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5.7 Visual and Aesthetic Impacts

Since the publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), this section has been modified to remove a reference to an I-69 overpass through the Southport Road interchange, consistent with the Refined Preferred Alternative (RPA). Listings of interchanges, underpasses, and overpasses have been updated to reflect the RPA. Some photos have been changed to better represent the view to and from the RPA.

5.7.1 Introduction

Visual resources of the I-69 Section 6 corridor include both the “view from the road” and the “view of the road.” Since the project involves upgrading an existing four-lane divided highway to an interstate highway, the visual resource impacts are comparable with those impacts currently attributable to SR 37. Impacts to visual resources are considered in the design quality, art, and architectural aspects of project planning. These considerations are particularly important in sensitive environmental settings.

The construction of I-69 would result in both temporary and permanent visual impacts. Temporary impacts include the view of construction equipment and exposed earth and the presence of dust resulting from construction activities. These temporary impacts would be mitigated by controlling the construction limits and by prompt re-vegetation upon completion of construction. For further mitigation measures related to construction, refer to **Section 5.12.3**. Permanent impacts (within the construction limits and outside of the existing SR 37 facility) include view changes resulting from the conversion of forests, wetlands, farmland, and rural and urban landscapes to features of an interstate highway.

5.7.2 Methodology

In an analysis of visual impacts of alternative roadway alignments, consideration is given to “aesthetic” appeal as it pertains to both the “view from the road” and the “view of the road.” “Aesthetics” refers to the visual qualities and scenic nature of an area. Visual impacts are also considered for public recreational spaces and for properties that are eligible for listing or are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. **Section 5.22** describes public recreation spaces and **Section 5.13** provides detailed information on historic properties. Additional information is also provided in **Chapter 8, Section 4(f) Evaluation**.

In order to maintain consistency with visual impact assessments conducted for I-69 Sections 1 through 5, the methodology for evaluating visual impacts of I-69 Section 6 follows guidelines set forth in the *Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects Handbook* (Federal Highway Administration, 1988). It should be noted that in January of 2015, FHWA issued updated *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*. The 2015 guidance is a



process oriented tool to assess visual impacts using an inventory phase and an analysis phase. The 2015 guidance requires a description of a “baseline” similar to the description of existing conditions in this chapter, and includes an analysis of scale, form, materials, and overall visual character. These factors will not change appreciably along I-69 Section 6 since SR 37 is already a multi-lane highway facility. For these reasons, and because the analysis method and results would not be appreciably different, the 2015 guidance was not used for this analysis.

5.7.3 Analysis

The I-69 Section 6 corridor transitions from hilly to relatively flat terrain from the south end of the project area near SR 39 to the north end at I-465. As shown in **Figure 4.3-2**, the landform of the corridor is consistent with the Martinsville Hills and New Castle Till Plains and Drainageways physiographic divisions. **Section 4.3.1.1** describes these physiographic divisions.

In general, land use within the study area is more urbanized in and near the cities of Martinsville and Indianapolis, and is agricultural and forested with scattered residential and commercial development between Martinsville and Indianapolis. Dense urban-type development is located in Indianapolis, particularly from Southport Road north to I-465.

Water features throughout the I-69 Section 6 corridor, as described in **Section 5.19**, affect the view from the road. These features include riparian wetlands, stormwater detention ponds, sand and gravel pit quarries, and streams. Most of the wetlands are emergent, although there are some forested wetlands. The study area is wholly within the White River watershed. See **Figure 5.7-1**.

Figure 5.7-1: View of White River within Study Area



Corridor vegetation is primarily agricultural or deciduous upland forest with wooded properties located at many locations, as described in **Section 5.20**. Common trees include oak, hickory, beech, maple, tulip, and poplar, with a ground layer composed mostly of forest herbs and grasses. Vegetation in the bottomlands and riparian wetlands include box elder, elm, red maple, silver maple, sycamore, sedges, and rushes.

For purposes of reviewing the visual context of the project, I-69 Section 6 can be broken into south, central, and north regions.

South Region. The south region begins near SR 39 at the south terminus of I-69 Section 6 and extends north through the urbanized area of Martinsville to SR 44. The region is characterized by commercial, residential, and light industrial land uses, including shopping centers, residential subdivisions, and apartment complexes. Private and public K-12 schools are also present in this region and visible from SR 37. **Figure 5.7-2** shows a typical view of the project corridor from the roadway in Martinsville area (south region) and **Figure 5.7-3** shows Martinsville High School as viewed from SR 37.

Central Region. The central region extends from SR 44 north to Smith Valley Road. This region is more rural than the south region and has pockets of row crops, pastures, and forests interspersed with businesses and residences adjacent to the roadway. **Figure 5.7-4** shows a typical view of agricultural land as seen from SR 37 within the central region.

