

4.5 Visual and Aesthetic Resources

4.5.1 Introduction to Resources and Regulatory Requirements

Visual and aesthetic environments are the natural and cultural features of the landscape that can be seen and that contribute to the public's appreciation and enjoyment of the environment. The visual environment encompasses elements from both the built and natural environments. These can include solitary built and natural landmarks (such as buildings and trees, bodies of water, and corridors) or entire landscapes. Impacts on the visual environment are defined in terms of the extent to which the project's presence would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment.

This description of the existing visual conditions and assessment of changes associated with the East Link Project is generally based on the visual assessment system developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The approaches and terminology used in this assessment are found in FHWA's *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA, 1981). Appendix F4.5, Attachment 1, describes how the FHWA methodology was used for this assessment and contains tables that depict how the existing visual quality categories were established and the degree to which the segment alternatives impacted visual quality categories. Sound Transit also assessed the project's consistency with visual resource goals and policies of relevant local comprehensive plans.

The study area for visual resources consists of the viewsheds of the alternatives. Viewsheds are the areas from which the alternatives could be viewed. In general, the viewsheds for the East Link Project encompass the foreground viewing distance (within 0 to 0.5 mile from the viewer) but may vary depending upon elements in the landscape (such as terrain, vegetation, buildings) that can block views of objects.

4.5.2 Affected Environment

Assessment activities for the affected environment included site visits, examination of aerial photographs, review of conceptual engineering drawings of the proposed alternatives, and preparation of an existing conditions inventory. Preparing the existing conditions inventory relied in part on materials from other technical areas that influence the visual environment. These related technical areas are Land Use (Section 4.2); Social Impacts, Community

Facilities, and Neighborhoods (Section 4.4); Ecosystem Resources (Section 4.8); and, Parkland and Open Space (Section 4.17).

The existing conditions inventory described the existing visual character of the study area, identified the types of viewer groups that would see the alternatives, described their sensitivity to changes in the viewed environment (viewer sensitivity), and categorized the existing visual quality using three categories based on the FHWA system. The visual quality categories were then used to help assess changes in the visual environment that would occur with the East Link Project. The three visual quality categories are as follows:

- **Low Visual Quality.** Areas that have low visual quality may have features that seem visually out of place, lack visual coherence, do not have compositional harmony, and contain eyesores.
- **Medium Visual Quality.** These areas can be generally pleasant appearing but may lack distinctiveness, memorability, drama, and compositional harmony, or may simply be common and ordinary landscapes.
- **High Visual Quality.** These areas may be memorable, distinctive, unique (in a positive way), intact natural or park-like areas, or urban areas with strong and consistent architectural and urban design features.

Exhibits 4.5-1 through 4.5-5 show the existing visual quality categories (low, medium, and high) by project segment. In addition to categorizing the overall visual quality, Sound Transit selected a series of locations to provide more site-specific information. Because it is not possible to include all the important viewing locations near a proposed project, representative locations—or key observation points (KOPs)—are selected. KOPs are used to describe existing visual conditions and to analyze the effects of a proposed action on visual resources. Twenty-one KOP locations were chosen after the field reconnaissance of the alternative routes and after meetings with the planning departments of the cities of Bellevue and Redmond, which are the communities where the alternatives potentially would cause the most change in the existing visual environment. In addition, important community features, identified in public workshops, were considered in determining KOP locations. Exhibits 4.5-1 through 4.5-5 depict the KOPs selected for the East Link Project. More detailed information related to the KOPs, including photographs of existing conditions at these locations, is provided in Appendix F4.5.



Source: Data from City of Seattle (2002), King County (2006), Sound Transit (2007), and CH2M Hill (2008).

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|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Visual Quality | ●→ Key Observation Point (KOP) | — At-Grade Route |
| High | ■ Traction Power Substation | - - - Elevated Route |
| Medium | ● Proposed Station | ••• Retained-Cut Route |
| Low | ○ Central Link Alignment and Station | - - - Tunnel Route |

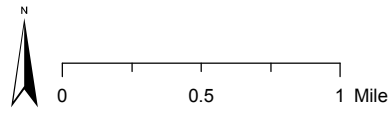
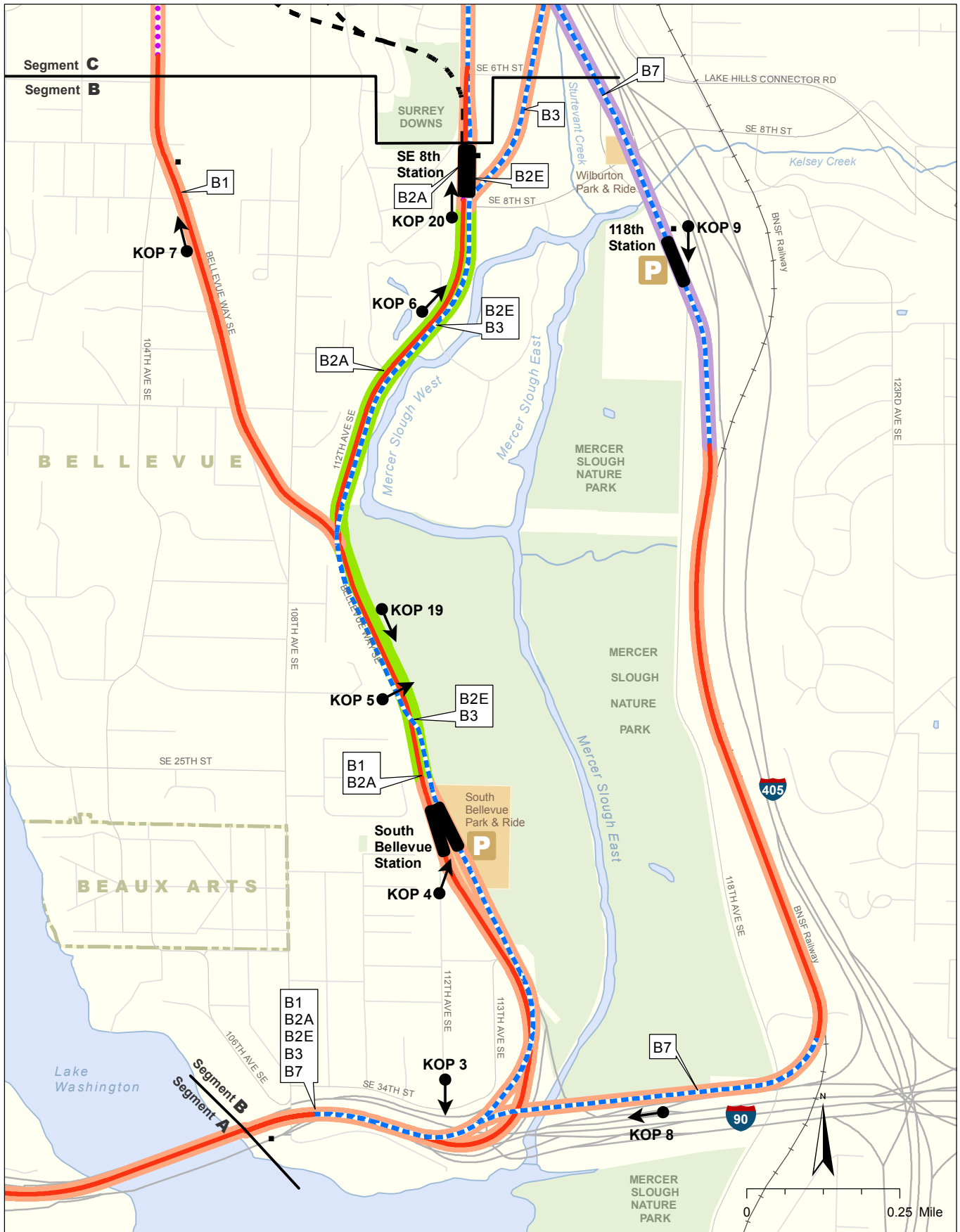


