end of Hemingway Drive. This location is approximately 2,500 feet south of Mission Gorge Road at an elevation of approximately 600 feet AMSL. The existing easement is visible from this KOP. Elliott Vents #5 are visible at the top of the ridge. Project impacts from this location would be positive as Elliott Vents #5 would be removed. Views of work at the South Portal may be possible for some residents, but would for the most part be screened by intervening topography. Visual impacts from KOP 1 would be less than significant.

**KOP 2 – Jackson Drive/Mission Gorge Road** (Figure 3.2-3). This KOP is located at the intersection of Jackson Drive with Mission Gorge Road. Project impacts from this location would be positive as Elliott Vents #5 would be removed. Views of work at the South Portal would be completely screened from this location by intervening topography. Visual impacts from KOP 2 would be less than significant.

MTRP Viewsheds

**KOP 3 – Mission Trails Visitor’s Center** (Figure 3.2-4). This KOP is located on the deck of the Mission Trails Visitor’s Center. Elliott Vents #5 are visible from this location. Project
impacts from this location would be positive as Elliott Vents #5 would be removed. Views of work at the South Portal may be possible from the Visitor’s Center, but would be mostly screened by intervening topography. Visual impacts from KOP 3 would be less than significant.

KOP 4 – San Diego River Crossing (Figure 3.2-5). This KOP provides a view of the existing crossing of the San Diego River that is to be improved with a stabilized low-flow crossing. Several trees would be removed and others would be trimmed to allow for the construction of the 15-foot by 70-foot crossing. This would result in a very limited change in appearance to the riparian vegetation at the crossing location. The impact would be temporary as the areas disturbed by construction would be restored to natural contours and planted with native riparian vegetation. See Section 3.8, Biological Resources, for a discussion of the significance of impacts to biological resources at this location. Visual impacts from KOP 4 would be less than significant.

KOP 5 – Top of Fortuna Mountain (Figure 3.2-6). This KOP is located at an elevation approximately 500 feet above the highest point of the proposed FRS II and at a distance of approximately 2 miles to the east. Much of the existing easement is visible as is the existing FRS I. The two tunnel portals are not visible from this location. While the FRS II construction area would be visible in the short term, long-term impacts would be limited to the FRS II control building. Based upon the vastness of the view from the top of Fortuna Mountain and the very small portion of the viewshed that would be affected by the proposed project, visual impacts from KOP 5 would not be significant. Visual impacts from KOP 5 would be less than significant.

KOP 6 – Rim Trail (Figure 3.2-7). This KOP is located on the Rim Trail, approximately 100 feet northeast of the FRS II site. The view of natural vegetation would be replaced temporarily with a view of a construction site. Short-term impacts from this KOP would be adverse because the construction site would represent a substantial change in scenery from the existing vegetated open space; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would be altered by the modified terrain above the FRS II and the presence of the FRS II control building. However, long-term visual impacts would not be significant because the site would be revegetated with a native seed mix and the FRS II control building would be constructed with an architectural design and building materials that would complement the surrounding parkland. Visual impacts from KOP 6 would be less than significant.

KOP 7 – Elliott Vents #4 and #5 (Figure 3.2-8). This KOP is located near the South Portal. The view of natural vegetation would be replaced temporarily with a view of a construction site. Short-term visual impacts at this location would be adverse due to the disturbance of existing parkland; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would be positive at this location as the existing vents would be removed and would either be capped at ground level or replaced by air valves in concrete vaults approximately 3 feet above ground level. Visual impacts from KOP 7 would be less than significant.
Tierrasanta Viewsheds – West of MTRP

**KOP 8 – Calle de Vida/Colina Dorada Drive Access Point** (Figure 3.2-9). This KOP is looking north from the intersection of Calle de Vida and Colina Dorada Drive. Short-term visual impacts at this location would be minimal because there would be limited road improvement. There would not be any long-term visual impacts at this location as no permanent features are proposed and all areas temporarily disturbed by construction would be restored to their original contours and planted with a native seed mix. Visual impacts from KOP 8 would be less than significant.

**KOP 9 – Eastern Terminus of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard Access Point** (Figure 3.2-10). This KOP shows the bridge that was constructed for the FRS I Project, which is currently used by park visitors utilizing the eastern terminus of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard for access to MTRP. Short-term visual impacts would be limited to the paved area of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard beyond Rueda Drive and the dirt parking/staging area between Clairemont Mesa Boulevard and the bridge. These impacts would not be significant as these areas are already developed or disturbed and are currently used for the parking of motor vehicles. There would be no long-term visual impacts at this location as no permanent features are proposed at this location and the dirt parking lot/staging area would be restored to approximate existing conditions. Visual impacts from KOP 9 would be less than significant.

