

4.4 Visual Resources

This section summarizes the regulatory setting, affected environment, and environmental consequences of the project alternatives on visual resources and visual quality in the Geary corridor. The analysis is based on review of preliminary project design documents and relevant citywide policy documents, such as the City of San Francisco *Better Streets Plan* (BSP) and the City of San Francisco *General Plan*.

RESOURCE

To see the San Francisco *Better Streets Plan*, go to: <http://sfbetterstreets.sfplanning.org>

4.4.1 | Regulatory Setting

4.4.1.1 STATE REGULATIONS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes that it is the policy of the State to take all action necessary to provide the people of the State “with ... enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities.”¹

4.4.1.2 REGIONAL/LOCAL REGULATIONS

At the local level, the City and County of San Francisco has established policies and regulations regarding visual resources in the following planning documents applicable to the Geary corridor: the San Francisco *General Plan*, the BSP, the Masonic Avenue Street Design Study, and the Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS).

4.4.1.2.1 SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL PLAN AND URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT (CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, 1990)

Land use planning goals and policies are guided by the San Francisco *General Plan*. The Urban Design Element (UDE) of the *General Plan* concerns the physical character and order of the City, and the relationship between people and their environment. The UDE sets forth objectives and supporting policies that cover the following major areas relevant to the proposed project: City pattern, conservation, major new development, and neighborhood environment.

The Urban Design Element of the San Francisco *General Plan* concerns the physical character and order of the City, and the relationship between people and their environment

The Conservation section within the UDE includes two maps relevant to the project alternatives: 1) *Street Areas Important to Urban Design and Views* and 2) *Quality of Street Views*.

The *Street Areas Important to Urban Design and Views* map identifies the east-facing slope of Anza Vista Hill and the portion of Geary Boulevard near St. Mary’s Cathedral Hill as “important street views for orientation.” The map also identifies the Cathedral Hill section of O’Farrell Street and the entire downtown portion of O’Farrell Street as “street views of an important building.” The entire downtown section of Geary is identified as a portion of the City’s 49-mile Scenic Drive.

¹ California Public Resources Code Section 20110(b).

The *Quality of Street Views* map identifies the elevated views eastward from roughly 37th Avenue to 32nd Avenue (sometimes referred to as Washington Heights) and the elevated eastward views of downtown from Anza Vista Hill (Masonic to Divisadero) as “excellent.”

Motorists and bus passengers in particular would thus be considered to have higher visual sensitivity in these designated areas.

Certain types of projects, including those that would modify the curb-to-curb width of City streets are subject to approvals related to the *General Plan*. See discussion at Section 4.1.1.1 regarding *General Plan* referrals.

4.4.1.2.2 | SAN FRANCISCO BETTER STREETS PLAN (BSP, 2011)

The San Francisco BSP was adopted by the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors in December 2010, and took effect on January 16, 2011. The BSP provides a comprehensive set of guidelines to improve San Francisco’s streetscapes to make them universally accessible to all, more attractive, safe, and comfortable. The BSP describes a vision, provides design guidelines, and identifies next steps to create streets that are publicly accessible and support multi-modal use with a particular emphasis on pedestrians and transit. The BSP calls for a comfortable pedestrian realm with significant pedestrian amenities and public spaces that include the following elements: curb ramps, marked crosswalks, pedestrian signals, pedestrian crossing bulbs, street trees, tree grates, sidewalk planters, storm water controls, pedestrian lighting, special paving, and site furnishings. The BSP explains that streetscapes should be designed to encompass a wide range of features and amenities. However, this does not mean that projects should contain all potential elements or not be built at all. Rather, the BSP suggests coordination of streetscape-related projects to make improvements simultaneously and look for opportunities to build additional low-cost elements into existing capital projects.

Numerous policies of the BSP set forth specific guidance for the design and appearance of streetscape features and would thus be applicable to the project alternatives.

4.4.1.2.3 | MASONIC AVENUE STREETScape PROJECT

This San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) project proposes a series of improvements on Masonic Avenue between Geary Boulevard and Fell Street to more safely and efficiently accommodate the needs of all users. Major improvements include the addition of a landscaped median, raised cycle tracks, bus bulbs, and creation of a public plaza at the southwest corner of the Geary-Masonic Avenue intersection. San Francisco Public Works began construction on this project in July 2016 with completion expected by spring 2018.



The San Francisco Better Streets Plan provides a comprehensive set of guidelines to improve San Francisco’s streetscapes to make them universally accessible, safe, and comfortable



Masonic Avenue Streetscape Project area

4.4.1.2.4 | JCHESS (2013)

Building off its *Draft Japantown Better Neighborhood Plan* (2009), the San Francisco Planning Department completed a process in 2013 to support economic development in this area, preserve and enhance its historic and cultural uses and buildings, and make physical enhancements within the study area. Focused on the neighborhood’s cultural heritage, strategies identified include creating a community development corporation, land trust, or community benefits district; implementing physical improvements to Peace Plaza and Buchanan Mall; and others. The JCHESS

identified specific concerns regarding landscaping, lighting, street furnishings, and wayfinding signage.²

The JCHESS identified implementation of the BSP as the primary vehicle for addressing the above streetscape concerns. The BSP provides guidance on how streets should be designed such as for the residential and commercial streets that comprise Japantown. The BSP guides the design of the streets, curb alignments, crosswalks, and parking lanes. The BSP also offers guidance for the use of the sidewalks and makes allowances for street trees and plantings, lighting, paving, site furnishings, and wayfinding signage. As part of the adoption of the BSP, the City completed an environmental review that enables streetscape and pedestrian improvements in conformance with the BSP to be implemented. The JCHESS also states that Geary corridor improvements could include safer and more attractive pedestrian crossings of Geary Boulevard in Japantown.

The Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy is focused on supporting economic development in this area, preserving and enhancing its historic and cultural uses and buildings

4.4.1.2.5 SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING CODE

Under Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code, a Certificate of Appropriateness is required from the Planning Department for projects located within any landmark site. This process requires a hearing with and approval from the Planning Commission. As needed, the Planning Commission may consult with civic groups, public agencies, and interested citizens in consideration of a Certificate of Appropriateness application. The design, architectural style, arrangement, texture, materials, and color of project features are considered.

Similarly, under Article 11 of the planning code, alterations to significant or contributory buildings in designated conservation districts, such as the Kearny-Market-Mason-Sutter (KMMS) Conservation District, are subject to review and approval by the Planning Department and Historic Preservation Commission. The Architectural Review Committee of the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for review and approval of the architectural design of structures located within a historic district.

4.4.1.2.6 SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC WORKS CODE

Various provisions of the San Francisco Municipal Code, including Public Works Code Section 798.5, establish a role for the Civic Design Review Committee (Committee) within the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) as responsible for reviewing and approving the architectural design of structures on City property. Committee review is required for any structure or landscaping on or over City property, including transit structures such as station platforms, bus shelters and station canopies, landscaped medians and planters. The committee has previously reviewed and approved SFMTA's standard shelter design, which would be used as part of each of the build alternatives.

² The JCHESS defined the term "streetscape" to include "all those things that influence a pedestrian's experience, including landscaping, lighting, sidewalk, furnishings, and upkeep."

4.4.2 | Affected Environment

4.4.2.1 | OVERVIEW

The project setting consists of the Geary corridor, extending from the westernmost portion of the Richmond district to the west, to Market Street in downtown to the east. The Geary corridor comprises largely level-to-rolling topography, with notable hills in the outer Richmond District, at Masonic Avenue/Anza Vista Hill, and at Cathedral Hill between Laguna Street and Van Ness Avenue.

The Geary corridor is the principal east-west corridor of the City, extending from downtown nearly to the beach in the west. Geary is the City's only major boulevard to do so. Between 37th Avenue and Van Ness Avenue, Geary Boulevard is among the widest streets in the City, with a curb-to-curb width ranging from 90 feet to 100 feet.

DEFINITION

VIEWSHED: An area of land, water, or other environmental element that is visible to the human eye from a fixed vantage point

The project viewshed consists of the actual area in which the project would be visible, including the Geary corridor and its adjacent land uses

4.4.2.1.1 VIEWSHED AND LANDSCAPE UNITS

The viewshed or area within which the project alternatives would be visible was defined as the area on or directly adjoining Geary Boulevard. This is because Geary Boulevard is predominantly lined by buildings which limit views into and out of the corridor. The streetscape is intermittently visible from nearby higher elevation areas.

Consistent with applicable methods (described in Section 4.4.3), the Geary corridor was subdivided into large-scale landscape units, based on broadly common visual character. These units provide a framework to contextualize the setting and effects.

Figure 4.4-2 depicts a map of landscape units or segments in the Geary corridor. The map also depicts locations of key representative viewpoints within the landscape units, which are used to focus the discussion below.

Figure 4.4-1 Landscape Units Map



Source: WKA, 2013

4.4.2.1.2 LANDSCAPE UNIT 1: 48TH AVENUE (RICHMOND DISTRICT) TO WOOD STREET (LAUREL HEIGHTS/ANZA VISTA HILL)

Landscape Unit 1 is roughly defined as the Geary corridor segment extending from (48th) Avenue to Wood Street, just west of Masonic Avenue. The segment traverses several neighborhoods, including the Richmond District, the University of San Francisco (USF)/Lone Mountain area, Laurel Heights and the west slope of Anza Vista Hill. However, the visual character of the Geary corridor throughout this segment is substantially similar, typified by architecturally heterogeneous, low-rise (1 to 6 stories) residential and street-front commercial uses. Figure 4.4-3 depicts typical images of Landscape Unit 1.

Between 48th Avenue and 28th Avenue, land uses adjacent to the Geary corridor are predominantly low-rise residential. In this segment, particularly between 37th and 30th avenues, the elevated topography creates scenic eastward views identified in the UDE *Quality of Street Views Map* as “excellent.” East of 30th Avenue, the Geary corridor descends slightly and remains level to gently rolling throughout the Richmond District.

From 28th Avenue eastward, the Geary corridor changes to a predominantly commercial but still largely low-rise street-front, remaining so throughout the remainder of this landscape unit. East of Arguello Boulevard, the topography rises gently toward the east, but the overall character of the entire segment between 30th Avenue and Wood Street is substantially similar. The overall character is thus of a predominantly low-rise commercial street front, with diagonal street-front parking between 28th and 15th avenues. Geary Boulevard widens from two lanes to four lanes from 39th Avenue through the Richmond District to Park Presidio Boulevard, widening to 6 lanes from that point eastward.

LANDSCAPE UNIT 1

Landscape Unit 1 extends from 48th Avenue to Wood Street. Two ‘excellent’ quality views were identified; these include a segment between 48th and 45th Avenue with westward views of the Pacific Ocean; and the segment between roughly 37th and 30th Avenues with elevated views eastward of the Richmond District, Lone Mountain, and portions of the downtown skyline

Center medians are present from 39th Avenue eastward; from 33rd Avenue eastward these are landscaped to varying degrees. Both median and sidewalk street tree plantings are found through most of the segment. Tree and landscape planting is highly variable however, ranging from highly intact, continuously planted blocks to sparsely planted ones, as depicted in Figure 4.4-3c.



Westbound view of the existing Masonic tunnel.

The predominant street tree species is the New Zealand Christmas tree (*Metrosideros excels*; hereinafter *Metrosideros*), a low- to medium-height, broad-canopy tree with red blossoms. These are largely mature plantings with typical canopy heights of between 8 feet to 20-plus feet. These plantings can be quite attractive with sufficient regularity and continuity. Center median tree plantings, however, are spotty and isolated throughout much of the Geary corridor. As a result of spotty, discontinuous center median planting and low to moderate canopy height, the character of the boulevard is improved but not dominated or strongly unified by the tree plantings, which remain visually subordinate in scale to the auto-dominated streetscape.