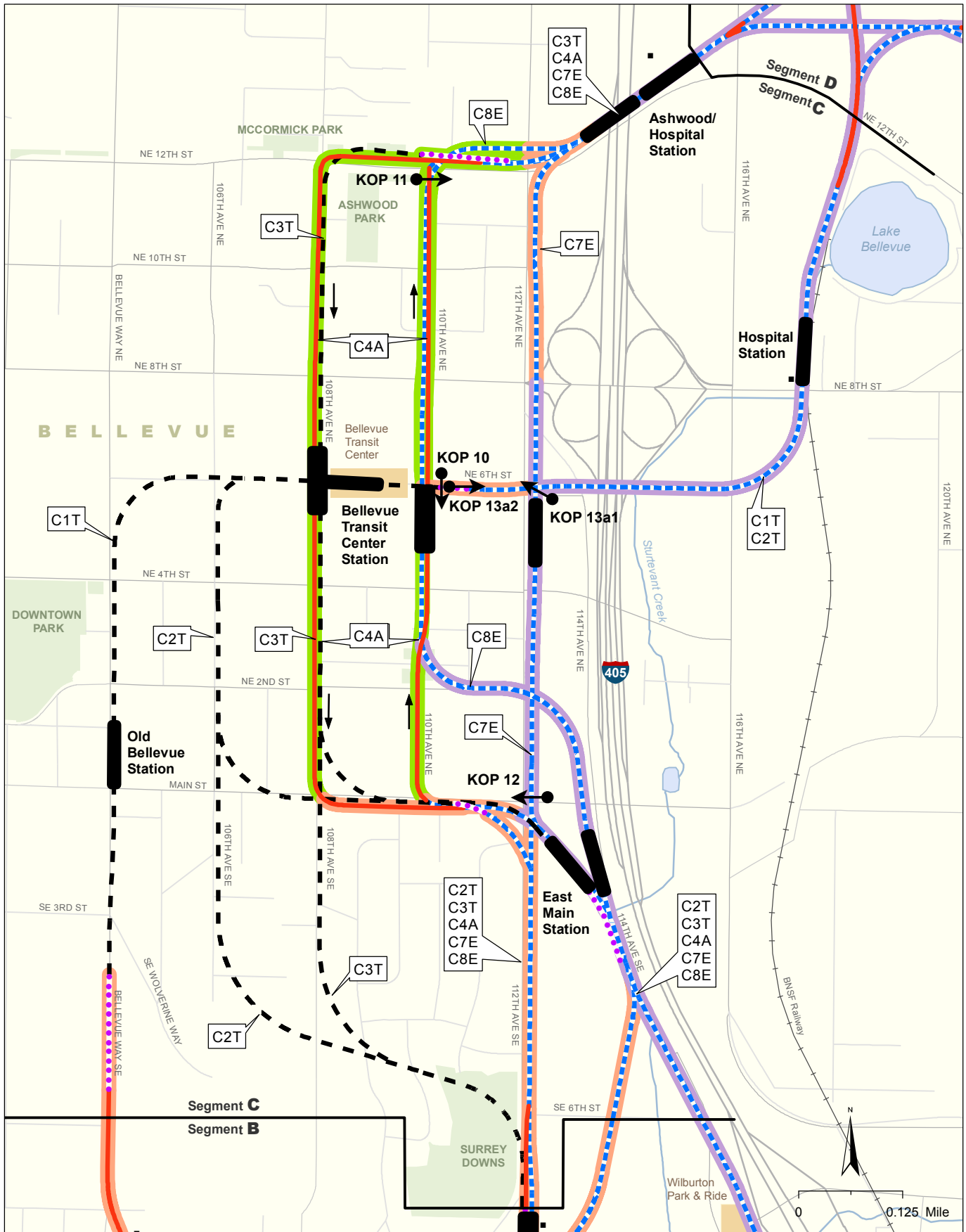
Exhibit 4.5-1
**Visual Quality
 Segment A**
 East Link Project



Source: Data from City of Bellevue (2005), King County (2006), and CH2M Hill (2008).

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|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Visual Quality | ●→ Key Observation Point (KOP) | — At-Grade Route |
| High | ■ Traction Power Substation | — Elevated Route |
| Medium | ■ Proposed Station | — Retained-Cut Route |
| Low | P New and/or Expanded Park-and-Ride Lot | — Tunnel Route |

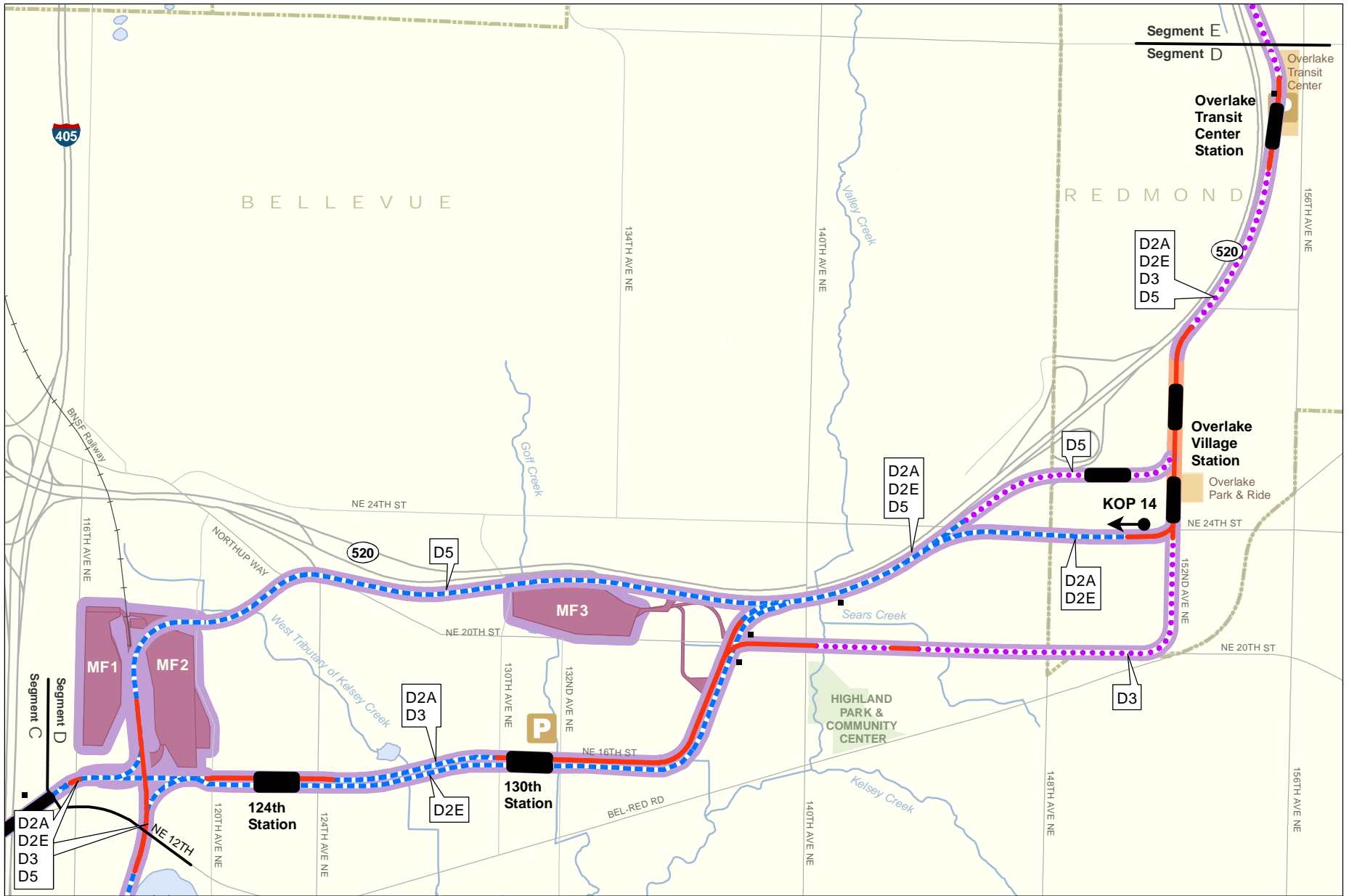
Exhibit 4.5-2
Visual Quality
Segment B
 East Link Project



Source: Data from City of Bellevue (2005) and King County (2006).