**KOP 10 – Portobelo Drive/Belsera Access Point** (Figure 3.2-11). This KOP shows the existing access road off of Portobelo Drive at the Belsera community. Improvements at this location would consist of the installation of a wider gate and the widening of the access road from approximately 8 feet to 12 feet. This would be a minor change that would not result in significant visual impacts. Visual impacts from KOP 10 would be less than significant.

**KOP 11 – North Portal** (Figure 3.2-12). This KOP shows the residential area that is visible from the North Portal. All residences visible from this location would be able to view the construction at the North Portal. Short-term views of construction at the North Portal would be adverse due to the close proximity of the residents to the construction site and the proposed area of MTRP immediately adjacent to the Belsera community that would be disturbed; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would not be significant because the disturbed areas would be restored to natural contours and planted with a native seed mix. A 12-foot-diameter concrete vault that would house a possible isolation flange, extending no more than 3 feet above ground level, would be the only permanent feature at this location. Visual impacts from KOP 11 would be less than significant.

**KOP 12 – Corte Playa Catalina** (Figure 3.2-13). This KOP is located at the northeastern end of Corte Playa Catalina, approximately one-quarter mile west of the proposed FRS II site. The grading for the proposed FRS II and the aboveground control building would be most visible from this street and from the front yards and windows of homes along this residential cul-de-sac. The FRS II site and proposed aboveground control building represent a small portion of the overall viewshed and the control building would be designed to complement the surrounding open space and vegetation. Visual impacts from KOP 12 would be less than significant.
KOP 13 – Belsera at North Portal (Figure 3.2-14). This KOP is located in the shared open space behind condominiums located in the Belsera neighborhood, along the western boundary of MTRP and adjacent to the Water Authority’s right-of-way and proposed North Portal. These homes are within several hundred feet of the North Portal and are immediately adjacent to the North Portal staging area and haul route. Short-term views of construction at the North Portal would be adverse due to the close proximity of the residents to the construction site and the proposed area of MTRP immediately adjacent to the Belsera community that would be disturbed; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would not be significant because the disturbed areas would be restored to natural contours and planted with a native seed mix. Visual impacts from KOP 13 would be less than significant.

KOP 14 – Belsera Along North Portal Haul Route (Figure 3.2-15). This KOP is located just north of the intersection of the North Portal access road from Portobelo Drive and to the Water Authority’s pipeline right-of-way. Views from this location would be of construction traffic and activity at the North Portal staging area. These homes are within several hundred feet of the haul route and the northern end of the staging area. Short-term views of construction at the North Portal would be adverse due to the close proximity of the residents to the construction site and the proposed area of MTRP immediately adjacent to the Belsera community that would be disturbed; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would not be significant as the disturbed areas would be restored to natural contours and planted with a native seed mix. Visual impacts from KOP 14 would be less than significant.

KOP 15 – Belsera West of Access Road (Figure 3.2-16). This KOP is located in the landscaped open space behind the Belsera condominiums, west of the North Portal access road and staging area. Views from this location would be of the active North Portal construction and the staging area for the construction. The staging area would be used for the parking of employee vehicles, inactive construction equipment, and temporary storage of materials such as pipe. Short-term views of construction at the North Portal would be adverse due to the close proximity of the residents to the construction site and the proposed area of MTRP immediately adjacent to the Belsera community that would be disturbed; however, the impact would not be significant because the change would be temporary. Long-term visual impacts would not be significant as the disturbed areas would be restored to natural contours and planted with a native seed mix. Visual impacts from KOP 15 would be less than significant.

Summary. The proposed project would result in adverse short-term impacts to scenic views of the West Fortuna area of MTRP due to the disturbance of vegetation and topography and the presence of heavy equipment. However, the impacts would be less than significant because the changes would be temporary.

