

## 3.1 **AESTHETICS**

### 3.1.1 **Background and Methodology**

#### 3.1.1.1 **Regulatory Context**

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that project sponsors evaluate the project's potential to cause aesthetic impacts by affecting scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual character, or creating new adverse sources of light emissions or glare. These four criteria are explained below:

- *Scenic vista* - an area that provides a distinctly, unique landscape to the general public.
- *Scenic resources* - a resource such as landscapes and geographic features that are unique to the local region, such as trees, rocks, outcroppings, and historic buildings that provide a benefit to the general public
- *Visual character* - refers to visually defining attributes that would characterize a particular area, such as hillsides with vineyards
- *Light and glare* - light refers to any visual resource that provides some type of illuminating effect, while glare implies that there is some type of visual annoyance from a light emission.

At the State and local level, scenic resources have regulatory protection. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) regulates designated “scenic” highways classified under the California Scenic Highway Program. The purpose of the California Scenic Highway Program is “preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish aesthetic value of lands adjacent to the highways.”<sup>1</sup> At the local level, the County of Sonoma regulates scenic resources in the *Open Space and Resource Conservation Element* of the Sonoma County General Plan 2020. The purpose of this element is to “preserve the natural and scenic resources which contribute to the general welfare and quality of life for the resident of the county (Sonoma) and to the maintenance of its tourism industry.”<sup>2</sup>

#### 3.1.1.2 **Thresholds of Significance**

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, project-related impacts would be considered significant if the implementation of the Proposed Project would result in any of the following conditions:

1. a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
2. substantially damage scenic resources;
3. substantially degrade existing visual character or quality of a site and its surroundings;  
and
4. create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Pursuant to visual assessment guidelines of the County of Sonoma Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD), the significance of an impact is based on the sensitivity of

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<sup>1</sup> California Department of Transportation, *The California Scenic Highway Program*, available at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/departments/mtce/scenic.htm>. Accessed April 26, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> County of Sonoma, *Sonoma County General Plan 2020*, available at: <http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/gp2020/index.html>. Accessed April 26, 2011.

the project site and the visual dominance of the proposed project. There are four categories of “sensitivity” according to the visual assessment guidelines:

1. *low*, which is within an urban land use or zoning designations protecting scenic resources;
2. *moderate*, which is a site or portion thereof within a rural land use designation or an urban designation that does not meet the criteria above for low sensitivity, but a site has no land use or zoning designations protecting scenic resources;
3. *high*, which is a site or any portion thereof is within a land use or zoning designation protecting scenic or natural resources, such as General Plan designated scenic landscape units, coastal zone, community separators, or scenic corridors; and
4. *maximum*, which is site or any portion thereof is within a land use or zoning designation protecting scenic resources, such as General Plan designated scenic landscape units, coastal zone, community separators, or scenic corridors.

**Table 3.1-1** provides an overview of the significance thresholds provided in these visual assessment guidelines.

*Table 3.1-1*  
**SONOMA COUNTY VISUAL ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES**  
**SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLDS**

	VISUAL DOMINANCE			
SENSITIVITY	Dominant	Co-Dominant	Subordinate	Inevident
Maximum	Significant	Significant	Significant	Less than Significant
High	Significant	Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant
Moderate	Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant
Low	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant	Less than Significant

SOURCE: Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department  
 PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

### 3.1.1.3 Methodologies

In accordance with PRMD’s Visual Assessment Guidelines, the sensitivity of the Airport was characterized using the four ratings of low, moderate, high, and maximum. The visual dominance of the Proposed Project was determined by comparing the contrast of the form, line, color, texture, and night lighting associated with the project elements.

Thus, the project elements of the Proposed Project were evaluated in terms of their ability to adversely affect scenic vistas, scenic resources, or visual character or to produce unnecessary light or glare within the Regional Study Area. An assessment of potential impacts was based on review of aerial photographs, proposed project elements, and documentation from the *Open Space and Resource Conservation Element* of the Sonoma County General Plan 2020.