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|-----------------------|---|----------------------|
| Visual Quality | ● → Key Observation Point (KOP) | — At-Grade Route |
| High | ■ Traction Power Substation | - - - Elevated Route |
| Medium | ■ Proposed Station | ⋯ Retained-Cut Route |
| Low | ■ New and/or Expanded Park-and-Ride Lot | - - - Tunnel Route |

Exhibit 4.5-3
Visual Quality
Segment C
 East Link Project

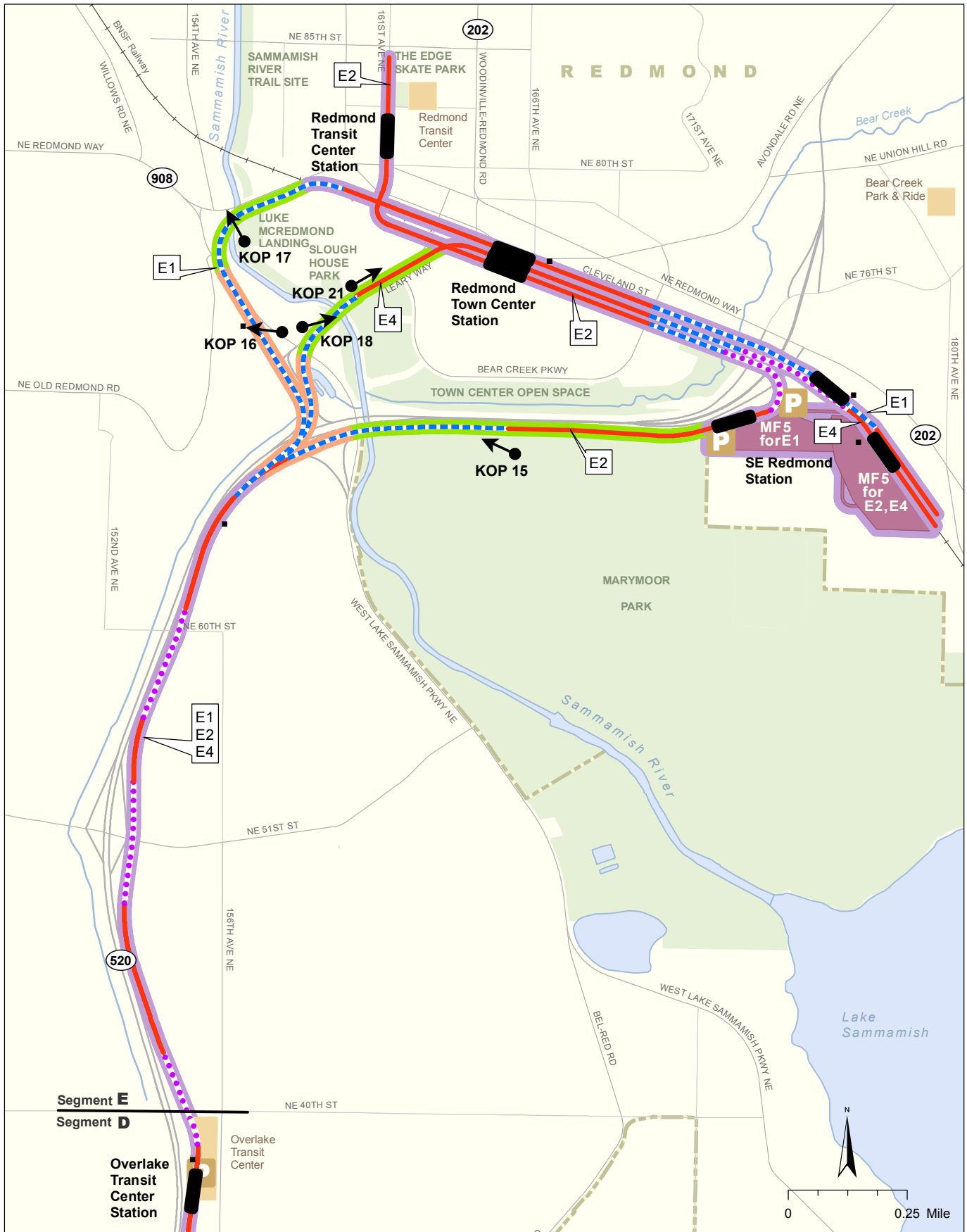


Source: Data from City of Bellevue (2005), City of Redmond (2005), King County (2006), and CH2M Hill (2008).

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|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Visual Quality | Key Observation Point (KOP) | Maintenance Facility and Access Track |
| High | Traction Power Substation | At-Grade Route |
| Medium | Proposed Station | Elevated Route |
| Low | New and/or Expanded Park-and-Ride Lot | Retained-Cut Route |
| | | Tunnel Route |



Exhibit 4.5-4
Visual Quality
Segment D
 East Link Project



Source: Data from City of Redmond (2005), King County (2006), and CH2M Hill (2008).

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|-----------------------|---|---|
| Visual Quality | ●→ Key Observation Point (KOP) | ▬ Maintenance Facility and Access Track |
| ▬ High | ■ Traction Power Substation | ▬ At-Grade Route |
| ▬ Medium | ■ Proposed Station | ▬ Elevated Route |
| ▬ Low | ■ New and/or Expanded Park-and-Ride Lot | ▬ Retained-Cut Route |
| | | ▬ Tunnel Route |

Exhibit 4.5-5
**Visual Quality
 Segment E**
 East Link Project

A wide variety of people (viewers) would see potential changes to the visual environment from the alternatives. Viewers can be categorized as having low, average, or high sensitivity to changes in the viewed environment. Viewer sensitivity is strongly influenced by a viewer's activity, awareness of his or her surroundings, and amount of time spent looking at a view. People such as residents or regular park users who see a landscape multiple times for long periods of time would be aware of changes in the landscape. They would likely appreciate or be familiar with a landscape's aesthetic qualities and are assumed to have high viewer sensitivity. People who view a landscape infrequently, view it for short periods of time (often as they pass through it), or are not attentive to it due to focusing on other activities (such as driving or working) are often less sensitive to changes and are assumed to have low viewer sensitivity. Viewers with average viewer sensitivity include workers and customers who may expect a somewhat pleasant visual setting for the establishments they work in or frequent but are in the locations for purposes other than enjoying its scenery or visual quality. The visual quality of an area can provide a good indication of how responsive an area's most sensitive viewers would likely be to changes in the visual environment. For example, viewers with high viewer sensitivity in areas that are categorized as having high visual quality would be expected to react more to changes in the visual environment than they would in areas that have medium or low visual quality. This concept can help determine areas where a project might be expected to have its greatest impacts on visual resources.

The following subsections describe the visual character, visual quality, viewers, and viewer sensitivity for each project segment and for areas near the maintenance facilities.