Long-term impacts to these scenic views would be less than significant because nearly all of the permanent project features would be belowground and the surface would be revegetated with native plant material. The FRS II control building would be constructed with an architectural design and building materials that would complement the surrounding parkland. The visibility of existing appurtenances within the Water Authority’s easement would be reduced through the
removal of up to five pairs of vent structures (Elliott Vents #1-#5). The removal of these vent structures along Pipelines 3 and 4, some of which are very tall and painted blue, is considered to be a positive visual impact because it would reduce the visibility of infrastructure within MTRP. Ground-level air valves would be installed in place of the vents. The stabilized crossing of the San Diego River would be designed to be visually attractive, similar to the existing stone and concrete dam just downstream of the proposed crossing. Upon completion of construction, the North Portal and South Portal would be low, unobtrusive concrete vault structures similar to others along the Water Authority’s easement in MTRP. Permanent visual impacts of the project would be less than significant.

*Would the proposed project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?*

As a regional open space park, all of MTRP is considered to be a scenic resource worthy of protection. There are, however, no mature trees, rock outcroppings or historic buildings at the FRS II site or the two tunnel portal sites. Mature trees line the San Diego River at the proposed stabilized crossing, several of which would need to be removed or trimmed to expand the existing 10-foot-wide road to a 15-foot improved crossing. This impact to mature trees would be minimized to the extent practical and is not a significant visual/aesthetic impact as there is already a dirt utility road crossing through the river at this location. See Section 3.8, Biological Resources, for a discussion of the significance of this impact to biological resources.

SR-52 has not been designated as a scenic highway, but has been identified as eligible for consideration for such a designation. The North Portal is the only project feature that would be visible from SR-52. Visual impacts at the North Portal staging area for drivers on SR-52 would be temporary and would not be significant. The permanent tunnel portal access vault would be no more than 3 feet tall and would resemble the existing concrete vaults visible within the Water Authority’s easement. Long-term impacts to the view from SR-52 would be less than significant.

*Would the proposed project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings?*

The proposed project would temporarily degrade the existing visual character of approximately 20 acres of MTRP, an urban park that covers nearly 5,800 acres. The project would not substantially degrade the project site and its surroundings in the long-term, due to the limited area of disturbance compared to the surrounding area, the placement of project facilities belowground, and restoration of the site topography and vegetation. This impact would be less than significant.

*Would the proposed project create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?*

Temporary lighting would be used at the tunnel portals and within the tunnels during construction. Night work at the North Portal would be limited to a 10-day period near the end of the project when the new tunnel pipeline is connected to the existing pipelines. Night work at
the South Portal would occur throughout the approximately 2-year construction period. No night work is proposed at the FRS II site.

The lights needed for night construction would be projected downward towards the tunnel portals or would be within the tunnels. Light spill toward the residential properties to the west would be avoided through the location of the lights and angle of projection. Permanent lighting associated with the project would be limited to the FRS II control building and would only be used by Water Authority employees during emergency night work. No glass, chrome or other reflective surfaces would be used on aboveground structures. Therefore, the proposed project would not introduce a new source of substantial light that would affect nighttime views in the area or glare that would affect daytime views in the project area. This impact would be less than significant.

3.2.4 Mitigation Measures

Impacts to aesthetics/visual quality would be less than significant. Therefore, no mitigation measures are required.

3.2.5 Residual Impacts after Mitigation

No residual impacts would occur.
Locations of Key Observation Points

Figure 3.2-1
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Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Figure 3.2-3

Jackson Drive/Mission Gorge Road (KOP 2)
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Visitors Center (KOP 3)

Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Figure 3.2-4

ELLIO T VENTS #5
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Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

San Diego River Crossing (KOP 4)
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Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

FRS Sites (KOP 5)

Figure 3.2-6
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Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

Rim Trail Panoramic View (KOP 6)
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Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Elliott Vents #4 and #5 (KOP 7)
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Figure 3.2-9

Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Calle de Vida/Colina Drive Access Points (KOP 8)
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Eastern Terminus of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard (KOP 9)

Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

Figure 3.2-10
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Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Portobelo Drive/Belsara Access Point (KOP 10)

Figure 3.2-11
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Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

North Tunnel Portal (KOP 11)
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Simulated View of FRS II Site from Corte Playa Catalina looking East

Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

Figure 3.2-13
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Rear Yard of Belsera Looking East Southeast Towards North Portal (KOP 13)

Mission Trails Flow
Regulatory Structure II,
Pipeline Tunnel, and
Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes
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Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Map Notes

View of Belsera at Corner of Access Road and SDCWA Right-of-Way (KOP 14)
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West of Belsera Access Road (KOP 15) Looking Southeast

Mission Trails Flow Regulatory Structure II, Pipeline Tunnel, and Vent Demolition Project

Figure 3.2-16
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