Scenic Vistas. The UDE *Quality of Street Views* map identifies two segments of Geary Boulevard within Landscape Unit 1 as “excellent” quality views (others are identified in Landscape Unit 2, discussed below). These include a segment between 48th and 45th avenues with westward views of the Pacific Ocean; and the previously discussed segment between roughly 37th and 30th avenues with elevated views eastward of the Richmond District, Lone Mountain, and portions of the downtown skyline. Elsewhere, long-distance and skyline views are very limited due to the generally low-lying topography. Other notable visual landmarks in this unit include the Holy Virgin Cathedral at 26th Avenue, and views of Lone Mountain and the USF campus, which provide a scenic and vivid natural landmark between Arguello Boulevard and Masonic Avenue. Occasional glimpses of wooded hills of the Presidio and Golden Gate Park are also visible through perpendicular streets.

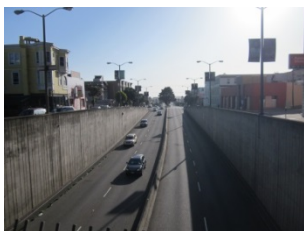
LANDSCAPE UNIT 2

Landscape Unit 2 extends from Anza Vista Hill near Masonic Avenue to the bottom of Cathedral Hill at Van Ness Avenue. Views of downtown from this segment are considered ‘excellent’ and should be preserved

4.4.2.1.3 LANDSCAPE UNIT 2: WOOD STREET (LAUREL/ANZA VISTA HILLS) TO VAN NESS AVENUE (CATHEDRAL HILL)

Landscape Unit 2 is defined as the Geary corridor segment extending from Anza Vista Hill near Masonic Avenue to the bottom of Cathedral Hill at Van Ness Avenue. In contrast to the relatively consistent character of Unit 1, for convenience of discussion this segment groups several contiguous sub-units with distinctive visual characteristics. These include: the Masonic Avenue/Anza Vista Hill area, Kaiser/Western Addition (Broderick to Fillmore); Japantown (Steiner to Laguna); and Cathedral Hill (Laguna to Van Ness). Figure 4.4-4 depicts typical image types.

Masonic Avenue/Anza Vista Hill. At Wood Street, the 4 inner lanes of Geary Boulevard enter the tunnel below Masonic Avenue through Anza Vista Hill, and the two outer lanes climb the hill to intersect with Masonic Avenue. East of Wood Street adjoining buildings become taller, up to 7 stories. The top of the hill is dominated by a tall, large-scale Best Buy store and a lower but large Muni bus barn, which enclose Geary Boulevard to the north and south. A large landscaped center island is prominent in this block, visually separating the sides of the street and reducing the scale of auto-dominated travel lanes for pedestrians at the existing bus stops. However, the tunnel entrances and retaining walls give the slopes of the hilltop area a spatially fragmented, disjointed quality. The historic SFMTA car barn to the north is partly obscured by a foreground of employee parking that gives the streetscape a cluttered utilitarian character, and contributes to compromised



Looking west from atop the Masonic tunnel.

intactness and unity of the hilltop streetscape. The streetscape thus lacks visual unity and coherence, and remains auto-dominated, with a shortage of pedestrian space. Intactness, unity and overall visual quality are moderate, though improved by the high vividness of scenic east-facing views.

Scenic Vistas. Views of downtown from this elevated location are noted on the UDE *Quality of Street Views* Map as a location with “excellent” views to be preserved. Similarly, the UDE *Street Areas* Map identifies this segment as an important street view for orientation. The streetscape at Masonic Avenue has moderately high vividness due to these outstanding elevated views eastward of the downtown skyline, as well as the substantial center-median landscaping (Figure 4.4-4).

Kaiser Permanente/Western Addition. West of the Target parking lots and Masonic tunnel, a series of 5-to-9 story buildings of Kaiser Permanente’s main Geary medical campus dominate the boulevard for three blocks. Between St. Joseph’s Avenue and Divisadero, large-scale London plane trees on the south side help screen otherwise unsightly street-front parking and delivery areas, adding intactness to the streetscape. Street tree planting in this area is heterogeneous and spotty however, including a wide and formally disparate assortment of tree types. This section has moderate visual quality, with moderate vividness from tall street facades, moderate intactness from street tree plantings, and moderate unity, compromised by disparate tree plantings and parking and loading areas facing the street. Continuing east, adjoining uses from Divisadero to Fillmore are highly heterogeneous, including office buildings, a recreation center and playfields, a park, a high school and apartments. This section, however, displays a moderately high degree of visual unity from regular, fairly continuous plantings of approximately 30-foot tall plane trees on both sides of the street (Figure 4.4-4b). Spotty, discontinuous plantings of miscellaneous species in the center median detract from the visual unity, but the overall effect of adjoining open spaces and continuous tall plane tree canopy on the sides is of moderately high visual quality.

Fillmore/Japantown. At Steiner Street, the center lanes of Geary Boulevard descend into the Fillmore undercrossing, while outside lanes meet with Fillmore Street to the east. Tall buildings at Fillmore Street mark the entry into the visually distinct Fillmore/Japantown area, characterized by a greater predominance of taller buildings and the larger-scale, uniform facades of the Japan Center. The Fillmore Street grade separation segregates traffic-dominated and more pedestrian scale environments. The effect of the undercrossing is to fragment the streetscape into visually and functionally disjointed, spatially isolated pedestrian and auto-oriented spaces so that the area around the intersection of Geary and Fillmore lacks visual coherence or unity. The bus stops atop the undercrossing are distinguished by the “Blue” art work on the structure’s glass panels, but are otherwise utilitarian, unadorned, and undistinguished in character. The undercrossing structure is decorated with sculptures on its retaining walls and identifying signage on the Fillmore Street bridge. Some street tree plantings line Geary Boulevard along the above-tunnel segment. However, street-level pedestrian access and entry to buildings in this section of Geary Boulevard is very limited. Overall, existing visual quality within the Geary corridor in the vicinity of Fillmore Street is moderately low.

The Japan Center occupies three blocks of the Geary street frontage to the north between Fillmore and Laguna streets. However, between Fillmore and Webster streets, the tunnel structure fragments the above-ground street frontages as

described above, and viewer use and sensitivity in the area is minimal. East of Webster Street, the Japantown Peace Plaza, with its highly distinctive pagoda structure, is a vivid landmark, and the street-front adjoining it is marked by landscaping, including very recently planted street trees, and distinctive Japanese-style sidewalk light fixtures. The exterior design of the high-rise Hotel Kabuki reflects a modicum of Japanese architectural style, lending further visual coherence to the area. Visual quality in the vicinity of the plaza is thus moderately high, and viewer sensitivity and exposure would also be high. Elsewhere in this section, visual quality and viewer sensitivity are moderate. Tree planting in this section between Webster and Laguna streets is uncoordinated, with continuous, mature plane trees contributing considerable visual intactness and unity along the entire south side of the street, but with both Canary Island pines and Monterey cypress in the center median, and varied types, mostly of small stature, on the north side (Figure 4.4-4c).

Cathedral Hill. The segment roughly from Laguna Street to Van Ness Avenue comprises Cathedral Hill, a tall promontory visually dominated by St. Mary's Cathedral, several buildings of the Chinese Consulate, and nearby high-rise residences. The cathedral is striking in form and visible from both nearby and more distant neighborhoods. The wide plaza between Geary and the cathedral creates large open views of the sky and cathedral. Nearby mid- to high-rise residential buildings (including the circular shaped Carillon Tower and the Joseph Eichler-designed Cleary Court) add to vividness of the hilltop area without detracting or encroaching on the unique form of the cathedral structure. Visual quality is thus high in this area (Figure 4.4-4d).

4.4.2.1.4 LANDSCAPE UNIT 3: VAN NESS AVENUE (TENDERLOIN) TO MARKET STREET (DOWNTOWN)

LANDSCAPE UNIT 3

Landscape Unit 3 extends from Van Ness to Market Street, and includes the Tenderloin and Downtown districts, comprising portions of two designated historic districts. The Geary portion of this segment is a portion of the city 49-Mile scenic drive; and the O'Farrell portion is considered a 'street' view of important buildings

Landscape Unit 3, extending from Van Ness Avenue to Market Street, includes the Tenderloin (Figure 4.4-5) and Downtown (Figure 4.4-6) districts, comprising portions of two designated historic districts: the Uptown Tenderloin National Historic District; and the KMMS Conservation District. Although this analysis is not specifically concerned with these areas as historic resources per se, both districts are recognized and protected in part for their distinctive architectural, visual, and scenic character. As high-density downtown urban environments, their primary distinctive visual characteristics derive from their architectural forms and styles. The formal visual characteristics and features of buildings in these areas (e.g., massing, composition, scale, materials, colors, details, and ornamentation) are subject to review and approval under federal, state and local guidelines. In some instances, visual effects to historic properties and districts may represent an adverse effect if they adversely affect the historic integrity of those properties. See Section 4.5.5 for an evaluation of such potential effects.

The Tenderloin section of the Geary corridor is an architecturally consistent, primarily residential area comprising predominantly of 3-to-7 story multi-unit buildings, mainly of brick, masonry or concrete, built between 1906 and the early 1930s. 380 buildings in the district are listed on the National Register (Figure 4.4-5b). The portion of the Geary corridor within the Tenderloin National Historic District extends roughly from Polk Street to Taylor Street (State of California, 2008). Visually, the Geary corridor in this section is typified by a street level often visually cluttered by disparate and chaotic store-front signage, juxtaposed with distinctive, often remarkable historic architecture. Scattered street tree groupings are found

along the Geary corridor, although of heterogeneous, uncoordinated patterns and types. Despite some visual disunity, the area is characterized by an evident overall stylistic, historic and formal continuity. Vivid elements include examples of outstanding historic architecture, and scenic view corridors eastward towards the downtown high-rise skyline.

The *Street Areas Map* of the UDE identifies the Geary portion of this segment as a portion of the 49-Mile Scenic Drive; and the O’Farrell Street portion as a “street view of important buildings.”

Vividness and unity in the Tenderloin is moderate; intactness is moderately high. Overall, visual quality was considered moderate. Viewer sensitivity and response are considered to be high due to the segment’s many special scenic and historic designations and its importance to tourism.

Figure 4.4-2 Typical Image Types, Landscape Unit 1



a. Typical Washington Heights residential area. Elevated eastward views from this portion of the Geary corridor are identified in the General Plan Urban Design Element as excellent scenic views to be conserved.



b. Typical Richmond district commercial street-front.



c. Existing tree planting - Existing sidewalk and center-median tree planting in the Richmond district and Landscape Unit 1 ranges from mature and continuous (left), to irregular or sparsely planted or absent (center, right).

Source: WKA, 2013

Figure 4.4-3 Typical Image Types, Landscape Unit 2



a. View from Geary east of Masonic Avenue (Anza Vista Hill). The elevated eastward view from this portion of the Geary corridor is identified in the General Plan Urban Design Element as an excellent scenic view to be conserved.

b. Plane tree, cypress plantings in Western Addition/Kaiser campus area.



c. Geary corridor in vicinity of Japantown Peace Plaza.



d. St. Mary's Cathedral

Source: WKA, 2013

From Taylor Street to Market Street, the Geary corridor enters the downtown area, and the KMMS Conservation District (Figure 4.4-6). The conservation district designates and protects significant and contributory buildings based on architectural quality and their contribution to the downtown environment, and includes Union Square, 114 architecturally significant and 140 contributory buildings. Potential visual effects to such properties are thus a paramount concern. Scale and height of buildings in this district becomes higher and larger than in the Tenderloin, and visual unity of the streetscape also increases. The visual environment of this area is characterized by predominantly moderate-scaled, light-colored buildings, generally four to eight stories in height, contributing to a streetscape of comfortable scale and sunlit sidewalks. The area experiences extremely heavy pedestrian and auto traffic and is the epicenter of downtown tourist visitation. Both Geary and O'Farrell east of Mason Street are distinguished by distinctive historic streetlights, known as the Golden Triangle Light Standards or Streetlights.