4.5.2.1 Segment A

The Seattle portion of Segment A passes through mixed land use types – mainly industrial, transportation, commercial – that have a generally utilitarian appearance and character. Much of the Seattle subarea of Segment A was categorized as having low visual quality. The exception is the hillside area west of the Interstate 90 (I-90) eastbound tunnel that contains residences and two parks (Judkins Park and Sam Smith Park); this area has a residential character and was categorized as being of medium visual quality. Some routes connecting to Segment A, including I-5 and I-90, have been identified by the City of Seattle as scenic routes or scenic routes with protected view rights-of-way. Subsection P (Public

View Protection) of Seattle Municipal Code 25.05.675 (Specific environmental policies) states that it is the City's policy to protect public views of significant natural and human-made features, such as Mount Rainier, the downtown skyline, and historic landmarks, from these routes.

The visual quality of the tunneled portions of I-90 was categorized as low. Although the I-90 Floating Bridge and the East Channel Bridge offer memorable and vivid views for people using them, the structures themselves are utilitarian in appearance and are visual encroachments when viewed from Lake Washington or its shoreline. The section of I-90 that is the I-90 Floating Bridge has been categorized as medium. The portion of I-90 that passes through the Mercer Island retained cut is more attractive than typical freeways due to extensive landscaping and wall treatments. As a result, it was categorized as medium visual quality.

The viewer sensitivity of viewers along Segment A is assumed to be as follows: commuters and others traveling on I-90 or nearby arterials (low), local residents driving through their neighborhood (average to high), residents from their residences (high), workers and customers (medium), and recreationists (high).

4.5.2.2 Segment B

The character and visual quality of south Bellevue is varied. Segment A to the Bellevue Way off-ramp, I-90 (and the Segment B alternative routes) passes south of residences in the Enatai Neighborhood. Some of the residences have views to the south that include parts of Lake Washington and nearby areas as well as I-90. Because of the presence of I-90, this area has been categorized as having medium visual quality. With the exception noted below, most of Bellevue Way SE passes by single-family residential and mixed (i.e., small commercial, churches, multifamily) land uses that have a pleasant appearance with medium visual quality. Bellevue Way SE between the South Bellevue Park-and-Ride Lot and the intersection with 112th Avenue SE was categorized as having high visual quality due to the memorable and distinctive views of Mercer Slough Nature Park, blueberry farms, and the heavily vegetated hillside west of Bellevue Way SE. Much of 112th Avenue SE was also categorized as having high visual quality due to the "boulevard-like" appearance of 112th Avenue SE and the adjacent waters of Mercer Slough. The portion of the B7 route that traverses Mercer Slough Nature Park passes over or near wetlands and streams. However, the I-90 structure is a visual encroachment; therefore, overall visual quality was categorized as medium. With a few exceptions, many of the potential views for trail users

along the I-90 boardwalk at the south end of the Mercer Slough Nature Park are limited by vegetation and tree canopy or the I-90 freeway structures. Parts of the route that follows the BNSF Railway corridor have a visual connection with the Mercer Slough Nature Park and/or pass through forested areas and have medium visual quality. Views along the portion of the route that is adjacent to I-405 and along 118th Avenue SE are visually dominated by I-405 and nearby large parking lots and were categorized as having low visual quality.

The viewer sensitivity in Segment B was categorized as follows: commuters and others traveling on I-90 or arterials leading to I-90 such as Bellevue Way SE and 112th Avenue SE (low), local residents driving through their neighborhood including Bellevue Way SE and 112th Avenue SE (high), residents from their residences (high), workers and customers (low), and recreationists (high).

4.5.2.3 Segment C

Downtown Bellevue is an area in transition. The existing character of Downtown Bellevue is changing and dynamic, as are visual quality categories. Much of the character of Downtown Bellevue is continuing to evolve from areas of low-rise automobile-oriented commercial complexes to dense, large-scale mixed-use mid- and high-rise buildings that have a highly urban character. Increasing numbers of Downtown Bellevue developments include pedestrian-oriented features such as plazas, landscaped areas, wide sidewalks, street lights, and benches. A number of these types of developments exist or are being built along 108th and 110th avenues NE and contribute to the high visual quality of the two streets. In addition to 108th and 110th avenues NE, part of NE 12th Street was categorized as having high visual quality due to the presence of McCormick Park, Ashwood Park, the King County, Bellevue Regional Library, and other new projects. Outside of the Downtown Bellevue core, portions of the alternatives pass next to or over I-405. The routes that continue east of I-405 pass through low-rise non-retail and retail commercial complexes with extensive parking areas. These areas were categorized as having low visual quality. The routes that parallel I-405 (or are within a block of it) pass through areas along 114th Avenue SE (and NE) and 112th Avenue SE (and NE) that contain a variety of building types often surrounded by parking lots. The visual presence of nearby I-405 is strong in these areas and they have been categorized as having low and medium visual quality.

The viewer sensitivity of viewers in this part of Bellevue is mixed and was categorized as follows:

commuters and others traveling on arterials or I-405 (low), residents from their residences (high), workers and customers (medium), recreationists (high), downtown pedestrians (high).

4.5.2.4 Segment D

Much of Segment D passes through areas that contain a mixture of warehouses, industrial concerns, storage and parking lots, and “big-box” and other retail establishments set back from the street behind large areas of parking. As a result, the existing visual quality of most of the Bel-Red/Overlake Segment is low. The area generally has a utilitarian appearance and character, although efforts are being made by the cities of Bellevue and Redmond to improve its appearance through the use of street trees, landscaping, and improved building design. As a result, a section of Segment D along 152nd Avenue NE in the Overlake area has been categorized as medium visual quality.

The viewer sensitivity in Segment D was categorized as follows: commuters traveling on State Route (SR) 520 or the arterials that cross through this area (low), non-retail workers and customers (low), retail workers and customers (average), and residents near Overlake (high).

4.5.2.5 Segment E

The Downtown Redmond segment has a wide range of visual character and quality. The portion of the segment that follows SR 520 from Overlake Transit Center to the edge of the Sammamish River valley passes through a mixture of land uses (office, commercial, and residential). The visual character varies by location, but all areas are visually dominated by the presence of the freeway. As a result, areas along SR 520 were categorized as having low visual quality. Other areas in Segment D that were categorized as low visual quality include the business parks, industrial areas, developing areas along the BNSF Railway, and industrial areas near Downtown Redmond. The portions of NE Redmond Way and Leary Way NE that pass over the Sammamish River have views of the river and parklands and serve as entries into parts of Downtown Redmond and were categorized as having high visual quality. The Sammamish River (and trail) also has high visual quality, as does the portion of SR 520 located between Marymoor Park and Redmond Town Center due to the views offered from it and its low horizontal presence on the landscape that is screened by areas of vegetation.

The viewer sensitivity of Segment E viewers was categorized as follows: commuters and others traveling on SR 520 or arterials (low), residents from

their residences (high), workers and customers (average), and recreationists (high).

4.5.2.6 Maintenance Facilities

The maintenance facilities would be located in Segments D or E in or near areas that are currently industrial and utilitarian in use, appearance, and character. These areas were categorized as having low visual quality. The viewer sensitivity for these facilities was categorized as follows: commuters and others traveling on SR-520 or arterials (low), workers and customers (average), and residents (high).

4.5.3 Environmental Impacts

The assessment of potential impacts on the visual environment focused on the following:

1. Consistency with existing visual character
2. Changes in visual quality
3. Likely impact on viewers with high viewer sensitivity
4. Blockage of sensitive views with an emphasis placed on views that are identified by local jurisdictions as requiring protection
5. Creation of shadows
6. Light and glare

Regarding changes in visual quality (Item 2) impacts can be low, medium, or high. A high impact is defined as a reduction of the existing visual quality category by one or more categories. For example, if the visual quality category of an area is reduced from high to medium or changes from medium to low, the impact would be considered high. Impacts that are considered low or medium are not evaluated in the assessment of impacts but are noted in Appendix F4.5, Attachment 1.