### **3.1.2 Existing Conditions**

Land uses to the north, west, and south of the Airport have partial views of the Airport that include the airfield and the lighting systems associated with the operation of the Airport. None of these land uses have any distinct visual character. In addition, no scenic vistas are designated in the Regional Study Area. However, there are designated scenic resources in Sonoma County in the form of Community Separators, Scenic Landscape Units, and Scenic Corridors (see **Figure 3.1-1**).

#### **3.1.2.1 Community Separators**

Community Separators are usually scenic lands that function as open spaces to separate city and other communities. The purpose of Community Separators are to contain urban development and provide city and community identity by providing visual relief from urbanization. The only Community Separator located within the Regional Study Area is along U.S. Highway 101 and Old Redwood Highway. This corridor separates areas of Windsor, Larkfield, and Santa Rosa.<sup>3</sup>

#### **3.1.2.2 Scenic Landscape Units**

Scenic Landscape Units are designated by the County of Sonoma as coastal bluffs, vineyards, San Pablo Bay, the Laguna de Santa Rosa and other landscapes that are unique to the local region. It is part of the County's policy to protect the openness of such areas from future urban development that would potentially cause a significant visual impact. River Road, Eastside Road, and Hills East of Windsor are the only Scenic Landscape Units within the Regional Study Area. River Road is an area south of the Airport that provides a variety of landscapes including vineyards, orchard covered hillsides, and redwood groves located along the Russian River. Eastside Road is an area of rolling hills between the Town of Windsor and agricultural and mineral resources areas located in the Russian River Valley. The Hills East of Windsor provide a scenic backdrop to the Santa Rosa Plain. North of Windsor this Scenic Landscape Unit extends into the Plain and adjoins the low, rolling hills which form part of the Healdsburg-Windsor Community Separator.<sup>4</sup>

#### **3.1.2.3 Scenic Corridors**

The County of Sonoma has designated scenic corridors to protect the variety and beauty of the many landscapes observed from local roadways. The only designated scenic corridors in the Regional Study Area are River Road, Guerneville Road, Fulton Road, Faught Road, and U.S. Highway 101.<sup>5</sup> River Road and Guerneville Road, located south of the Airport, are oriented in an east-west alignment between Forestville and Larkfield-Wikiup. Fulton Road is on the eastern edge of the Regional Study Area and U.S. Highway 101, which is located east of the Airport, is oriented in a north-south alignment between Windsor and Santa Rosa.

#### **3.1.2.4 Outdoor Lighting**

The County of Sonoma has developed policies to protect night time skies. The Airport includes a variety of lighting for the airfield system as well as security lighting in the vicinity of the terminal building and hangars on the east side of the Airport. Public roads to the north, west, and south of the Airport have partial views that include the airfield and the lighting systems associated with the operation of the Airport. In addition, aircraft arriving and departing from the

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<sup>3</sup> County of Sonoma, *Open Space and Resource Conservation Element*, available at: <http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/gp2020/osrce.pdf>. Accessed April 26, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