Golden Triangle Streetlights

For more information regarding the Golden Triangle Streetlights, please see Section 4.5.2.3.2

Figure 4.4-4 Typical Image Types, Landscape Unit 3 - Tenderloin



a. Typical Tenderloin 2 – 5-story masonry residential streetscape.

b. Alcazar Theater. There are numerous examples of outstanding architecture in the Tenderloin portion of the corridor, including 380 National Register properties in the Uptown Tenderloin District.



c. Scenic views eastward from Tenderloin toward Market Street, downtown skyline.

d. Visual clutter of first-floor store-front signage is a typical visual feature of the Tenderloin streetscape.

Source: WKA, 2013

Figure 4.4-5 Typical Image Types, Landscape Unit 3 - Downtown



a, b. Scenic views eastward toward Market Street skyline.

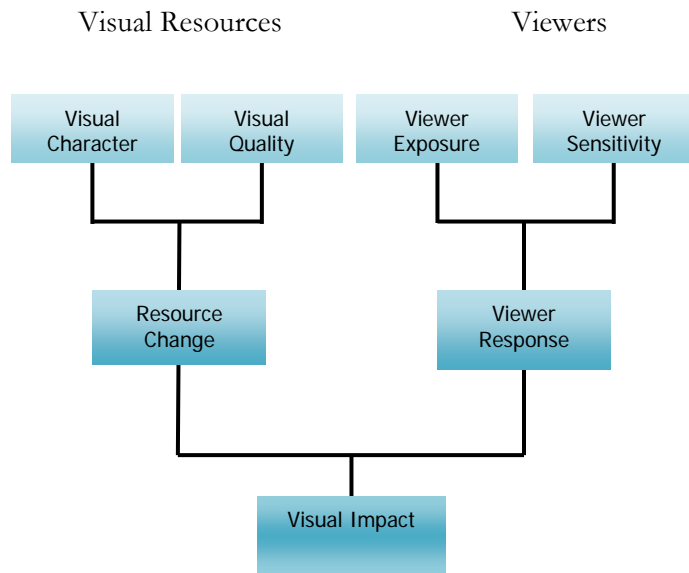
c. Typical Downtown streetscape.



D, e, f. There are 114 architecturally significant and 140 contributory buildings within the Kearney-Market-Mason-Sutter Conservation District.

Source: WKA, 2013

Figure 4.4-6 FHWA Visual Assessment Model



Source: FHWA, 1988

4.4.3 | Methodology

4.4.3.1 VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHOD

The lead agency has not developed any procedures related to visual resources. In the absence of defined standards, the alternatives were evaluated for potential visual effects using the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment method, which has remained the most widely used approach for visual assessment of transportation projects of all kinds nationally for the past three decades. FHWA Visual Impact Assessment is the method followed by many transportation agencies for conducting assessments of transportation projects. The conceptual framework of the FHWA methodology is depicted in Figure 4.4-6.³

Under the FHWA method, a project’s visual environment or setting is characterized in terms of two principal components: the study area’s **visual resources**; and its potentially sensitive **viewers**. Visual resources are, in turn, described in terms of their **visual character**, and evaluated in terms of their existing **visual quality**. Viewers are characterized in terms of their **viewer sensitivity** – their potential level of concern with changes to visual quality – and their **viewer exposure**, that is, their degree of exposure to views of the project.

The Geary corridor is divided into linear segments called *Landscape Units*, which are used to describe the visual character and to provide the context and baseline for evaluating visual effects of the project

Visual Character: Landscape Units. For the purposes of this analysis, the Geary corridor was divided into landscape units, defined in terms of their broad shared visual character. Visual and landscape characteristics are described for each unit to provide the context and baseline for evaluating visual effects of the project. Notable or important features of the visual setting are also described. The project’s visual effects are, in the broadest sense, determined by their compatibility with the visual character of the setting. Because the study area is considered mainly to be limited to

³ FHWA. 1988.

the Geary corridor, these units are essentially linear segments or lengths of the street corridor.

Visual Quality. The assessment of the project's setting and potential effects is conducted in terms of three criteria, vividness, intactness, and unity. As described in the FHWA guidelines:

- Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns.
- Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and man-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. It can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. It frequently attests to the careful design of individual manmade components in the landscape.⁴

The project's effects on the visual resource is measured in terms of its change to the setting's existing visual quality, as rated according to these three criteria.

Viewer Response, Sensitivity and Exposure. Viewer sensitivity is evaluated according to *viewer activity type, viewer awareness as affected by the visual setting, and local values and goals*. Typically, recreational and residential viewers are assumed to have higher levels of viewer sensitivity to changes in visual quality than people working or passing through a viewshed. In contrast, viewers at their place of work are generally assumed to have lower levels of sensitivity, particularly in industrial settings. Motorists are generally assumed to have moderate levels of sensitivity, unless they are on scenic roadways or corridors identified in public plans or policies.

Viewer exposure may also strongly influence viewers' response to project effects, and includes consideration of the presence or absence of screening or filtering of project features; number of viewers; the distance at which the project would be seen; the extent, frequency, and duration of viewer exposure; and other relevant viewing conditions.

Viewer Groups. Viewers of features of the Geary corridor can be categorized into the following groups:

- **Pedestrians:** People walking to/from and along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Cyclists:** People riding to/from and along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Transit patrons:** People waiting at bus stops and traveling on buses along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Motorists:** People traveling via automobile through and along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Residents:** People who live along Geary Boulevard or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.

Viewer response is composed of viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure

Viewer sensitivity is evaluated according to viewer activity, viewer awareness as affected by the visual setting, and local values and goals

Viewer exposure is defined as the viewer's degree of exposure to views of the project

⁴ FHWA. 1988. Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects. Available: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/ser/downloads/visual/FHWAVisualImpactAssmt.pdf>.

- **Commuters:** People who commute to jobs located along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Tourists:** People who have traveled to and through the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor with the intention of experiencing and viewing the many cultural and visual resources of citywide importance.
- **Commercial patrons:** People who shop along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.
- **Adjacent business owners:** People who own businesses along the Geary corridor or on other streets that offer views of the Geary corridor.

Under the FHWA method each viewer group is evaluated for its anticipated viewer sensitivity, viewer exposure to the project features, and anticipated overall viewer response. The significance of adverse effects to visual quality is evaluated within the context of the level of anticipated viewer response.

Typically, among the groups listed above, *residents* and *tourists* would be considered to have a high sensitivity to changes in visual quality. Adjacent residents would experience frequent, extended views and generally place a high level of importance on the quality of their living environment. For tourists and recreationists, scenic values and sight-seeing are of primary importance. Bus patrons are also considered to have moderately high sensitivity because of their close, extended, and repeated exposure to the project and its environments. While the primary focus of riders may not be on visual quality, their extended, immediate exposure to this setting is apt to heighten sensitivity.

While pedestrians, cyclists and motorists may include residents, in their capacity as street occupants it is presumed that their focus is on travel, not scenic quality, and sensitivity is considered moderate. However, where it can be assumed that such travelers are tourists or recreationists, sensitivity would be assumed to be high.

These ratings are assumed for viewer groups throughout the Geary corridor unless specified otherwise.

4.4.3.2 KEY VIEWPOINTS

Within each landscape unit, key representative viewpoints were selected for locations where the project could have the most pronounced visual effects on key sensitive viewer groups, and may differ between the various build alternatives. For each key viewpoint, viewer response, characterized in terms of viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure to the project, is summarized. Next, each viewpoint is characterized in terms of the visual quality of the existing view. While there is always variation in viewer response and visual quality throughout a landscape unit, the assessment of key viewpoints is meant to capture representative instances of the most relevant viewers, project features, viewing conditions and potential project-related issues.

Key viewpoints were selected within each Landscape Unit and represent locations where the project would have the most pronounced visual effects on key sensitive viewer groups

Figures are included to illustrate the key viewpoints. The figures depict the key viewpoints as they currently stand, and photo-realistic simulations of future conditions under a given build alternative. The simulations were developed to communicate the long-term design *intent* along the Geary corridor. The simulations include the following assumptions:

- Bus-only lanes and other streetscape improvements are consistent with the project plans (Appendix A) and the project’s Urban Design Memorandum (March 2014)
- The height of simulated trees is typical for a five- to 10-year growth time frame, depending upon the container size and site conditions

4.4.3.3 DETERMINATION OF VISUAL EFFECTS

As illustrated in Figure 4.4-1 above, the description of visual character and quality; and the assessment of viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure, together constitute the visual resource baseline under the FHWA assessment method. The change in visual quality due to the project is then assessed in Section 4.4.3 (Environmental Consequences) in the context of viewer response to identify the level and significance of effects. The conclusions of this analysis are subsequently used to assess the project’s impacts under CEQA, using the criteria of CEQA Guidelines Appendix G.

The alternatives have the potential to result in construction- and/or operational-period effects as noted below.

Construction-Period Effects

- Use of construction equipment, stockpiling of materials, and other visual signs of construction
- Tree removal
- Artificial lighting during nighttime construction work

Operational-Period Effects

- Visual changes to the streetscape, including colorized new bus-only lanes, new or relocated bus stops, and associated physical improvements.
- Filling of the Fillmore Street underpass (Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated)

The activities and components of the alternatives listed above were evaluated in terms how they would affect the visual character, visual quality, and viewer response within the Geary corridor. The analysis considered the visual landscape in the Geary corridor as of 2013.

4.4.4 | Environmental Consequences

This section describes potential impacts and benefits for visual quality. The analysis compares each alternative relative to the No Build Alternative.

As set forth in Section 4.4.4.1, the modifications to the Hybrid Alternative/LPA since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR do not change the conclusions regarding visual impacts in the Draft EIS/EIR.

4.4.4.1 | HYBRID ALTERNATIVE/LPA MODIFICATIONS: SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ADDITIVE EFFECTS SINCE PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT EIS/EIR

As discussed in Section 2.2.7.6, the Hybrid Alternative/LPA now includes the following six minor modifications added since the publication of the Draft EIS/EIR:

- 1) Retention of the Webster Street pedestrian bridge;
- 2) Removal of proposed BRT stops between Spruce and Cook streets (existing stops would remain and provide local and express services);
- 3) Addition of more pedestrian crossing and safety improvements;
- 4) Addition of BRT stops at Laguna Street;
- 5) Retention of existing local and express stops at Collins Street; and
- 6) Relocation of the westbound center- to side-running bus lane transition to the block between 27th and 28th avenues.

This section presents analysis of whether these six modifications could result in any new or more severe visual effects during construction or operation. As documented below, the Hybrid Alternative/LPA as modified would not result in any new or more severe visual effects relative to what was disclosed in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Retention of the Webster Street Pedestrian Bridge

Construction: Retention of the Webster Street pedestrian bridge would reduce short-term visual disruptions and visual evidence of construction in the immediate vicinity, as the bridge would no longer be demolished. Therefore, the scale of construction-period visual effects would be reduced in this location relative to what was described in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Operation: During project operation, retention of the existing Webster Street pedestrian bridge would reduce the degree of visual change at this location. Therefore, no new or more severe visual impacts would result during project operation.

Removal of Proposed BRT Stops between Spruce and Cook Streets

Construction: The removal of proposed BRT stops between Spruce and Cook streets would eliminate construction activity outside the curb-to-curb portion of the right-of-way in this area. This would reduce short-term visual disruptions and visual evidence of construction in the immediate vicinity. Therefore, construction-related visual impacts would be reduced relative to what was described in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Operation: During project operation, retention of the existing local and express stops between Spruce and Cook streets would reduce the degree of visual change at this location. Therefore, no new or more severe visual impacts would result during project operation.