The impact assessment emphasized areas where changes in the visual environment (Items 1 and 2) would be noticed by people with high viewer sensitivity (Item 3) and/or where sensitive views (Item 4) would be affected. For a view to be considered sensitive, it would need to be identified by a local jurisdiction (in comprehensive plans, ordinances, or other directives) as requiring protection or identified during scoping or agency review. The last two items, shading and light and glare, were assessed by examining engineering plans for likely impacts and examining the visual simulations of project features that were developed with input from project engineers.

4.5.3.1 No Build Alternative

With the No Build Alternative, there would be no construction of new facilities and no property acquisitions that would change the existing visual environment. Under this alternative, the visual environment would remain essentially the same except as changes occur over time in individual properties. The No Build Alternative may contribute to lower density redevelopment, thereby maintaining lower profile commercial development and low to medium visual quality.

4.5.3.2 Impacts During Operation

The East Link Project would have visual impacts of varying degrees throughout the project vicinity, as discussed in the following subsections. Impacts were evaluated assuming that the project would incorporate the following measures used during project planning to avoid and minimize potential visual impacts:

- Selecting and/or modifying routes to avoid or reduce the need to acquire and clear new right-of-way. This measure has already been incorporated to a great degree in identifying route and station alternatives and includes using existing transportation corridors (arterial streets and highways, limited-access highways, and rail corridors), underground profiles, and retained-cut sections.
- Developing design criteria that guide project design issues such as architectural expression being a balanced approach of systemwide elements and contextual elements, systemwide signage for customer ease, and a systemwide art program. Interdisciplinary teams would develop designs, and the community would have opportunities to comment.
- During the design development process, subjecting station and facility designs to appropriate design reviews required by the cities in which they are located.
- Integrating facilities (particularly stations) with existing plans, including plans for redevelopment.
- Minimizing the elevation or height of elevated structures and stations to the extent allowed by required vertical clearances.
- Minimizing clearing for construction and operation.
- Planting appropriate vegetation within and adjoining the project right-of-way to replace existing street trees and other visually important

vegetation that are removed for the project and/or to provide screening for sensitive visual environments and/or sensitive viewers.

- Replanting remainder parcels with grass or simple plantings, maintaining them, and pursuing their redevelopment for land uses, such as residential, commercial, or open space uses, that are consistent with city plans.
- Using source shielding in exterior lighting at stations and ancillary facilities, such as maintenance bases and park-and-ride lots, so light sources (such as bulbs) are not directly visible from residential areas, streets, and highways, and to limit spillover light and glare in residential areas.

Impacts Common to All Build Alternatives

All the build alternatives would change the visual environments in which they would be built.

Construction and operation of the alternatives would require the removal of a variety of visual features such as buildings, street trees, landscaped areas, slopes (replaced with retaining walls), and parking lots. Project components would also be visible to varying degrees, which could change the visual environment in which the components are located. Some of the more potentially visible project components include elevated profiles and/or structures, stations, parking structures, and rail cars. Table 4.5-1 lists the main components to be built for the East Link Project, describes their visual characteristics, discusses general types of measures that would be implemented to reduce potential visual impacts, and explains why the measures would be successful in reducing potential impacts.

Potential Impacts by Alternative

Most sections of the alternatives examined in this Draft EIS would be consistent with their existing visual surroundings in terms of character and would not change the visual quality category of those surroundings. Table 4.5-2 summarizes areas where the existing visual quality categories would be lowered one or more categories despite the avoidance and minimization measures described in Table 4.5-1. Table 4.5-2 also indicates if there would be potential blockage of sensitive views and creation of significant shading or light and glare. Although none of the alternatives would block sensitive views, project components would be seen by some residents in views that they value. The view of the components would lower the visual quality of views from some individual residences without changing the visual quality category of a portion of an alternative's route.

Most of the alternatives would not have impacts related to shadows or light and glare, as shown in the table. Exceptions in each segment are described in subsections below.

The following subsections discuss potential visual changes by segment and alternative. The discussion contains references to visual simulations that are provided in Appendix F4.5. Photographs in the appendix depict the existing views from the KOPs and visual simulations that display how the existing views would change with the alternatives.

Segment A

The overhead catenary support structures would be unique in parts of this segment. The catenary lines on the floating bridge would be hung from a cross member supported by poles on one or both sides of the tracks. This difference is not expected to effect visual quality along the I-90 corridor. The project and the catenary lines would be compatible in character with the D2 Roadway and I-90 (as shown in Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-2, Photo 2b). It would be consistent with the transportation-oriented character of the areas it would pass through and would reduce neither the visual quality rating nor the viewer experience. The alternative and stations would not block view corridors identified by the City of Seattle or lower the visual quality categories of views from Judkins Park and Sam Smith Park in Seattle or from the Park on the Lid in Mercer Island, which overlook the trackway and stations. The two proposed stations, Rainier Avenue and Mercer Island (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-3, Photo 3b), would be consistent with the visual character of their surroundings. Their scale and design would help the East Link Project visually connect with adjacent neighborhoods.

Segment B

All of the Segment B alternatives but one—Bellevue Way Alternative (B1)—would follow I-90 near the Enatai Neighborhood before the elevated structure would curve away from I-90 to connect with Bellevue Way SE. The elevated structure would be seen by neighbors as it follows I-90. The elevated structure would be similar in appearance to the I-90 elevated structure and ramps in terms of form, height, color, and materials. The elevated structure would be visually compatible with the transportation-oriented character of the areas it would be located in and would not change visual quality categories. Sensitive views would not be blocked (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-4, Photo 4b).

Each of the Segment B alternatives that follows Bellevue Way SE (except the BNSF Alternative [B7])