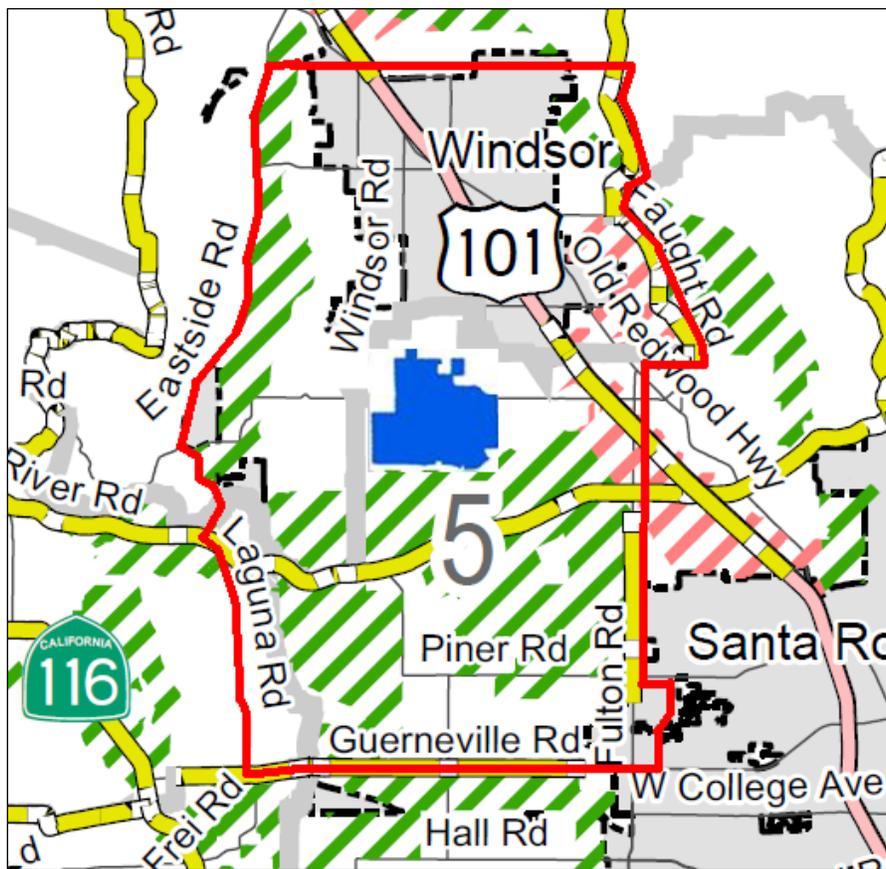
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Airport would be visible to motorists traveling on roads in the Airport vicinity. Thus, light and glare from aircraft is intermittently visible.

### 3.1.2.5 Site Sensitivity

Using the Visual Assessment Guidelines developed by the County of Sonoma PRMD, the Airport is considered to be a site with “moderate” sensitivity. This is the result of the Airport being adjacent to both rural and urban zoning designations and the Airport not having any land use or zoning designations that protect scenic resources.

Figure 3.1-1  
**SONOMA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN 2020  
OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION ELEMENT**



#### Legend

-  Regional Study Area
-  Airport Property
-  Community Separators
-  Scenic Landscape Units
-  Scenic Corridors

SOURCE: Sonoma County, 2008  
PREPARED BY: RS&H, 2011

### 3.1.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

#### Impact 3.1.1: Change in Lighting Associated with Short-Term Project Elements

The Proposed Project would remove some of the existing lighting and add new lighting on the airfield. The new lighting associated with the Proposed Project, which would be visible from some of the adjacent land uses, would include:

- extending runway edge lighting, relocating runway threshold lighting, and relocating and installing appropriate pilot directional signing for the 885-foot Runway 14/32 extension;
- extending taxiway edge lighting and installing appropriate pilot directional signing for Taxiway Y;
- adding runway edge lighting to the existing length of Runway 1/19;
- adding runway edge lighting, installing runway threshold lighting, and relocating and installing appropriate pilot directional signing for the 200-foot Runway 1/19 extension;
- adding taxiway edge lighting and installing appropriate pilot directional signing to a new Taxiway V;
- adding taxiway edge lighting and installing appropriate pilot directional signing to the connecting taxiway between Runway 1-19 and Taxiway Y;
- installing taxiway edge lighting and relocating and installing appropriate pilot directional signing to a widened and reconstructed Taxiway B;
- installing taxiway edge lighting on the western half of Taxiway D; and
- relocating the existing obstruction lighting with the Instrument Landing System (ILS) Localizer antenna array, equipment building, and associated structures requiring obstruction lighting beyond the departure end of Runway 32.