North Region. The north region begins at the Johnson/Marion County line and continues north to the terminus of I-69 Section 6 at the I-465 interchange in Indianapolis. This region is urban with a predominance of commercial and light and heavy industrial development, with residential subdivisions and apartments along the roadway. See **Figure 5.7-5** for a view of Southern Dunes Apartments in the north region.

Figure 5.7-2: View of Urban Martinsville from SR 37 (South Region)



Figure 5.7-3: View of Martinsville High School from SR 37 (South Region)





5.7.3.1 View from the Road

All the alternatives, including the RPA, either use common mainline alignments or have alignments that are within close proximity to each other and use the existing SR 37 right of way. As such, views from the road would generally be similar for any of the alternatives.

In the visual analysis of the views from the road, three distinct visual characteristics were identified. First, views from the road would be obstructed in some locations due to either the roadway’s position or design within the existing terrain and/or the dense adjacent forest. Second, opportunities to view the features along the corridor from the road would only be possible in those areas that have flat to slightly rolling terrain (versus hilly terrain) and less extensive vegetation adjacent to the road. Third, some panoramic vistas would be created or maintained along the corridor. Unlike close-up views of vegetation, farmland, and the built environment that are possible from existing, slower speed state highways and county roads in the study area, most views from the road would be distant views.

Many residential areas would be visible from the road throughout the I-69 Section 6 corridor. In particular, several densely-populated neighborhoods abut or are near existing SR 37 in the south region between SR 39 and SR 44 in Martinsville. Views of these areas would be extended with Alternative C1 since it would be elevated through this section. The view of these areas would be similar to existing SR 37 from the other alternatives. **Figure 5.7-6** shows a view of the Spring Valley Mobile Home Park in Martinsville.

Figure 5.7-4: Typical Agricultural Land along SR 37 (Central Region)



Figure 5.7-5: Southern Dunes Apartments (North Region)



At the north end of the south region, Alternatives C1, C2, and C3 would provide similar views as they pass under SR 252 and SR 44. Alternative C4 and the RPA, however, would pass over SR 252. This change was requested by the City of Martinsville specifically to provide a panoramic gateway vista for those travelers entering the area from the north. See **Section 3.7.2**.

Figure 5.7-6: View of Spring Valley Mobile Home Park from SR 37 (South Region)



Further north, in the central region, scattered, less dense residential areas and single owner lots abut or are within a quarter-mile of SR 37. Larger neighborhoods currently served by SR 37 are located in the north region from the Johnson/Marion County line to I-465 and include the Southern Dunes (**Figure 5.7-5**) and Aspen Lakes apartment complexes.

The mainline for all the alternatives would be elevated from the Wicker Road grade separation north to the I-465 interchange. At grade separations, I-69 would be elevated approximately 20 feet above existing SR 37 in order to accommodate the cross-street underpasses. Between the grade separations, I-69 would be as close to its existing elevation as possible to reduce the amount of fill needed for construction.

According to INDOT Standard Specifications, the grade of I-69 should be no greater than four percent. Due to the proximity of grade separations to each other there is not enough distance between the grade separations to allow I-69 to return to the SR 37 existing elevation and meet the four percent grade requirements. Therefore, I-69 would be elevated above the existing elevation north of Southport Road to I-465.

The elevation of I-69 would be similar to SR 37 except where I-69 passes over crossroads. The mainline elevation would be approximately 20 feet higher than SR 37 where I-69 crosses over Wicker Road, Banta Road, Edgewood Avenue, and Epler Avenue.

Most existing visual landmarks along SR 37 would continue to be visible from the I-69. In the south region, these include Martinsville High School, Ray Skillman Hoosier Ford, Chili's Bar and Grill, Walmart, IU Health Morgan County Hospital, Spring Valley Mobile Home Park, Sun Valley Mobile Home Park, and Faith Missionary Church.



Visual landmarks in the central region include the Martinsville Country Club, Ozark Fisheries, First United Methodist Church (**Figure 5.7-7**), Miles Furniture, Center Grove Little League fields, and Indy Family Farms.

Figure 5.7-7: View of First United Methodist Church from SR 37 (Central Region)



The north region includes Glens Valley Methodist Church, Community Church at Murphy’s Landing, Dakota Ridge apartment complex, Aspen Lakes apartments, and various commercial properties near SR 37. See **Figure 5.7-8** for typical land use near the Thompson Road intersection with SR 37.