TABLE 4.5-1
Visual Characteristics of Project Components

Project Component	Visual Characteristics
Elevated Guideways or Structures (piers, straddlebents) ^a	These are often the most visible project components. The bottom parts of elevated guideways range between approximately 18 and 50 feet above grade. In some locations, elevated guideways (and their associated OCS components) can intrude on views, although they may not block them altogether. Elevated stations (and guideways to a lesser extent) can create shadows that could have negative impacts in some areas under some conditions. However, stations and associated structures such as elevators, escalators, and walkways would be designed to be attractive architectural elements or features in the areas where they would be built and would add visual interest to the streetscapes near them.
At-Grade Trackways	At-grade trackways are generally located in or adjacent to existing streets. They would be designed to be compatible with the roadway or adjacent streetscape.
Overhead Catenary System (OCS)	The OCS is a highly visible element from close viewing distances. OCS components (wires and poles) become less visible as viewing distances increase. The structures may intrude on views but do not block views due to their thin, cable-like profile and appearance.
Widened Streets	Street widening can involve the removal of buildings, trees, and other vegetation and can require excavating hillsides or filling slopes. In some locations and situations, the removal of trees and other vegetation would be mitigated by replanting similar plants that over time mature enough to become similar in appearance with the vegetation that was removed.
Stations	Depending upon size, bulk, and whether or not they would be elevated or at-grade, stations can block views, cast shadows, or add built features to the landscape. Elevated stations are generally more visible than at-grade stations. Stations would be designed to be aesthetically and architecturally compatible with their surrounding areas. During station design, the stations would undergo appropriate design review as required by the cities where they would be located.
Parking Structures	Depending upon size and bulk, parking structures can block existing views. Parking structures can be designed or assigned criteria to match surrounding architecture types to help them aesthetically fit with their surroundings. Local landscape regulations would be followed to help parking structures visually and aesthetically better blend into the areas where they would be located.
Parking Lots	Parking lots result in additional hard surface, which are low in visual interest. Some jurisdictions require landscaping that can reduce the visual impact. Local parking lot and relevant landscape regulations would be followed to help parking lots visually and aesthetically better blend into the areas where they would be located.
Lighting	If not properly designed and shielded, project-related lighting can create glare impacts, increase the level of ambient light in nearby areas, and increase skyglow, which can adversely affect nighttime views of the stars. This is true of both operation and construction. Design-related measures such as shielding and altering light direction would be used where appropriate to reduce potential impacts.
Building Removal	Removal of existing buildings can improve or detract from visual settings depending on building condition, style, scale, and color. Areas where buildings would be removed would contain project components and/or be revegetated to better blend in with nearby areas.
Vegetation Removal	Removal of vegetation can open up views that are non-existent or, conversely, expose other non-aesthetic views, such as additional hard surfaces. When possible, Sound Transit would preserve existing vegetation, replant vegetation, replace trees, and screen to minimize effects of vegetation removal.
Retaining Walls	Retaining walls often replace vegetated hillsides with hard materials such as concrete that may require surface design treatments to reduce impacts. Where appropriate, retaining walls would be treated with surface design enhancements.
Maintenance Facility	A maintenance facility can potentially block views or be viewed down upon from adjacent areas; however, the alternative sites for such a facility are located in areas that already have similar land uses, visual character, and structures. Maintenance facilities would be designed to be aesthetically compatible with the surrounding uses and would involve screening using fencing, walls, or vegetation to help them blend in with the areas where they would be located. During facility design, the exterior of the maintenance facilities would undergo appropriate design review if required by the cities where they would be located.
Retained Cuts	These features would only be visible from nearby areas. Design guidelines can be applied to the fencing and/or walls located at the top of the cut, which are the most visible components of this feature.
Traction Power Substations (TPSS)	The TPSS would be installed at about 2-mile intervals. They would be completely enclosed small metal buildings, about 20 feet by 60 feet in size, with an additional 10 to 20 feet required around each unit. Where appropriate, they would be screened from public view with a wall or fence. The exterior walls or fences would be landscaped as per the landscape regulations of the jurisdictions where the facilities are located.

^a Piers are columns holding up the guideway. Straddlebents are supports made of two columns and supporting a beam upon which the guideway sits.

TABLE 4.5-2
Summary of Changes to Visual Quality Areas by Alternative

Alternative	Changes in Visual Quality Categories?	Sensitive View Blockage?	Shadows?
Segment A, Interstate 90			
A1, I-90	No	No	No
Segment B, South Bellevue			
B1, Bellevue Way	Yes—Removal of vegetation and retaining walls along Bellevue Way Southeast lowers visual quality from high to medium.	No	No
B2A, 112th SE At-Grade	Yes—Removal of vegetation and retaining walls along Bellevue Way Southeast. This causes visual intrusion for approximately 15 residences on hillside.	No	No
B3, 112th SE Bypass	Yes—Similar visual impacts as B2A lowers visual quality from high to medium along Bellevue Way.	No	No
B2E, 112th SE Elevated	Yes—Same as B2A & B3 up to South Bellevue Station, Visual intrusion for approximately 15 to 20 residences along Bellevue Way hillside. B2E lowers visual quality from high to medium south of 112th Avenue NE. .	No	No
B7, BNSF	No	No	No
Segment C, Downtown Bellevue			
C1T, Bellevue Way Tunnel	No	No	No
C2T, 106th NE Tunnel	No	No	No
C3T, 108th NE Tunnel	Yes—Long-term construction impacts from removal of mature tree canopy and permanent presence of C3T in McCormick Park lowers visual quality from high to medium.	No	No
C4A, Couplet	Yes—Similar to C3T, but less of McCormick Park affected, and route would be permanent feature in park, lowering visual quality from high to medium.	No	No
C7E, 112th NE Elevated	No	No	Yes – in limited areas
C8E, 110th NE Elevated	Yes—Elevated structures over 110th Avenue NE would be out of scale with pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Same impacts as C3T and C4A on McCormick Park from 110th Avenue NE to east end of park, lowering visual quality from high to medium.	No	Yes – in limited areas
Segment D, Bel-Red/Overlake			
All Segment D alternatives	No	No	Yes – in limited areas
Segment E, Downtown Redmond			
E1, Redmond Way	Yes—Removal of hillside trees and the visual presence a large-scale horizontal element temporarily lowers visual quality from high to medium in very limited areas until re-growth occurs.	No	No
E2, Marymoor	No	No	No
E4, Leary Way	Yes—Removal of the landscaped strip and mature street trees along portions of Leary Way lowers visual quality from high to medium.	No	No

would change the existing appearance of Bellevue Way SE to varying degrees. The following subsections describe the changes associated with Segment B alternatives.

Bellevue Way Alternative (B1). This alternative would reduce the visual quality category along part of its route. The alternative would be consistent with the existing landscape character of most of the areas it would pass through. The removal of trees and the construction of retaining walls would be most noticeable along parts of Bellevue Way SE between the South Bellevue Park-and-Ride Lot and the intersection with 112th Avenue SE. This would reduce the visual quality category from high to medium for parts of this section of Bellevue Way SE. This change would likely be seen and noticed by sensitive viewers such as neighborhood residents and people visiting the Mercer Slough Nature Park, the Frederick Winters House, and the Mercer Slough Blueberry Farm. Removing trees and other vegetation would open up views for some nearby hillside residents. Because B1 would result in the roadway being expanded into the hillside west of Bellevue Way SE, many of the project components would not be seen, or would only partially be seen, from the residences (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-6, Photo 6b).

Neither the South Bellevue Station nor the parking structure would change the existing medium visual quality category of the South Bellevue Park-and-Ride Lot (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-5, Photo 5b). B1 would not change the character or context of the Fredrick Winters House and its surroundings when viewed from Bellevue Way SE, but would change the character of Bellevue Way SE (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-20, Photo 20b). B1 would cause some change in the existing visual character of Bellevue Way SE north of the 112th Avenue SE intersection (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-7, Photo 8b). Although the East Link Project would widen the street, remove some vegetation and buildings, and build retaining walls primarily on the west side of the road, it would generally be consistent with the existing visual character and would not change the existing medium visual quality category.

112th SE At-Grade Alternative (B2A). This alternative would change the existing visual quality category along the same parts of Bellevue Way SE as the Bellevue Way Alternative (B1). The elevated structure and elevated South Bellevue Station associated with B2A would be more visible from Bellevue Way SE and some nearby residences to the west than the at-grade station associated with the Bellevue Way Alternative (B1) (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-6, Photo 6c). The

elevated station and structure would introduce large-scale visual elements into the viewed landscape. However, they would be consistent with the transportation-oriented character of the existing park-and-ride lot (and nearby elevated I-90 structures) and would not change the existing medium visual quality category of this part of Bellevue Way SE (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-5, Photo 5c). The main difference between B1 and B2A would be that the B2A transition structure (from elevated to at-grade) along the southern part of this section of Bellevue Way SE would result in more project components (overhead catenary system [OCS], guideway, and light rail vehicles) being elevated above grade along part of Bellevue Way SE. The elevated components would be more visible from approximately 15 residences on the hillsides to the west. The elevated structures would encroach on views to the east and would reduce the visual quality category from high to medium. The section of B2A that would pass near the Fredrick Winters House would not change the visual character of the house or its surroundings when viewed from Bellevue Way SE. The removal of vegetation and construction of the retaining wall would somewhat change the character of this portion of Bellevue Way SE, but would not lower the existing visual quality category from high to medium (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-20, Photo 20c). The alternative would travel in the median of 112th Avenue NE and remove the existing median vegetation but would be consistent with the area's character and visual quality because it would not require widening the road and landscaping on either side of the road would be retained until just before the SE 8th Station (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-7, Photo 7b). North of SE 8th Street, an at-grade station built along 112th Avenue NE would require widening the road near the station (but south of Surrey Downs Park in Segment C), remove numerous street trees, and increase the area of asphalt. Although this would change the character and vegetative cover at the intersection, residents do not face or have views into this intersection. The result would reduce the visual quality but not enough to change from medium to low (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-21, Photo 21b).