Addition of More Pedestrian Crossing and Safety Improvements

Construction: Implementation of additional pedestrian enhancements throughout the corridor would entail localized construction activities where new pedestrian crossing bulbs would be constructed. While visual disruptions associated with construction would be noticeable, they are a common feature of the urban environment, would occur entirely within the existing transportation right of way, would be short in duration, and would be similar to construction of other pedestrian

improvements described in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, no new or more severe visual effects would occur due to construction of additional pedestrian enhancements.

Operation: Once operational, like the pedestrian enhancements analyzed in the Draft EIS/EIR, the additional pedestrian crossing facilities added to the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would further enhance streetscape visual unity and quality, similar to other streetscape elements included within the Hybrid Alternative/LPA. Therefore, this modification would not result in new or more severe visual impacts during construction.

Addition of BRT Stops at Laguna Street

Construction: Addition of BRT stops at Laguna Street would include construction of transit islands that would separate right-turning vehicles from the bus lanes. While visual disruptions associated with construction would be noticeable, they are a common feature of the urban environment, would occur entirely within the existing transportation right of way, would be short in duration (2-3 weeks), and would be similar to construction of other BRT stops described in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, no new or more severe visual effects would occur due to construction of BRT stops at Laguna Street.

Operation: Once operational, this modification would ultimately enhance visual quality by reducing the width and dominance of auto travel lanes. In addition to the visual narrowing of paved roadway area, the transit islands would also provide an opportunity for other aesthetic improvements such as pavement patterns. Therefore, this modification would result in a beneficial change in visual quality at Laguna Street and no new or more severe visual impacts would occur.

Retention of Existing Local and Express Stops at Collins Street

Construction: Similar to retaining the Spruce and Cook local and express stops, retention of the Collins Street bus stops would eliminate construction activity outside the curb-to-curb portion of the right-of-way in this location. Therefore, the scale of construction-period visual effects would be reduced in this location relative to what was described in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Operation: One operational, this modification would retain the existing bus stops, which would reduce the degree of visual change at this location. Therefore, no new or more severe visual impacts would result from this modification.

Relocation of the Westbound Center- to Side-Running Bus Lane Transition

Construction: Relocation of the westbound bus lane transition at 27th Avenue would not alter the total level of construction activities and associated visual change, but would simply shift about half of it one block to the west. The 27th Avenue transition shift would not require removal of the median or its landscaping between 27th and 28th avenues and would have similar visual effects to those described in the Draft EIS/EIR. Therefore, this modification would not result in any new or more severe construction-period visual effects relative to what was described in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Operation: Similarly, this modification would not change the nature of bus operations, but would shift the location of the transition from center- to side-running bus lanes one block to the west. This would not result in any new or more severe visual impacts during project operation.

4.4.4.2 | CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

4.4.4.2.1 NO BUILD ALTERNATIVE - CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

Improvements associated with the No Build Alternative are comprised of physical infrastructure and transit service changes associated with other City projects that are either planned or programmed to be implemented in the Geary corridor by the year 2020. Construction of these improvements would be within public right-of-way areas. In some locations, the No Build Alternative could require tree removal during construction, during which a temporary decline in visual quality may occur. Other evidence of construction associated with signage, detours, construction materials, etc. could also affect the visual quality for residents, transit riders, motorists, and other viewer groups in the Geary corridor.

4.4.4.2.2 BUILD ALTERNATIVES - CONSTRUCTION EFFECTS

Project related construction activities for any of the build alternatives would involve the use of a variety of equipment, stockpiling of materials, and other visual signs of construction. Various TMP elements, such as portable Changeable Message Signs, detours, and other signage would be used during construction. While evidence of construction activity may be noticeable to area residents, transit-riders, and other viewer groups, such visual disruptions would be short term and are a common feature of the urban environment. Additionally, construction of the build alternatives would require varying levels of tree removal, during which a temporary decline in visual quality would occur.

Some construction may occur at night, requiring the use of additional task-specific lighting at certain worksites. Construction best practices would be implemented to minimize any nighttime light and glare effects. Any such lighting would be temporary, to cease upon the completion of nighttime construction activity in a given location.

4.4.4.3 | OPERATIONAL EFFECTS

Under FHWA methodology, adverse changes to the visual resources (visual quality and visual character), in combination with high levels of anticipated negative viewer response (viewer sensitivity and exposure), result in adverse effects.

4.4.4.3.1 NO BUILD ALTERNATIVE - OPERATIONAL EFFECTS

Under the No Build Alternative, transit and transportation facilities and services would remain unaltered except for changes that are currently planned or programmed to be implemented in the Geary corridor by 2020, which is defined as the opening year for all alternatives. Under the No Build Alternative, the Geary corridor would consist of essentially the same transit service as today including for SFMTA and Golden Gate Transit bus services. The No Build Alternative also includes opening of the new Transbay Transit Center (which would modify the current routing of the 38R and local 38 Geary (38) buses when they operate south of Market Street on new dedicated bus-only lanes near the Transbay Transit Center.

Finally, the No Build Alternative also includes several pavement maintenance/rehabilitation and roadway infrastructure improvements and new shelter enhancements at Muni Rapid stops including bike racks, shelter decals, redesigned flag signs, and new transit poles outfitted with solar powered lanterns. The solar powered lanterns are to be installed at all stops throughout the City after completion of installation along Rapid stops. Lanterns would illuminate bus stop signs with downwardly focused light to minimize light spillover.

4.4.4.3.2 BUILD ALTERNATIVES - OPERATIONAL EFFECTS

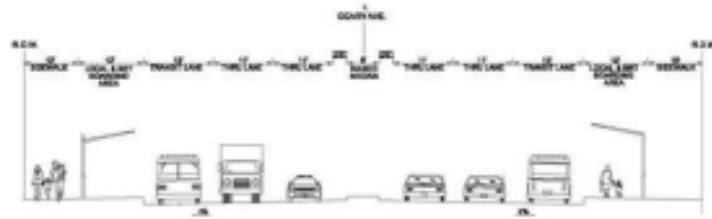
Figure 4.4-7 shows proposed cross-sections for each build alternative. Under Alternative 2, the primary visual changes would result from the coloring of BRT lanes and the introduction of new BRT stops on bus bulbs. At these stops, amenities such as new shelters, decorative lighting, custom paving associated with the bulbouts and dedicated bus lanes, and tree planting would be placed on widened passenger areas (bus bulbs) created by extending the sidewalk into the existing parking lanes. Existing center medians and associated landscaping would remain.

Under Alternative 3 and Alternative 3-Consolidated, dedicated, center-running bus-only lanes would replace existing center medians. The center-running bus-only lanes would be separated from auto traffic by continuous raised, landscaped medians and BRT platforms. The existing center medians and associated landscaping lost to the center BRT lanes would be replaced by extensive landscape planting in the adjoining new center-running medians, with a substantial net increase in the amount of landscaping in the Geary corridor.

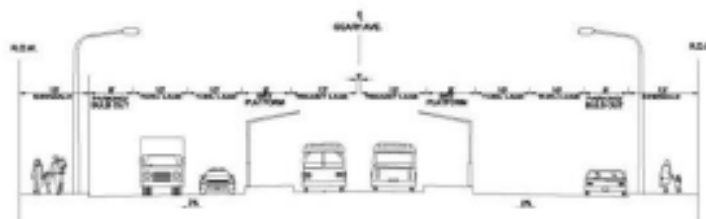
East of Van Ness Avenue, all alternatives would be identical. They would include dedicated bus-only lanes as is the existing condition with the addition of an extension of the red bus-only lanes on the last blocks of Geary and O'Farrell before Market Street. Bus stops would be provided with new amenities such as shelters, decorative lighting, custom paving, and tree planting behind the station shelters on widened bulbout passenger waiting areas.

Table 4.4-1 below summarizes potential operational period visual effects for each project alternative. These summaries are drawn from the detailed impact discussions in Section 4.4.4.3.2, which, per FHWA methodology, consider visual effects by alternative and landscape unit. Some landscape units are further disaggregated where existing visual conditions or visual effects warrant.

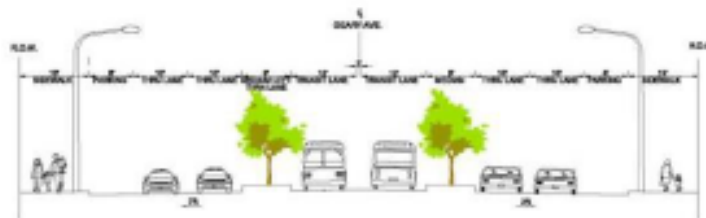
Figure 4.4-7 Typical Project Alternative Cross-Sections



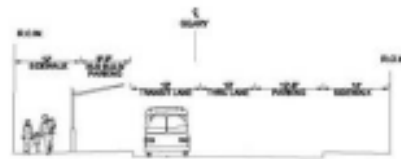
Alternative 2 – Typical Cross-Section



Alternatives 3, 3-Consolidated – Typical Cross-Section (BRT Stop)



Alternatives 3, 3-Consolidated – Typical Cross-Section (without Stop)



All Alternatives – Van Ness to Market Typical Cross-Section (BRT Stop)

Note: The Hybrid Alternative/LPA incorporates elements of Alternatives 2 and 3-Consolidated at different points in the corridor. Each of these cross-sections is illustrative of the Hybrid Alternative/LPA at different points in the Geary corridor.
Source: WKA, 2013

Table 4.4 -1 Potential Operational Visual Effects

VISUAL ASSESSMENT UNITS	VISUAL EFFECTS UNDER EACH ALTERNATIVE				
	NO BUILD	ALTERNATIVE 2	ALTERNATIVE 3	ALTERNATIVE 3-CONSOLIDATED	HYBRID ALTERNATIVE/LPA
Landscape Unit 1 (Refer to Figure 4.4-3)					
48th Avenue to 33rd Avenue (15 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2
33rd Avenue to 27th Avenue (6 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2
27th Avenue to Palm Avenue (27 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial at new stops	Beneficial	Same as Alternative 3	Same as Alternative 3
Palm Avenue to Wood Street (8 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial at upgraded stops	Same as Alternative 2	Somewhat beneficial at new BRT station	Same as Alternative 2
Landscape Unit 2 (Refer to Figure 4.4-4)					
Wood Street to Broderick Street (Anza Vista Hill/Masonic Avenue area) (5 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Visual environment for bus passengers somewhat degraded in proposed Masonic tunnel boarding area. Improvement measure proposed.	Same as Alternative 3; however, slightly improved due to additional landscaped median	Same as Alternative 2
Broderick Street to Scott Street (Kaiser Campus/Western Addition) (2 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial	Beneficial	Same as Alternative 3	Same as Alternative 2
Scott Street to Laguna Street (Western Addition/Fillmore/Japan Center) (5 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial at upgraded stops	Beneficial effect experienced by all viewer groups	Same as Alternative 3	Same as Alternative 2
Laguna to Cleary Court (Cathedral Hill) (1/2 block)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Minor, visually neutral or slightly beneficial effect	Same as Alternative 2	Beneficial	Same as Alternative 2
Cleary Court to Van Ness Avenue (Cathedral Hill) (2 1/2 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Minimal, visually neutral or slightly beneficial effect	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2
Landscape Unit 3 (Refer to Figure 4.4-5)					
Van Ness Avenue to Market Street (11 blocks)	Neutral or somewhat beneficial	Somewhat beneficial, particularly for bus passengers and pedestrians	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2	Same as Alternative 2

Note: All effects are assumed to be long-term for all viewer groups unless otherwise noted.
 Source: Circlepoint, 2016

Landscape Unit 1: Operational Effects**Alternative 2 – Operational Effects Overview**

Alternative 2's effects on blocks without stops would be minimal: existing landscaping on sidewalks and in center medians would remain unchanged; visual change due to BRT lane striping would be minimal

In blocks with BRT stops, intactness and unity would be enhanced through a noticeable increase in the extent, consistency, and scale of street tree canopy

Key View Point (KVP) 1 (Figures 4.4-8a and 4.4-8b) depicts a typical representative view of the Geary corridor under Alternative 2 as it would appear in the Richmond District and other sections of Landscape Unit 1, which are essentially similar in character throughout. Under Alternative 2, existing curbside parking would be eliminated on blocks where new BRT stops are introduced, as in the simulated view in Figure 4.4-8b. In other blocks without stops, curbside parallel parking would replace diagonal parking, with a dedicated bus lane directly adjacent to the parking area and two auto travel lanes to the left of the bus lane. Center medians and landscaping would remain unchanged. The primary visual changes due to Alternative 2 at blocks with BRT stops would include block-long bus bulbs (widening of the sidewalks to accommodate bus boarding without bus lane change); an increased number of shelters; additional sidewalk street tree planting; addition of decorative street lighting and pavement patterns. Proposed new tree plantings as part of this alternative would include tree species of larger stature and more vertical form than the existing *Metrosideros* plantings that currently typify the Richmond district streetscape.