5.7.3.2 View of the Road

Figure 5.7-8: J&E Tire (North Region)

Within the urban setting in the south and north regions of the corridor, the road would remain a key part of the urban landscape. Most of the land uses adjacent to the corridor are commercial, residential, and light industrial, including shopping centers, residential subdivisions, and apartment complexes. Heavy industrial land use is present in the vicinity of the I-465/SR 37 interchange. Most of these land uses currently have a view of existing SR 37. Changing the existing view of a four-lane divided state highway to that of an interstate facility would not significantly modify the visual quality of the south and north regions except where the road is elevated. This would occur in Martinsville with Alternative C1 and from north of Southport Road to I-465 with all alternatives. Generally, the alternatives would be in keeping with the visual context of the existing setting at other locations.



Within the central region, I-69 would be visible from the numerous residences, churches, and businesses adjacent to the corridor. Where properties are now shielded from existing SR 37 by



trees, shrubs, and/or distance, clearing done during construction of the interstate mainline, interchanges, and service roads would make the road more visible.

In the vicinity of interchanges, lighting may be visible from homes, businesses, and churches located near the roadway. During construction, there would be several temporary visual impacts, such as exposed earth and jobsite equipment.

Direct views of the road would occur for all alternatives where interchanges or overpasses/underpasses would be developed since either I-69 or the crossroad would be elevated above its existing grade. These would include the following locations for the RPA.

- State Road 39 interchange
- Ohio Street interchange
- Grand Valley Boulevard overpass
- SR 252/SR 44 combined interchange
- Teeters Road overpass
- Old SR 37/Myra Lane underpass
- Old SR 37/Egbert Road overpass
- Henderson Ford Road interchange
- Perry Road/Old SR 37 overpass
- Waverly Road overpass
- SR 144 interchange
- Smith Valley Road interchange
- County Line Road interchange
- Wicker Road underpass
- Southport Road interchange
- Banta Road underpass
- Edgewood Avenue underpass
- Epler Avenue underpass
- I-69 and I-465 interchange

Since the configuration of the SR 39 interchange would be similar to existing with all alternatives, including the RPA, the view would remain essentially the same in that area.

5.7.4 Mitigation

Section 7.3.6 summarizes mitigation measures that would be used to address impacts on visual resources. These mitigation measures are consistent with INDOT policy to incorporate context sensitive solutions (CSS) into the development, construction, and maintenance process for improvements to the state jurisdictional transportation system.¹

CSS considers the preservation of historic places, scenic trails, natural environmental enhancement, and community values along with the objectives of mobility, safety, and economics. The establishment of CSS incorporates accepted effective design practices where practicable. See **Section 7.2** for details regarding the INDOT policy regarding CSS.

¹ CSS is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders to develop a transportation facility that fits its physical setting and preserves scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources, while maintaining safety and mobility. CSS is an approach that considers the total context within which a transportation improvement project will exist.



CSS has been and would continue to be taken into consideration within the project. INDOT has committed to include CSS measures, which may include plantings, gateways, and other enhancements within constraints of available right of way, impacts, and cost. These would be further discussed with city and county agencies during final design.

5.7.5 Summary

Because I-69 Section 6 involves the conversion of a four-lane divided highway to an interstate highway, the visual impacts at most locations would be similar to those already attributable to existing SR 37. Visual impacts associated with overpasses, in areas where I-69 is elevated above the existing grade of SR 37, and in areas where I-69 is widened beyond the existing SR 37 would occur in the corridor beyond those associated with the existing SR 37.

The I-69 Section 6 corridor follows existing SR 37 as an urban corridor from the southern terminus at the intersection just south of SR 39 north through Martinsville. Developed land uses in the corridor consist of commercial, residential, and light industrial uses, including shopping centers, residential subdivisions, and apartment complexes, predominantly in the south and north regions.

North of Martinsville, the central region is a rural, sparsely developed corridor with a view shed dominated by farmland, forested areas, and scattered residences and businesses. Many intermittent streams and ephemeral drains occur in the relatively flat terrain throughout the corridor.

Visual impacts would occur in the corridor beyond those associated with existing SR 37. Vegetation would be removed within the construction limits of all the alternatives to accommodate the mainline of I-69 interchanges, overpasses, and local service road changes. In areas that have rolling terrain, changes in views of the adjacent landscape would be possible, although vegetation, intervening terrain, and distance already affect such views. Many residential areas currently visible from SR 37 would continue to be visible from the road throughout the central region north of Teeters Road.

Elevated sections would change the views to and from the roadway in Martinsville for Alternative C1 and north of Southport Road for all alternatives. Elevated ramps and interchanges may be visible in some locations, such as the interchanges located in the urbanized area of Indianapolis. However, at many of the interchanges and overpasses, vegetation and heavily wooded areas would remain in the vicinity to shield the view of these elevated structures from homes, businesses, and historic districts. This is especially germane to the rural area in the central region. Terrain features would also obstruct views of the roadway, overpasses, and interchanges.

Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce impacts. Such measures would include CSS in accordance with INDOT policy. A discussion of mitigation is provided in **Section 7.3.6**.