112th SE Elevated Alternative (B2E). This alternative would change the high visual quality category of the same portion of the route that would be changed by 112th SE At-Grade Alternative (B2A). The removal of the trees and the strong visual presence of the elevated profile would not be consistent with the existing visual character on the west side of Bellevue Way SE and would be noticed by viewers with high viewer sensitivity, such as neighborhood motorists and

people visiting the Mercer Slough Nature Park, the Frederick Winters House, and the Mercer Slough Blueberry Farm. In addition, the B2E guideway, OCS, trolleys, and passengers would be seen to varying degrees from between 15 and 20 hillside residences. From several of the residences that are closest to Bellevue Way SE, the project components would encroach on views those residences have to the east of the blueberry farms and the Mercer Slough Nature Park (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-6, Photo 6d). These views have not been identified by local jurisdiction for protection. A positive aspect of the elevated portions of the alternative would be that the project riders would be able to enjoy elevated views of features such as the Mercer Slough Nature Park. North of SE 8th Street, an elevated station would result in a large-scale component adjacent to an office park and across the street from a residential area. Although this would change the character and vegetative cover of the intersection, the station elements would be compatible with the office parks that are also located near the SE 8th interchange from I-405. The result would reduce the visual quality for residents, but it would not block views. The station would not change the visual quality from medium to low (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-21, Photo 21c).

112th SE Bypass Alternative (B3). From Segment A to approximately 112th Avenue SE and SE 8th Street, the changes in visual quality associated with B3 would be the same as those described previously for the 112th SE At-Grade Alternative (B2A): the existing visual quality category would change from high to medium along the portion of Bellevue Way SE adjacent to approximately 15 residences on the hillside west of Bellevue Way SE. North of the intersection of SE 8th Street and 112th Avenue SE, the 112th SE Bypass Alternative (B3) would leave 112th Avenue SE and transition from at-grade to an elevated structure (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-21, Photo 21d). Its route would take it through an area that contains parking lots, office buildings and an undeveloped open area, thus minimizing the removal of large trees along 112th Avenue SE. The presence of the elevated profile would be consistent with the nearby structures, including I-405 and would not change the medium visual quality category of the area it would pass through.

BNSF Alternative (B7). This alternative would not change the medium visual quality category for this route. The elevated structure crossing over Mercer Slough Nature Park would be noticeable to I-90 Trail users and would introduce a second major structural element into the view (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-9, Photo 9b). It may also open heavily vegetated areas, possibly expanding trail users' views

of the Mercer Slough landscape. Some portions of the I-90 Trail would continue to be screened by nearby vegetation, but along portions of the trail where viewers would see the elevated structure, it would partially intrude on north views of vegetation in the Mercer Slough Nature Park. Sensitive viewers (i.e., recreationists) would notice the light rail structure from portions of Mercer Slough Nature Park, but their views of it would include the existing I-90 structure behind it. Due to the existing dominating presence of the I-90 structure and its associated ramps along this portion of B7, the alternative's elevated structure would not decrease the area's existing medium visual quality category. This alternative would not change the visual quality category of the BNSF Railway corridor that it would be located along nor the portion of the alternative adjacent to 114th Avenue (SE and NE) and I-405 (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-9, Photo 10b).

Segment C

The 110th NE Elevated Alternative (C8E) would be the only alternative of the Segment C alternatives resulting in a change in visual quality category. The following subsections describe the impacts associated with the Segment C alternatives.

Bellevue Way Tunnel Alternative (C1T). The open portion of the retained-cut and the tunnel portal would be noticeable from along Bellevue Way SE. The openness of the cut and the fencing along the top of the retained-cut walls would be the most noticeable features but would not decrease the area's medium visual quality (see Appendix F4.5, Attachment 1). The underground portion of C1T would have no impact on visual character or quality. The transition of the alternative from tunnel to an elevated profile along NE 6th Street would require the building of a transition structure from the portal to the elevated structure crossing over I-405. The portal and structure would be visible along NE 6th Street between the Meydenbauer Convention Center and City Hall Plaza (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-14, Photo 14b1). Their form and line would contrast with the existing streetscape and they (primarily the transition structure) would not block views between parts of the convention center and City Hall Plaza. The existing visual context of this block of NE 6th Street would be lowered but not enough to lower the visual quality category from medium to low.

106th NE Tunnel Alternative (C2T). Most of C2T would be underground and would have no impact on visual character or quality. Connection from the 112th SE At-Grade Alternative (B2A) would require a retained cut along part of 112th Avenue SE that would not be visible in Surrey Downs Park (although the tunnel

would pass under the park). The retained cut would somewhat change the character of areas next to it, but would not lower the existing medium visual quality to low. The connector along 112th Avenue SE (B2E) would require widening the street and removing existing mature street trees that line parts of the street. In this portion of 112th Avenue SE, the trees screen views of the parking lots, whereas the elevated profile would add hard surfaces where trees soften the views of parking from the residences on the opposite side of the street. Although the character of this part of 112th Avenue SE would change with the removal of the trees and the presence of the elevated structure, it would not lower the existing medium visual quality along the section of 112th Avenue SE that is lined with large parking lots on its east side. The elevated structure would cast shadows along 112th Avenue SE (although to a lesser degree than the existing street trees). The transition from elevated profile to tunnel along 112th Avenue SE would turn west near Main Street before entering the tunnel (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-13, Photo 13b). It would require the removal of trees and buildings, but would not be out of scale with its surroundings and would not lower the existing medium visual quality category.

The other connector from B3 and B7 would follow 114th Avenue SE to the transition structure. It would not change the existing freeway and parking lot dominated character of the route or its low visual quality category.

An additional elevated portion of the alternative would be located east of the Meydenbauer Convention Center along NE 6th Street (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-14, Photo 14b1). The impact of the portion of the route along NE 6th Street and beyond would be the same as that described for the Bellevue Way Tunnel Alternative (C1T).

108th NE Tunnel Alternative (C3T). The impacts related to the Segment B connectors (B2E, B3, B7) and for the tunnel described above for the 106th NE Tunnel Alternative (C2T) would apply to the 108th NE Tunnel Alternative (C3T). The C3T alternative would leave the tunnel to become elevated along NE 12th Street (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-12, Photo 12b). C3T would alter McCormick Park between 108th Avenue NE and 112th Avenue NE due to tunnel construction, a permanent section of retained cut, and a section of elevated structure. The appearance of the park would be changed due to the presence of the retained cut and elevated structure. C3T would include redesigning and rebuilding the park upon completion of the project. Although the configuration of the park after construction would be different than it is now and

mature vegetation (i.e., large trees) would be removed, the new park could play an important role in the visual quality of the area. Nearby residents, who have high viewer sensitivity, would be adversely affected by the project for several years until the redesigned park's vegetation (e.g., shrubs and groundcover) began to fill in; trees would take longer to adequately mature. Between the start of construction and several years after the construction of the new park, the visual quality category of the area near the park would be reduced from high to low. Within several years of completion of the new park, plants would begin to fill in and visual quality would improve to medium. Visual quality could improve to high after 5 to 10 years depending upon the park design, growth of trees, and effectiveness of landscaping used to reduce the visual dominance of proposed project structures in the park.