The overall effect of the proposed Geary corridor improvements as depicted in Figure 4.4-8b would be to enhance visual intactness and unity of the streetscape at blocks with BRT stops. Under Alternative 2, effects on blocks without stops would be minimal: existing landscaping on sidewalks and in center medians would remain unchanged; visual change due to BRT lane striping would be minimal. In blocks with BRT stops, intactness and unity would be enhanced through a noticeable increase in the extent, consistency, and scale of street tree canopy. As tree canopies mature, a more continuous street tree canopy would have a unifying effect on the streetscape, providing a common visual feature that could dominate and filter the heterogeneous building facades, while presenting an intact, memorable, recognizable street image. Unity would also be enhanced by replacement of existing utilitarian cobra head street lighting with Geary corridorwide decorative and street lighting, additional shelters, decorative paving and associated street furniture. Intactness would be enhanced, particularly for waiting bus passengers and pedestrians, by an enlarged pedestrian environment due to bus bulbs at blocks with BRT stops. The effect of BRT stops would thus be to enhance overall visual quality of the streetscape in the long term. As described in Section 4.4.2, viewer sensitivity and response varies by viewer group, ranging from moderate to high. The improvements to visual quality of the streetscape as a result of Alternative 2, however, would be a somewhat beneficial effect for all affected viewer groups in the Geary corridor, including adjacent businesses, pedestrians, bus passengers, and motorists in the long term.

Alternative 2 would contribute substantially to achieving the objectives of the *Better Streets Plan*

Tree replacement at locations with existing plantings would cause an immediate decline in visual intactness, an adverse effect. This adverse effect would persist until replacement plantings begin to mature over three to five years (though full maturity would take five to 10 years or longer). In the short term, improvements to visual intactness and unity of the streetscape due to introduction of other Geary corridor design features, as discussed above, would partly off-set the loss of existing

Figure 4.4-8 Key Viewpoint 1 - Typical BRT Stop, Alternative 2 (25th Avenue)

A. Existing view looking west



B. Simulated view looking west showing mature vegetation



Source: WKA, 2013

tree canopy. Although it would result in greater short-term visual effects, replacement of existing *Metrosideros* plantings with a unified street tree treatment would have the long-term beneficial effect of a degree of visual unity to the more visually varied landscape.

San Francisco's BSP calls for a comfortable pedestrian realm, particularly on streets of citywide importance such as Geary Boulevard, with significant pedestrian amenities that include: curb ramps, marked crosswalks, pedestrian signals, pedestrian crossing bulbs, street trees, tree grates, sidewalk planters, storm water controls, pedestrian lighting, special paving, and site furnishings. Alternative 2 would include all the aforementioned features and would contribute substantially to achieving the objectives of the BSP.

Alternative 3 – Operational Effects Overview

Under Alternative 3, existing center medians and travel lanes would be replaced through most of Landscape Unit 1 (27th Avenue to Wood Street) by two adjacent center-running BRT-only lanes

Existing side curbs would remain, except for new bus bulbs at the corners of blocks with bus stops/BRT stations, for traffic calming and improved pedestrian access to bus platforms. Existing sidewalk tree planting would thus remain unaffected by Alternative 3

KVP 2 (Figure 4.4-9) depicts a typical view of a local bus stop under Alternative 3 as it would appear in the Richmond District and other sections of Landscape Unit 1. Under Alternative 3, there would be two typical stop configurations: local-bus-only and local-and-BRT stops. Figure 4.4-9 depicts a typical local stop configuration. The local stop configuration depicted is unique to Alternative 3 and would not be a part of Alternative 3-Consolidated. The local-and-BRT stop configurations would be substantially identical under Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated. A typical BRT stop under Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated is depicted in Figure 4.4-10, under the discussion of Alternative 3-Consolidated, below.

Under Alternative 3, existing center medians and travel lanes would be replaced through most of this landscape unit (27th Avenue to Wood Street) by two adjacent center-running BRT-only lanes. These BRT lanes would be separated from auto travel lanes by adjoining raised medians with landscaping and/or new BRT stations. Auto traffic would occupy the two outer travel lanes in each direction, outside of the landscaped medians/bus platforms. Parallel auto parking at the curb would replace existing diagonal parking. Existing curbs would remain, except for new pedestrian crossing bulbs at the corners of blocks with bus stops, for traffic calming and improved pedestrian access to bus platforms. Existing sidewalk tree planting would thus remain unaffected by Alternative 3.

Alternative 3 would require removal of all existing center medians and median trees from 27th Avenue to Buchanan Street, resulting in an immediate short-term decline in visual intactness and visual quality. That decline would be partially off-set by the increase in visual unity due to the new median design, median landscaping and replacement tree planting, and introduction of aesthetically coordinated local stops and new BRT stations. Overall, there would be a minor to moderate decline in visual quality due to loss of existing trees in the short term, for a period of three to five years as replacement tree canopies begin to mature.

Improvements to visual quality of the Geary corridor streetscape would be greater under Alternative 3 than under Alternative 2 in Landscape Unit 1

However, the overall effect of the proposed improvements of Alternative 3 in the long term, as depicted in Figure 4.4-9b, would be to enhance intactness and unity of the streetscape. In contrast to Alternative 2, which would visually enhance blocks with bus stops and new BRT stations through new tree plantings, lighting and street furnishings but leave other blocks largely unchanged, Alternative 3 would add new center medians, stops, and associated new tree planting in virtually all blocks with center-running configuration.

Figure 4.4-9 Key Viewpoint 2 - Typical Local Stop, Alternative 3 (18th Avenue)

A. Existing view looking west



B. Simulated view looking west showing mature vegetation



Source: WKA, 2013

The most prominent visual effect of Alternative 3 would thus be to transform the character and quality of the Geary corridor streetscape from a relatively open expanse of auto-dominated roadway and paving with sparse landscaping, to a more complex boulevard cross-section of distinct, smaller-scale, functionally separate but visually unified spaces. There would be an overall increase in street tree planting in the center landscape medians and at existing bus stops. Proposed street tree plantings would comprise a limited palette of species, to be used consistently throughout the Geary corridor. In general, proposed replacement species are larger and taller than the existing *Metrosideros* trees found in the Richmond District. These larger species would be more in scale with the width of Geary Boulevard, which would visually benefit from a larger tree canopy to unify and soften its broad expanse of paving and traffic.

The dual center-running landscaped medians would reduce the dominance of paving and auto travel lanes by visually separating and buffering the two sides of the street, reducing the visual scale of paved area. Viewers would occupy narrower, more pedestrian- and passenger-scaled realms – pedestrian and autos to each side, BRT in the center – visually filtered from each other by tree plantings and station structures, but also unified by the linear pattern of tree canopies. This, together with the addition of unified Geary corridor street lighting and furnishings, would result in a substantial increase in vividness, intactness, unity and overall visual quality of the Geary corridor in the long term.

Again, viewer sensitivity and response varies by viewer group. As under Alternative 2, however, the improvements to visual quality of the streetscape as a result of Alternative 3 would be a beneficial effect for all affected viewer groups. These beneficial effects on the Geary corridor streetscape would be greater under Alternative 3 than under Alternative 2.

As under Alternative 2, but to a much greater extent, streetscape improvements under Alternative 3 would conform with and advance the objectives of the BSP. In general, Alternative 3 would have a marked beneficial effect on the image of the Geary corridor in Landscape Unit 1. In keeping with many of the specific recommendations of the BSP, Alternative 3 would enhance visual intactness and unity, creating a more unified, recognizable Geary corridor image and improved overall visual quality.

Alternative 3-Consolidated – Operational Effects Overview

KVP 3 (Figure 4.4-10) depicts a typical view of a BRT stop under Alternative 3-Consolidated as it would appear in the Richmond District and other sections of Landscape Unit 1. Although specific locations would differ between Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated, the BRT stop configurations would be similar in layout.

As under Alternative 3, Alternative 3-Consolidated would replace existing center medians and travel lanes through most of this landscape unit with two adjacent center-running BRT-only lanes. These BRT lanes would be separated from auto travel lanes by adjoining raised side medians with landscaping and/or new BRT stations. Auto traffic would occupy the two outer travel lanes in each direction, outside of the landscaped medians/BRT stations. Parallel auto parking at the curb would replace existing diagonal parking.

The primary difference between Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated would be the inclusion of center local stops, as depicted in Figure 4.4-10b. The overall amount of landscaped median would be somewhat less under Alternative 3-Consolidated than under Alternative 3 due to the smaller footprint of local-only stops under Alternative 3.

Overall, however, the effects on visual quality of Alternative 3-Consolidated would be essentially similar to those of Alternative 3.

Figure 4.4-10 Key Viewpoint 3 - Typical BRT Stop, Alternative 3- Consolidated (17th Avenue)

A. Existing view looking west



B. Simulated view looking west showing mature vegetation



Source: WKA, 2013

Existing curbs would remain, except for new pedestrian crossing bulbs at the corners of blocks with bus stops and new BRT stations. Existing sidewalk tree planting would remain unchanged. The primary difference between Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated would be the inclusion of center local stops. These stops would be shorter than corresponding full BRT stops and complemented by additional landscaped area in the adjoining side-running medians where the existing bus shelters would be removed. The overall station platform area would thus be somewhat greater, and landscaped median area somewhat lesser than Alternative 3.

Overall, however, the effects on visual quality of Alternative 3-Consolidated would be essentially similar to those of Alternative 3. Like Alternative 3, Alternative 3-Consolidated would result in substantial new tree planting throughout Landscape Unit 1, and addition of unified Geary corridorwide street lighting and furnishings, with resulting improvements to the visual image and visual quality of the Geary corridor. It would leave existing sidewalk tree plantings unchanged; and reduce the scale and visual dominance of paving and travel lanes within the Geary corridor by visual separation from landscaped medians. Visual quality of the streetscape as a result of Alternative 3-Consolidated would represent a beneficial effect for all affected viewer groups in the Geary corridor in the long term. In keeping with the BSP, Alternative 3-Consolidated would greatly enhance visual intactness and unity, creating a more unified, recognizable Geary corridor image and improved visual quality.

The Hybrid Alternative/LPA combines various segments of Alternatives 2 and 3-Consolidated to produce a build alternative that meets the project's purpose and need with minimal environmental effects

The overall amount of landscaped median would be somewhat less under Alternative 3-Consolidated than under Alternative 3 even though there are fewer overall stations due to the smaller footprint of local-only stops under Alternative 3.