The Proposed Project would involve replacing, relocating, and adding runway edge lighting, taxiway edge lighting, obstruction lighting, and pilot directional signing as well as the removal of some of the existing runway edge lighting, taxiway edge lighting, and pilot directional signing. The combined removal, addition and installation of lighting and signing would take place within the existing boundaries of the operational airfield. The public roads adjacent to the Airport, such as Slusser, Windsor, Sanders, and Laughlin Roads, have intermittent views of the airfield due to terrain and vegetation. The obstruction lighting associated with the ILS would be relocated about 700 feet to the north and would be visible to motorists traveling on Sanders Road. However, the length of time that these lights will be visible would be minimized because of existing vegetation that would screen the lighting for motorists. The new airfield lighting would be comparable to the existing airfield lighting at the Airport and would not constitute a contrast in terms of night lighting in the vicinity of the Airport. The airfield lighting is visible to pilots but the lighting is not directed at off-Airport receptors. Thus, the new airfield lighting would be visible to some surrounding hillside residents who have views of the Airport. Because the distance between the Airport and the nearest such residence is approximately two miles and because there is a difference in elevation between the Airport and these residences, these lights would not be directed at the residences. In addition, the new airfield lighting would be intermittently visible to motorists on Windsor and Slusser Roads. Using the Visual Assessment Guidelines developed by the County of Sonoma PRMD, the dominance of the night lighting would be “subordinate”.

In addition to the change in airfield lighting, increases in air and ground traffic would be anticipated as a result of increases in the number of air passengers. The increased air and ground traffic would generate additional glare during the day and add to existing illumination levels during the evening and night. This is considered to be a minor increase in light and glare

because the number of aircraft operations would be similar to the number of aircraft operations that currently occur and have historically occurred. Using the Visual Assessment Guidelines developed by PRMD, these increases would generally repeat the existing types of glare and night lighting from air and ground traffic. Therefore, the dominance of the Proposed Project would be “subordinate”, which is defined by the visual assessment guidelines “that the project is minimally visible from public view that contrasts are weak – they can be seen but do not attract attention. Project generally repeats the form, line, color, texture, and night lighting of its surroundings. A “subordinate” visual dominance in an area of “moderate” sensitivity is considered to be a less-than-significant impact.

#### **Mitigation Measure 3.1.1**

No mitigation is warranted.

#### **Impact 3.1.2: Change in Lighting as a Result of Construction of Short-Term Project Elements**

The Proposed Project likely would involve construction activities during nighttime hours. Depending on the final location of staging areas and the intervening terrain and vegetation, lighting for construction purposes may be visible to motorists on roads in the Airport vicinity and at residences north of the Airport. This would be a temporary impact, but would be considered “dominant” using the Visual Assessment Guidelines because the night lighting could contrast with the existing elements in the surrounding landscape. Thus, this is considered to be a significant impact.

#### **Mitigation Measure 3.1.2**

The County shall require the construction contractor to prepare a construction management plan that reduces any lighting used for nighttime construction activities from affecting persons at residences in the Airport vicinity. At a minimum, the plan shall require the use of downward-facing lights and shielding to ensure that no temporary sources of light affect motorists on roads in the Airport vicinity during nighttime construction activities. The implementation of this mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

#### **Impact 3.1.3: Change in Visual Character as a Result of Short-Term Project Elements**

The Proposed Project would involve the temporary presence of construction vehicles, earthmoving, and a reduction of mature landscaping during construction activities. These temporary activities would be visible to motorists on roads adjacent to the Airport. Upon the completion of construction, the visual quality of the Airport would be similar to the existing visual quality. While visual impacts resulting from construction activities would be temporary, the Proposed Project would not significantly change the visual character of the Airport to motorists on roads in the Airport vicinity.

The Proposed Project would involve some tree removal or trimming, filling of open waters, and perimeter fencing installation. These project elements would have no effect on motorists on roads adjacent to the Airport because the views of the Airport would continue to include all of the existing visual features (i.e., intermittent views of the airfield, vegetation, Airport buildings). In addition, none of the areas where project elements would be implemented are designated as scenic resources by the County. While the visual character of the Airport for motorists traveling on roads in the Airport vicinity may change slightly, it would not cause a significant impact to the general public because the project elements would only involve minor removal or relocation of existing features. Thus, the visual dominance would be considered “subordinate” and, using the Visual Assessment Guidelines, be classified as a less-than-significant impact.