In terms of visual changes by segment, Alternative 3-Consolidated would not include smaller, local-only stops. Instead of eight BRT stops and ten separate local stops as under Alternative 3, Alternative 3-Consolidated would have twelve BRT stops between 27th Avenue and Palm Avenue. From a visual standpoint the increase in the number of BRT stops under Alternative 3-Consolidated would be off-set by the absence of separate local stops as under Alternative 3.

Overall Hybrid Alternative/LPA effects would be neutral to somewhat beneficial in the long term for all viewer groups in Landscape Unit 1. From 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would enhance visual intactness and unity

Hybrid Alternative/LPA – Operational Effects Overview

Overall, Hybrid Alternative/LPA effects would be neutral to somewhat beneficial in the long term for all viewer groups in Landscape Unit 1. From 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue the Hybrid Alternative/LPA in would enhance visual intactness and unity, creating a more unified, recognizable Geary corridor image and improved overall visual quality.

Landscape Unit 1: Segment by Segment Operational Effects

Alternative 2, 48th Avenue to 33rd Avenue

Effects of the Hybrid Alternative/LPA in Landscape Units 2 & 3 and for the remainder of the Geary corridor would be identical to those described for Alternative 2

Viewer sensitivity of adjacent residents is high; of bus passengers, moderately high. However, visual changes resulting from Alternative 2 would be minimal in most of this segment, except for a BRT stop located at 33rd/34th avenues. Street trees ranging from very young saplings to mature 25-foot trees would be removed to construct the BRT stops, resulting in a moderate short term decline in visual quality. These would be replaced as part of the new stop design. Visual effects would be similar to those depicted in Figure 4.4-8b, KVP 1. An increase in intactness and

unity from new BRT design features, widened sidewalks, and increased sidewalk tree planting would represent an improvement to visual quality at the stops, particularly after growth of tree canopies over a period of three to five years. Effects on scenic eastward views would be negligible. Thus overall effects of Alternative 2 would be neutral or somewhat beneficial in the long term for all viewer groups.

Alternatives 3, 3-Consolidated, and the Hybrid Alternative/LPA, 48th Avenue to 33rd Avenue

Like Alternative 2, these three alternatives would have side-running BRT throughout this segment, and thus would have similar neutral/beneficial visual effects as Alternative 2.

Alternative 2, 33rd Avenue to 27th Avenue

Visual effects of Alternative 2 would be minimal. There would be no BRT stops in this segment. Local stops/BRT layover stops would be located on the south between 30th and 32nd avenues, with negligible visual change. Thus, overall effects of Alternative 2 would be neutral or somewhat beneficial in the long term for all viewer groups.

Alternatives 3, 3-Consolidated, and the Hybrid Alternative/LPA, 33rd Avenue to 27th Avenue

Similar to Alternative 2, each of these alternatives would have side-running BRT throughout this segment, and would thus result in similar neutral to beneficial visual effects as Alternative 2.

Alternative 2, 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue

Eight BRT stops would be located at 25th/26th avenues, 14th/15th avenues, Fifth/Sixth avenues (westbound) and Sixth/Seventh avenues (eastbound), and Arguello/Second avenues. The appearance of these stops would be substantial as depicted in Figure 4.4-8b, with similar beneficial long-term visual effects. There would also be seven local stops in each direction in this segment. These would be similar to existing stops and would have negligible visual effects. Overall, visual effects would be somewhat beneficial at new stops for all affected viewer groups.

Alternative 3, 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue

Alternative 3 would transition from side-running to center-running between 26th and 27th avenues. This segment is depicted by typical representations in Figures 4.4-10 and 4.4-9. Although BRT stations under Alternative 3 would be located at different locations than shown in Figure 4.4-10, the station configuration and general appearance would be substantially the same as depicted in the figure. There would be eight BRT stations in this segment, located at 24th Avenue, 12th Avenue, Fifth/Sixth avenues, Arguello/Second avenues, plus 10 local stops.

Alternative 3 would transition from side-running to center-running near 27th Avenue. Between 27th and Palm avenues, several trees would be removed in the existing center medians

There would be a minor to moderate decline in visual quality due to loss of existing trees in the short term, for a period of 3 - 5 years as replacement tree canopies begin to mature, but in the long term effects of Alternative 3 would be beneficial

In this segment several trees would be removed in the existing center medians. These vary in size from young saplings to mature 20-foot *Metrosideros*. The larger center median trees are generally planted in scattered, irregular patterns in contrast to the denser, more regular sidewalk planting found, for example, between 19th and 22nd avenues. Their removal would result in an immediate decline in visual quality, partly off-set by positive design elements of the new median and bus stop design. As discussed above, there would be a minor to moderate decline in visual quality due to loss of existing trees in the short term, for a period of three to five years as replacement tree canopies begin to mature, but in the long term effects of Alternative 3 would be beneficial, particularly once replacement trees fully mature (after five to 10 years).

Alternative 3-Consolidated, 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue

Alternative 3-Consolidated would incorporate the same transition as described above for Alternative 3. Visual effects of Alternative 3-Consolidated in this area would thus be similarly beneficial as those described above for Alternative 3.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, 27th Avenue to Palm Avenue

The Hybrid Alternative/LPA would transition from side-running to center-running between 26th and 27th avenues in the eastbound direction and 27th and 28th avenues in the westbound direction. Visual effects of the Hybrid Alternative/LPA in the stretch of Geary between 27th Avenue and Palm Avenue would be similar to those described above for Alternative 3 as this lane configuration would entail the same tree removal in the center median as described for Alternative 3. While there would be a minor to moderate decline in visual quality due to loss of existing trees in the short term, long-term effects would be beneficial.

Alternative 2, Palm Avenue to Wood Street

There would be no BRT stops in this segment, and three local stops. Changes associated with Alternative 2 would thus be limited to lane striping. Visual effects would thus be negligible to beneficial (at upgraded stops) for all affected viewer groups.

Alternative 3, Palm Avenue to Wood Street

There would be no BRT stops in this segment, and two local stops. Changes associated with Alternative 3 would thus be limited to lane striping. Visual effects would thus be negligible to beneficial for all affected viewer groups.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Palm Avenue to Wood Street

There would be one combined BRT/express stop in this segment. Thus, with implementation of a new BRT station and associated amenities, visual effects under Alternative 3-Consolidated would be beneficial for all viewer groups.

Alternative 3-Consolidated would have twelve BRT stops between 27th Ave and Palm Avenue. From a visual standpoint the increase in the number of BRT stops under Alternative 3-Consolidated would be offset by the absence of separate local stops as under Alternative 3

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Palm Avenue to Wood Street

There would be no BRT stops in this segment, and two combined local/express stops. Changes associated with the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would thus be limited to lane striping. Visual effects would thus be negligible to beneficial for all affected viewer groups.

Landscape Unit 2: Operational Effects

Alternative 2 – Operational Effects Overview

General visual effects of proposed local and BRT stops would largely be similar in Landscape Unit 2 as in Landscape Unit 1. In most cases, the setting conditions and proposed BRT stop configurations would be the same as discussed above. Site-specific differences are described in the following section, discussed by project segment.

Alternative 3 – Operational Effects Overview

General visual effects of proposed local and BRT stops would largely be similar in Landscape Unit 2 as in Landscape Unit 1. Thus several effects would be the same as under Alternative 2. Site-specific differences are described in the following section, discussed by project segment.

Alternative 3-Consolidated – Operational Effects Overview

Visual effects of proposed local and BRT stops would largely be similar in Landscape Unit 2 as in Landscape Unit 1, described previously, and will thus not be repeated. Visual changes associated with Alternative 3-Consolidated in Landscape Unit 2 would be similar to Alternative 3 described above. Site-specific differences are described in the following section, discussed by project segment.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA – Operational Effects Overview

Visual changes associated with the Hybrid Alternative/LPA in this segment and for the remainder of the Geary corridor would be the same as for Alternative 2.

*Landscape Unit 2: Segment by Segment Operational Effects***Alternative 2, Wood Street to Broderick Street**

There would be one combined local/BRT stop within this segment, located in each direction east of Masonic Avenue. The westbound stop would be in roughly the same location as the existing local stop, but would be nearly doubled in length to extend to the corner of Presidio Avenue. The eastbound stop would be moved from the corner of Presidio Avenue to the corner of Masonic Avenue and also doubled in length. The large landscaped center median would be altered slightly in footprint, but would remain substantially similar in overall size and configuration. All tree planting and landscaping between Masonic and Presidio Avenue, however, would require removal and replacement. No other tree or landscaping removal is proposed. The existing outside lanes would be converted to painted bus-only lanes. A bicycle lane would be added inside the auto travel lanes between Masonic and Presidio avenues.

KVP 4 (Figure 4.4-11) depicts a view of the westbound BRT stop at Masonic Avenue on the Geary Boulevard surface lanes under Alternative 2, located east of Masonic Avenue at the top of Anza Vista Hill. The appearance of the BRT stops in both directions would be similar; the discussion that follows would apply to each.

Figure 4.4-11 Key Viewpoint 4 - BRT Stop, Alternative 2 (Masonic Avenue)

A. Existing view looking east



B. Simulated view looking east



Source: WKA, 2013

As depicted in Figure 4.4-11, the bus stop in this location would be expanded considerably in length, with additional shelters. The existing, relatively large *Metrosideros* trees would be removed to accommodate the new station layout. Planting at the corner of Presidio Avenue would be increased. New decorative street lamps, paving patterns, and railing, along with new shelters, would provide added visual unity to the BRT stop. Semi-opaque railing would provide visual separation from the adjacent car barn parking lot, also enhancing visual unity and intactness. These improvements would result in overall improvement to visual quality. The overall effect on visual quality in this segment would thus be somewhat beneficial due to an increase in visual unity in the block between Masonic and Presidio Avenue. This would be a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups. Vivid, scenic views eastward of downtown would be unaffected by the proposed improvements.

Despite relatively limited lane changes between Masonic and Presidio avenues under Alternative 2, tree replacement would be required for all trees in this block in the landscaped center median. All existing trees would be replaced with replacement plantings of large-stature species in keeping with landscape/streetscape themes for the Geary corridor as a whole. The removal of existing trees would result in immediate short-term adverse effects to visual quality; due to the loss of visual intactness during the period that replacement planting matures. Within a period of three to five years, lost visual intactness would begin to be restored; and as plantings further mature (over a period of five to 10 years), the use of new, larger-scale tree species would improve visual unity and intactness of this location.

Alternative 3, Wood Street to Broderick Street

The Wood Street to Broderick Street segment includes a local/BRT center lane stop in each direction, located in the entrances to the Geary Boulevard tunnel under Masonic Avenue. The new station would represent a decline in visual quality for bus passengers

This segment includes a local/BRT center lane stop in each direction, located in the entrances to the Geary Boulevard tunnel under Masonic Avenue, in the sections currently enclosed by retaining walls. The eastbound stop would be west of Wood Street; the westbound stop east of Presidio Avenue.

Under Alternative 3, the four narrow travel lanes through the Masonic tunnel would be altered, with the northernmost lane remaining as a westbound auto travel lane; the second existing westbound travel lane would become the BRT platform; and the two existing eastbound auto lanes would become two BRT bus-only lanes, one in each direction. Other auto traffic would be diverted above the tunnel on the Geary Boulevard side lanes. It is possible that tree planting could be incorporated into the platform design, enhancing intactness compared to the rather bleak existing setting of concrete and paving. However, compared to the existing bus stop environment on the above-ground Geary Boulevard side lanes on Anza Vista Hill, the new station would represent a substantial decline in visual quality for bus passengers. The moderate visual quality of the existing hilltop bus stop, characterized by ample street tree plantings and scenic views of downtown, would be replaced by a highly confined, concrete and auto-dominated setting with poor visual quality. Although the platform design could add design elements to enhance the visual quality of the tunnel, the constrained setting would remain dominated by tall concrete retaining walls and adjacent auto and bus traffic and visual quality would remain low.

For motorists and most pedestrians and shoppers, the introduction of a new BRT stop in the tunnel entrance would have a negligible effect. Eastbound motorists and some westbound as well would be diverted from the tunnel to the above-ground

side lanes of Geary Boulevard. Pedestrians on the surface streets would notice little difference. However, bus passengers who now board at the aboveground stops would now board from the tunnel platforms, which would represent an aesthetic change for passengers while waiting for buses. To offset this visual change, improvement measures were developed for this alternative, which include public art and landscape elements at the Masonic tunnel BRT stops in order to enhance visual quality.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Wood Street to Broderick Street

Alternative 3-Consolidated would include new BRT stops at the Masonic tunnel entrances and overall lane re-configuration described above for Alternative 3. Visual effects of Alternative 3-Consolidated would therefore be identical to those of Alternative 3. In the vicinity of these elements, visual effects would be adverse for bus passengers and largely neutral for other viewer groups.

In the above-ground portion of Geary Boulevard east of Masonic Avenue, lane restriping, addition of a bike lane, and landscape replacement in the center median would be the same as described for Alternatives 2 and 3. However, there would be no new local stops in this block. As with Alternative 3, this would result in a slight improvement of visual quality in the long term due to enhanced visual unity from implementation of a Geary corridorwide street tree scheme.

Instead of a local stop west of Baker Street, Alternative 3-Consolidated would place BRT stops in each direction directly east of Baker Street. Because Alternative 3-Consolidated would have two BRT lanes in this block, rather than three (as in Alternative 3), Alternative 3-Consolidated would include more landscaped median.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Wood Street to Broderick Street

Same as Alternative 2.

Alternative 2, Broderick Street to Scott Street

One combined local/BRT stop located in each direction would be located east (westbound) and west (eastbound) of Divisadero Street. Some of the existing trees would be removed in this segment to accommodate the new BRT stops. The BRT stops would be similar in appearance to that depicted in Figure 4.4-11, although the species of replacement trees is not yet determined. Tree removal would result in a minor decline in visual intactness in the short term, which would be partly off-set by an increase in visual unity from the addition of decorative station fixtures (shelters, street lamps) and replacement tree planting. In the long term with maturation of replacement tree planting, the overall effect on visual quality would be somewhat beneficial due to a net improvement to visual unity and intactness.

Alternative 3, Broderick Street to Scott Street

One local/BRT stop would be located in each direction west of Divisadero Street in this segment. Existing center median trees of various types, including Monterey cypress, Canary Island pine, and *Metrosideros* would be removed to accommodate the center BRT lanes. These disparate trees range from small to large in height and are planted in irregular, isolated groupings. Shrub plantings in the center medians range from good condition near Kaiser to spotty or barren east of Divisadero. Landscaping in the center median thus varies in quality, but is heterogeneous and

Alternative 3-Consolidated would include BRT stops in each direction east of Baker Street, and an additional landscaped median

From Broderick Street to Scott Street, several trees would be removed to accommodate new BRT stops for Alternative 2

Tree removal would result in a minor decline in visual intactness in the short term, which would be partly off-set by an increase in visual unity from the addition of decorative station fixtures and replacement tree planting.

Under Alternative 3, several existing center median trees would be removed to accommodate the center BRT lanes; however, replacement landscaping would occur

Overall, the improvement of the streetscape visual quality from median landscaping and platform design under Alternative 3 in this segment would be a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups in the long term

lacking in visual unity. On the other hand, existing semi-mature London plane trees line the south side of the street throughout this segment, and the north side between Divisadero and Scott Street, provide a unifying feature and enhanced intactness. These would be unaffected by Alternative 3. Removal of the center median trees would have an adverse effect on the streetscape in the short term. However, the decline in visual quality would be less severe than in some other segments because of the positive effect of the existing plane tree plantings, which would remain visually dominant, and because of the enhanced visual unity of new Alternative 3 replacement landscaping, even in its immature phase.

Similar to the depiction of Alternative 3-Consolidated shown in Figure 4.4-10, KVP 3, above, Alternative 3 would introduce dual landscaped center medians separating the center bus-only and outer auto travel lanes. Along with tree planting on the BRT platforms themselves, these medians would introduce regular, consistent plantings of Geary corridorwide theme tree plantings to complement and reinforce the existing plane tree canopy. Such plantings could substantially improve the visual intactness, unity and overall visual quality of the segment, while enhancing the visual unity of the Geary corridor as a whole. For example, replacement planting in the center medians with new plane trees could complement the existing plane tree canopy, creating an *allee* effect more in keeping with the wide scale of Geary Boulevard. As at the other new BRT stops, the platforms would also introduce distinctive lighting, paving and tree planting, contributing to enhanced visual unity of the streetscape. Overall, the improvement of the streetscape visual quality from median landscaping and platform design would be a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups in the long term.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Broderick Street to Scott Street

Instead of local/BRT stops west of Divisadero Street as under Alternative 3, BRT stops would be located mid-block in each direction between Divisadero and Scott streets. These stops would be connected to crosswalks at each intersection by solid medians. This alternative would thus have less tree planting than Alternative 3 in this block. Overall, however, effects would be substantially similar to Alternative 3. Improvement of the streetscape visual quality from platform design and landscaping would be a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Broderick Street to Scott Street

Same as Alternative 2.

Alternative 2, Scott Street to Laguna Street

BRT stops would be located in each direction at Fillmore Street (west of the Fillmore intersection). Existing local-only stops would remain at Scott and Buchanan streets in each direction.

KVP 5 (Figure 4.4-12) depicts a view of the westbound BRT stop on the Geary Boulevard surface lanes under Alternative 2, located west of Fillmore Street. This view is representative of proposed stops in this segment. The appearance of the new stops in both directions would be similar and the discussion that follows would apply to both.

Figure 4.4-12 Key Viewpoint 5 - BRT Stop(Fillmore Street)

A. Existing view looking east



B. Simulated view looking east showing mature vegetation (Alternative 2)



Source: WKA, 2013

C. Simulated view looking east showing mature vegetation and the Webster Street pedestrian bridge (Hybrid Alternative/LPA)



Source: SFCTA, 2016

As depicted in Figure 4.4-12b, the proposed BRT stop in this location under Alternative 2 would be very similar to that depicted in Figure 4.4-11b. In this case, the relatively poor visual quality of the existing location would be more noticeably improved by the introduction of the proposed stop. New decorative street lamps, custom paving associated with new bulbouts, as well as with dedicated bus lanes, new railings, and new shelters, would provide added visual unity to the BRT stop. Widened sidewalks and new tree planting would enhance unity and intactness. The overall effect on visual quality would thus be beneficial. This would be a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups.

Effects of the eastbound stop would be similar. Although existing visual quality of that location is not as poor, the new station features would have an overall beneficial effect on visual quality.

Alternative 3, Scott Street to Laguna Street

In Alternative 3, a center median local stop would be located in each direction between Scott and Steiner streets. An additional eastbound local stop would be located on Geary Boulevard at the southwest corner of Fillmore Street. Alternative 3 also includes the filling of the Fillmore undercrossing and the associated raising of Geary Boulevard from below grade to at-grade. Fillmore and Geary would thus become a normal at-grade intersection. A center median local/BRT stop would extend the entire block between Fillmore and Webster streets.

In the long term, complementary replacement tree planting in the center medians would restore and could enhance the intactness and unity of this section between Webster and Laguna Streets

Several trees would be removed from the center median between Scott and Steiner streets to accommodate the center-running BRT lanes and landscaped medians. This would have an adverse effect on visual quality in the short term, though this effect would be moderated by the compromised visual quality of the existing plantings, which are of inconsistent types, spacing, and health, and by the strong visual dominance of the continuous tall plane trees that would remain on each side of this block. Replacement landscaping would also create enhanced visual unity, even in its immature phase. In the long term, complementary replacement tree planting in the center medians could thus enhance the intactness, unity and overall visual quality of this section between Scott and Fillmore streets.

KVP 6 (Figure 4.4-13) depicts the local/BRT stops in the newly filled portion of Geary Boulevard between Fillmore and Webster streets under Alternative 3.

As depicted in Figure 4.4-13b, the proposed local/BRT stop would extend for the entire block. The existing block is visually fragmented and divided by the undercrossing structure, and thus lacks visual intactness and unity. Existing visual quality is thus moderately low. As depicted in Figure 4.4-13b, the restoration of a continuous at-grade boulevard in this section would enhance if not fully restore visual unity of the space. The enhanced visual unity would be appreciated by pedestrians, people in surrounding buildings, as well as by transit riders and drivers. Introduction of the platforms would add to that restored unity through the addition of visually unified elements of regular tree planting, decorative light standards, repeating shelter structures, and decorative railing. Greatly widened sidewalks and decorative platform lighting would add further to the improved intactness and unity of the streetscape. Overall, visual quality would thus be improved by the new stops and filled configuration, a beneficial effect as experienced by all viewer groups.

Some trees in the center median between Webster and Buchanan streets would be removed to accommodate a reconfigured center median and a major new pedestrian crosswalk serving the main entrance to the Japantown Peace Plaza in the middle of this block. These trees are a part of a continuous center median tree planting extending between the vicinity of the Peace Plaza to Laguna Street. The removal of trees would have an adverse effect on visual quality in the short term, which would be somewhat moderated by the continued strong visual dominance of existing plantings of tall plane trees on the entire south side of the street between Webster and Laguna streets. In the long term, complementary replacement tree planting in the center medians would restore and could enhance the intactness and unity of this section between Webster and Laguna streets. The center BRT lanes would make the transition from center-running to side-running in this block between Buchanan and Laguna streets.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Scott Street to Laguna Street

Same as Alternative 3.

Figure 4.4-13 Key Viewpoint 6 - BRT Stop, Alternative 3 (Fillmore Street)

A. Existing view looking east



B. Simulated view looking east showing mature vegetation



Source: WKA, 2013

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Scott Street to Laguna Street

Similar to Alternative 2 regarding proposed BRT stops; local-only stops would be in different locations than those of Alternative 2. In addition, the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would relocate reconfigured on-street parallel parking spaces on both sides of Geary Boulevard between Webster and Laguna.

Unlike the other build alternatives, the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would not remove the Webster Street bridge (refer to Figure 4.4-12c). This would reduce the scale of construction-period visual effects in the area as the bridge would no longer be demolished.

The Hybrid Alternative/LPA would add combined local/BRT stops in both directions on new transit islands at Laguna Street. The addition of transit islands would ultimately enhance the visual quality of the pedestrian environment by reducing the width and dominance of auto travel lanes. The Laguna Street transit islands would also provide an opportunity for aesthetic improvements such as additional street tree planting, decorative street lighting, and pavement patterns, and would result in a visual narrowing of paved roadway area. These improvements would result in a net visual benefit.

Alternative 2, Laguna to Cleary Court

There would be no new stops in this segment. Changes associated with Alternative 2 would include lane re-striping, painting of the dedicated bus lane, and widening of the sidewalk by approximately 20 feet. Visual effects for all users would thus be minor.