### **Mitigation Measure 3.1.3**

No mitigation is warranted.

### **Impact 3.1.4: Change in Lighting as a Result of Long-Term Project Elements**

The Proposed Project includes the construction of a new terminal building, a new Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) building, potential new air cargo buildings, and an air traffic control tower. Additional lighting likely would be associated with these new buildings, signs, and parking areas, and to provide security for employees and visitors using these facilities. The County would be required to submit plans for all proposed lighting to the FAA's 7460 review process to ensure that the potential lighting and glare from these new buildings would not affect aircraft navigation.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Proposed Project would be subject to the PRMD design review process. To prevent potential glare from affecting travelers, motorists, and aviation, the County would use downward-facing lights, light shields, and amber lumens.

In addition to the change in airfield lighting, increases in air and ground traffic would be anticipated as a result of the continued increases in the number of air passengers. The increased air and ground traffic would generate additional glare during the day and add to existing illumination levels during the evening and night. However, these increases would be considered "subordinate" under the Visual Assessment Guidelines because these increases would repeat the existing form and night lighting that exists at the Airport. Therefore, this is considered to be a less-than-significant impact.

### **Mitigation Measure 3.1.4**

No mitigation is warranted.

### **Impact 3.1.5: Change in Visual Character as a Result of Long-Term Project Elements**

The Proposed Project includes the development of new buildings, including a new terminal building, a new ARFF building, potential new air cargo buildings, and a new air traffic control tower. The new terminal and ARFF building would be visible to motorists traveling on Airport Boulevard to the Airport. These new buildings would not change the visual character of the Airport. The potential new air cargo buildings may be visible to motorists on Laughlin Road and to persons on property south of the Airport. These buildings would be constructed in a developed area of the Airport where similar types of buildings exist. Therefore, no change in the visual character of the Airport would occur. The new air traffic control tower would be visible from various locations in the Airport vicinity and would introduce a new structure into the landscape of the Airport. However, since there is an existing air traffic control tower on the east side of the Airport, this new building would not constitute a type of building that does not already exist at the Airport. Although some change in the visual character of the Airport would occur as a result of a new air traffic control tower, this change would be considered "subordinate" using the Visual Assessment Guidelines because the air traffic control tower is a replacement structure and the form, line, and night lighting of the new air traffic control tower would be similar to the existing air traffic control tower. Thus, the development of new buildings at the Airport would have a less-than-significant impact on the visual character of the Airport.

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<sup>6</sup> A sponsor proposing any type of construction or alteration of a structure that may affect the National Airspace System (NAS) is required under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR part 77) to notify the FAA by completing the Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration form (FAA Form 7460-1). The form should be sent to the Obstruction Evaluation service (OES). Copies of FAA Form 7460-1 may be obtained from OES, Airports District Office or FAA Website.

The Proposed Project would result in the acquisition of two parcels south of Laughlin Road. The visual quality of these parcels, which are adjacent to the River Road Scenic Landscape, would not change. The River Road Scenic Landscape Unit provides a “variety of landscapes, including valleys planted in vineyards, orchard covered hillsides, and redwood groves adjacent to the Russian River.”<sup>7</sup> The two parcels, which would be acquired for runway protection purposes, are adjacent to vineyard landscapes. No change in the existing visual appearance of the two parcels would occur as a result of the Proposed Project. Thus, visual appearance of the River Road Scenic Landscape Unit would not be affected by the acquisition of these parcels.

Future development over a proposed 20-year time frame would include converting two parcels on the southern edge of the Airport from agricultural use to commercial use. This development would result in the removal of existing structures, trees, and water features on these parcels. However, this change would have a visual dominance of “subordinate” because it would be minimally visible from Laughlin Road and the development would repeat the types of existing development at the Airport. Using the Visual Assessment Guidelines, this would be considered a less-than-significant impact. .

**Mitigation Measure 3.1.5**

No mitigation is warranted.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.