Alternative 3, Laguna to Cleary Court

This segment marks the beginning of a side-running BRT lane configuration that would then continue to the eastern Geary corridor terminus at Market Street. One local stop would be located in each direction at the corners east of Laguna Street, on bus bulbs extending to Cleary Court. These would also accommodate parallel street parking beyond the stops. The BRT lanes would be located inside the parallel parking zones. The widened sidewalk would result in an improved bus passenger and pedestrian environment. From the perspective of bus passengers and pedestrians, the new stops would provide a visually improved, more spacious environment. Existing young plane trees at these locations would be preserved at the new stops. The stops would thus have a minor, visually neutral or slightly beneficial effect.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Laguna to Cleary Court

Alternative 3-Consolidated would introduce BRT stops in both directions near Cleary Court. The eastbound BRT stop would be located within this segment. The westbound BRT stop would be located east of Cleary Court in the below segment. The BRT stops would be substantially similar to the side-running BRT stops depicted in Figures 4.4-8, 4.4-11, and 4.4-12. Rather than occupying an entire block, however, they would be located on wide bus bulbs extending into the existing roadway, requiring removal of several existing young plane trees at the eastbound stop. These would be replaced in kind as feasible as part of the platform design to maintain continuity with the existing plane tree plantings in this segment. The tree

From the perspective of motorists, bus passengers and pedestrians, the introduction of the BRT stops would reduce the auto- and pavement-dominated character of the streetscape, enhance intactness with additional platform-related tree planting, while preserving visual unity through replacement of the existing pattern of plane tree planting

replacement would result in a decline in visual quality in the short term, until maturation of the replacement tree planting. As a result of the very wide proposed bus bulbs, the BRT stops would become a prominent feature of the streetscape in this section, increasing the scale of the passenger waiting area and reducing the existing expanse of paving (from four auto lanes plus curbside parking, to two auto lanes and one BRT lane, with curbside parking west of the BRT platforms) in the vicinity of the stops. From the perspective of motorists, bus passengers and pedestrians, the introduction of the BRT stops would reduce the auto- and pavement-dominated character of the streetscape, enhance intactness with additional platform-related tree planting, while preserving visual unity through replacement of the existing pattern of plane tree planting. From the perspective of bus passengers and pedestrians, the new stops would provide a visually improved, more spacious environment.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Laguna to Cleary Court

The Hybrid Alternative/LPA would add combined local/BRT stops in both directions on new transit islands at Laguna Street; the outbound stop would be between Laguna Street and Cleary Court. The addition of transit islands would ultimately enhance the visual quality of the pedestrian environment by reducing the width and dominance of auto travel lanes. The Laguna Street transit islands would also provide an opportunity for aesthetic improvements such as pavement patterns and would result in a visual narrowing of paved roadway area. These improvements would result in a net visual benefit.

Alternative 2, Cleary Court to Van Ness Avenue

In this segment one westbound local/BRT stop would be located west of Gough Street, and one local/BRT stop would be located in both eastbound and westbound directions at the northwest corner of Geary and southwest corner of O'Farrell west of Van Ness Avenue.

Some trees would be removed to accommodate the westbound stop west of Gough Street. These are part of a virtually continuous curb planting of plane trees extending between Laguna Street and Gough Street. It is possible that center median landscaping would also be replaced in the vicinity of this stop for lane re-configuration to accommodate the BRT lanes.

Alternative 2 includes a BRT stop on a bus bulb at the northwest corner of Geary Street and Van Ness Avenue. There are no sidewalk trees in this area of the block, so no tree removal would be required. Existing visual quality of this corner of Geary Street is moderately low, with construction underway at the northwest corner of Geary and Van Ness Avenue, no street tree planting, narrow sidewalks, adjoining a utilitarian, nondescript side façade lacking street-level windows or pedestrian access. Similarly, a BRT stop would be built at the southwest corner of O'Farrell Street and Van Ness Avenue. Some existing young London plane trees of moderate (about 20') height would be removed to construct the new BRT stations. These are part of a uniform, continuous plane tree planting on both sides of the street between Van Ness Avenue and Franklin Street.

Alternative 2's visual effects would be minor to somewhat beneficial for all viewer groups from Cleary Street to Van Ness Avenue

The appearance of the stops would be substantially similar to those previously depicted in Figures 4.4-11 and 4.4-12 (KVPs 4 and 5). The removal of existing trees would cause a decline in visual intactness, unity and overall visual quality in the short term. This adverse effect would be partly off-set by replacement tree planting, new decorative street lamps, paving patterns, and shelters, and particularly a greatly widened sidewalk/passenger area which would enhance visual unity and intactness at the BRT stop, particularly for bus passengers. Tree replacement at the stop would be in-kind to match the existing planting pattern. In the long term, with maturation of replacement tree planting, intactness, unity and overall visual quality of the site would be somewhat enhanced. The overall effect on visual quality would thus be somewhat beneficial in the long term as experienced by all viewer groups.

Alternative 3, Cleary Court to Van Ness Avenue

Alternative 3 would relocate the existing eastbound local stop from the east to west side of Gough Street and would upgrade an existing eastbound local stop on the corner of O'Farrell Street west of Van Ness Avenue to local/BRT. The local stop would be essentially similar to other side-running local stops depicted previously (refer to Figure 4.4-9). The eastbound BRT stop at Van Ness Avenue would be located at an already widened bus bulb. The bus bulb would be extended to the west of the existing bulbout. The new bulbout would be located between two driveways (of an adjacent auto dealership/auto service shop). The new stop would thus represent a minimal change, with some visual enhancement from introduction of new fixtures and additional shelters. Alternative 3 would thus have minimal, visually neutral or slightly beneficial effects in this segment.

Alternative 3-Consolidated, Cleary Court to Van Ness Avenue

Alternative 3-Consolidated would include the same eastbound BRT stop at O'Farrell Street and Van Ness Avenue as described above for Alternative 3. The eastbound BRT stop at Van Ness Avenue would be located at an already-widened bus bulb. The bus bulb would be extended to the west of the existing bulbout. The resulting new bus bulb would be located between two driveways of an auto dealership/service shop. The new stop would thus represent a minimal change, with some visual enhancement from introduction of new fixtures and additional shelters.

Similar to Alternative 2, Alternative 3-Consolidated would include a westbound BRT stop at the northeast corner of the Van Ness/Geary intersection. There are no sidewalk trees in this location, so no tree removal would be required. Existing visual quality of this corner of Geary Boulevard is moderately low, lacking street tree planting, with narrow sidewalks adjoining a utilitarian side façade lacking street-level windows, pedestrian access or traffic. The bus bulb would introduce a wider bus passenger and pedestrian environment, with street trees, decorative street lighting and paving patterns enhancing visual unity and intactness.

Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Cleary Court to Van Ness Avenue

Same as Alternative 2.

Landscape Unit 3: Operational Effects**Alternative 2 – Operational Effects Overview**

Visual changes in Landscape Unit 3 would be similar to those described for Landscape Units 1 and 2. The character of the adjoining setting is denser, taller and more urban than in the units to the west, and the cross-section of Geary Boulevard is narrower, about 60 feet to 69 feet rather than up to 100 feet. However, the configuration of the proposed stops in Landscape Unit 3 is the same as for other side-running stops described for Alternative 2.

Alternative 3, 3-Consolidated, and Hybrid Alternative/LPA – Operational Effects Overview

In Landscape Unit 3, these three alternatives would each have features similar to Alternative 2. Accordingly, visual effects would be similar as those for Alternative 2.

Landscape Unit 3: Segment by Segment Operational Effects**Alternative 2, Van Ness Avenue to Market Street**

In Alternative 2 (as well as for all of the build alternatives), five BRT or local/BRT stops in each direction would be included. KVP 7 (Figure 4.4-14) depicts a view of a typical BRT stop at Powell and O'Farrell streets. As illustrated in the simulation, the new stops would be essentially similar to other side-running stops depicted previously (refer to Figure 4.4-8). Specific street tree recommendations (*Tristania*) would blend with prevailing tree plantings in this segment. There are no existing street trees in this block, and in general tree plantings are scattered and isolated within the downtown area of this segment.

Figure 4.4-14b depicts the bus bulb, and a new lane configuration with bus-only lane similar to existing but with one auto travel lane only, and a curbside parking lane. The change from existing conditions would thus be fairly minor. At BRT stops, the widening of the sidewalk passenger area and addition of street trees, lighting, distinctive paving and other amenities, as well as a visual narrowing of paved area, would enhance intactness and overall visual quality somewhat for all viewer groups, particularly for pedestrians and bus passengers. A primary visual concern in this segment is to ensure that new features remain compatible with the historic characteristics of the setting. Throughout the KMMS Conservation District, the streetscape is distinguished by historic street lamps as seen in Figures 4.4-6 and 4.4-14. As noted previously, many buildings in this area are designated architecturally significant or contributing, and the corner property shown in KVP is one such example. Visually distinctive features of adjoining historic properties, such as the sign adjoining this BRT stop, are a concern, and platforms would be designed to avoid obscuring or visually clashing with such features. See Section 4.5 (Cultural Resources) for a further discussion of consistency with national, state and local standards governing historic resources, including potential project-related visual effects.

Overall, Alternative 2 would have a subtle but somewhat beneficial visual effect in this segment as experienced by all viewer groups, particularly bus passengers and pedestrians.

Overall, Alternative 2 would have a subtle but somewhat beneficial visual effect from Van Ness Avenue to Market Street, as experienced by all viewer groups, particularly bus passengers and pedestrians

Figure 4.4-14 Key Viewpoint 7 - BRT Stop, All Alternatives (Powell Street and O'Farrell Street)



A. Existing view looking west, prior to 2014 installation of red lanes



B. Simulated view looking west showing mature vegetation

Source: WKA, 2014

Alternatives 3, 3-Consolidated, and the Hybrid Alternative/LPA, Van Ness Avenue to Market Street

These three alternatives would incorporate the same features as Alternative 2 described above. Visual effects of these alternatives would therefore be similar to those of Alternative 2.

4.4.4.4 | COMPARATIVE EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated would have the greatest visual disruptions during construction, followed by the Hybrid Alternative/LPA, then Alternative 2. Once operational, Alternative 3-Consolidated and the Hybrid Alternative/LPA would have the greatest long-term benefits to visual quality, followed by Alternative 2 and Alternative 3. The No Build Alternative would have the least beneficial impacts to visual quality throughout the corridor, featuring only marginal improvements.

4.4.5 | Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

4.4.5.1 | CONSTRUCTION MEASURES

In addition to compliance with City policies regarding minimization of disruption associated with working within City streets (refer to Section 4.6.1), implementation of the following measures would help minimize any adverse visual effects associated with construction of any of the build alternatives.

- **MIN-VQ-C1.**

- » Project construction shall be phased to reduce the period of disruption at any particular location to the shortest practical length of time.
- » Construction lighting shall be shielded and directed to limit direct illumination to within the area of work and avoid all light trespass.
- » Construction staging and storage areas shall be screened by visually opaque screening wherever they will be exposed to public view for extended periods of time.

4.4.5.2 | OPERATIONAL MEASURES

As no adverse operational period visual effects have been identified, no avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures are warranted. However, please note Section 4.6.5, where minimization (MIN-CUL-7) calls for harmonization of the visual qualities of built elements of the build alternatives with adjacent historic properties through careful consideration of design, lighting, materials, and color choices that would complement and be sensitive to nearby historic properties. In addition, SFCTA and SFMTA, in cooperation with the San Francisco Planning Department, have identified a number of improvement measures listed below to further enhance the visual quality of the build alternatives.

- **I-VQ-1.** Incorporate public art and landscape elements at Masonic tunnel BRT stops. In order to enhance visual quality at Masonic tunnel BRT stops under Alternatives 3 and 3-Consolidated, public art could be incorporated in the station design, tunnel retaining walls and overcrossing parapet. Climbing vines or other landscape planting could be incorporated into station design as feasible.

- **I-VQ-2.** In order to maximize overall Geary corridor visual unity, a consistent palette of street tree types could be developed, reviewed by City planning staff, and applied throughout the Geary corridor.
- **I-VQ-3.** Coordinate with Geary corridor planning efforts of the City planning department. Station design could be coordinated with long-term urban design studies of the City planning department, including studies for the Divisadero to Laguna Street segment of the Geary corridor.

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