Couplet Alternative (C4A). Impacts related to the Segment B connectors (B2E, B3, B7) described above for the 106th NE Tunnel Alternative (C2T) would apply to this alternative as well, except that instead of going into a portal, these connectors would be elevated across 112th NE and then meet grade as they connect to the main portion of C4A. For C4A, the connector from B2A would be the same as B2E and therefore affects large trees and introduces an elevated profile along 112th Avenue NE. Along 108th and 110th avenues NE, the at-grade profile of the couplet would be consistent with the urban environment of Segment C and would not change the high visual quality category. Residents and others who frequent Downtown Bellevue would notice the changes, but C4A's at-grade profile in the existing street right-of-way would help it fit into the streetscape (see Exhibit F4.5-11, Photo 11b). The impacts from the portion of the route that would pass along NE 12th Street would be similar to those described for the 108th NE Tunnel Alternative (C3T) except C4A remains at-grade as it enters the park rather than coming from a portal (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-12, Photo 12c).

112th NE Elevated Alternative (C7E). The impacts of B2A, B2E, B3 and B7 connectors from Segment B would be the same as those described above for the Couplet Alternative (C4A) except that they remain elevated as the continue up 112th Avenue NE. North of Main Street, the elevated structure would pass along 112th Avenue NE through areas categorized as having low and medium visual quality due to buildings set back from the street, extensive parking lots and numerous views of and access points to I-405. C7E would not change the existing visual quality categories along the route. The City of Bellevue's future plans for 112th Avenue NE are for it to become

a pedestrian-attractive, high-density corridor. The elevated structure would cast shadows along this part of 112th Avenue NE (to the intersection with NE 6th Street), which receives light to moderate pedestrian use. The intent of the urban design element of the *Bellevue Comprehensive Plan* is to reduce shadows in areas that receive heavy pedestrian use. This area is not a heavy pedestrian traffic area and therefore shadow from the overhead structure may not conflict under current conditions. The C7E elevated station near the intersection with NE 6th Street would be connected to 110th Avenue NE by a raised pedestrian walkway (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-14, Photo 14b2). The new structures would be visible in this general area but would be visually compatible with the area in terms of scale and design. The raised pedestrian walkway would provide a direct pedestrian connection between the station and Bellevue City Hall's plaza and nearby areas, so relatively few passengers would likely use the sidewalks along the section of 112th Avenue NE under the station. The elevated structures would not lower the area's visual quality category.

110th NE Elevated Alternative (C8E). The elevated structure and station associated with the B3 and B7 connector, including the portion that would be located along NE 2nd Street, would be compatible with the character of I-405 and existing development it would pass through and would not change the area's visual quality category. The visual quality of the route would change along 110th Avenue NE near the Bellevue Transit Center and NE 6th Street due to the elevated profile (particularly the straddlebents [see notes of Table 4.5-1 for definition]) and elevated station. The elevated station would add a large-scale over-head visual element to an area that is pedestrian-oriented and receives heavy pedestrian use. It would not be consistent with the park-like character of Bellevue City Hall plaza or the nearby streetscape (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-11, Photo 11c). The visual quality category of this portion of 110th Avenue NE would change from high to medium. In addition, the elevated station would create shadows on the sidewalk, which is heavily used by pedestrians, and street below (between shadows cast by nearby buildings) during sunny weather.

The north end of the route would pass through McCormick Park from 110th Avenue NE to 112th Avenue NE and would lower visual quality. It would impact less of the park than the 108th NE Tunnel Alternative (C3T) or Couplet Alternative (C4A). The impact of C8E would be due primarily to the removal of vegetation (particularly mature trees) and the presence of the elevated structure. As described in the

section on the 108th NE Tunnel Alternative (C3T), the appearance and visual quality of the park would improve over time after being redesigned and rebuilt.

Segment D

All of the Segment D alternatives would be compatible with the largely industrial/commercial/transportation (along SR 520), automobile-oriented, big-box retail character of the areas they would pass by and through (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-15, Photo 15b). Photo 15b shows that street trees removed for this project would be replaced and the impact of light rail along NE 24th Street would be generally compatible with adjacent land uses. The at-grade and elevated alternatives would not be considered visual encroachments and could slightly improve existing visual continuity of the development in Segment D. The alternatives would not change the existing (low to medium) visual quality categories along their routes. Additionally, the City of Bellevue and Redmond have adopted future land use plans that would change the Bel-Red and Overlake Village subareas into high-density, mixed uses for more transit-oriented development patterns. Therefore, over time, the light rail would be integrated with future development and visual enhancements to the subareas.

All of the stations would be designed to respond to the areas in which they would be built, and the four potential stations would either improve the low visual quality of the areas where they would be built or would not change it. The City of Bellevue and City of Redmond are processing or have adopted changes in land use along some areas that Segment D alternatives would pass through. The changes would increase pedestrian-oriented land uses, and reflect improved urban design standards. The design of the stations would be subject to appropriate design review by the City of Bellevue and City of Redmond to facilitate compatibility with the proposed changes.

Segment E

One of the Segment E alternatives (Redmond Way Alternative [E1]) would temporarily change the visual quality category of the area it would pass through, whereas the Leary Way Alternative (E2) has the potential of permanently lowering visual quality along Leary Way. The following describes the changes associated with Segment E alternatives.

The portion of the Segment E alternatives adjacent to SR 520 (which applies to the three Segment E alternatives) would be located along the east side of SR 520. The alternatives would include at-grade and retained-cut profiles. Light rail would be compatible with the character of SR 520 and nearby areas and roads in terms of scale, form, line, and color. The low

visual quality categorization along the route would not change.

Redmond Way Alternative (E1). The route along West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE would be elevated and would pass through a heavily vegetated hillside located above a small commercial strip and below a condominium complex (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-17, Photo 17b). Building this part of the alternative would require removing a number of trees on a hillside west of West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE. The primary impact of E1 on visual character and quality would be the strong visual presence of the elevated structure. A secondary impact would be from the removal of trees on the hillside. The elevated structure would introduce a large-scale horizontal element high above the nearby street. The structure would add a prominent feature to a pleasant but not especially memorable area. It would also, however, be a large-scale encroachment to the view of the heavily vegetated hillside and would be seen from the condominium complex above. Until replantings mature, E1 would temporarily lower the existing visual quality of the section of West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE from medium to low (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-17, Photo 17b) in this area. The portion of the elevated structure that would parallel Redmond Way and would cross the Sammamish River would be seen from the Sammamish River Trail and from Luke McRedmond Landing Park (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-18, Photo 18b). The elevated structure would be seen in front of the Redmond Way bridge over the Sammamish River and would be similar in character in terms of scale, form, materials, and color. The removal of some trees could be noticed by some park and trail users. The elevated structure would be compatible with the existing visual character and would not lower the area's high visual quality category along Redmond Way, nor would it lower the visual quality of the BNSF corridor.

Marymoor Alternative (E2). The route along Marymoor Park would be scarcely visible from north of SR 520 because of the screening effect of trees that follow Bear Creek and the fact that the alternative would be constructed at-grade on the south side of the raised embankment on which SR 520 is built. The alternative would be more visible from parts of Marymoor Park, particularly the sports fields at the north end of the park (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-16, Photo 16b). E2 would be similar in character to SR 520 (but less visible) and would not lower the existing high visual quality of this area. After leaving Marymoor Park, E2 would be visually compatible with the BNSF corridor and 161st Avenue NE, in scale and urban character.

Leary Way Alternative (E4). E4 is the only alternative in Segment E that would change the visual quality category of an area it would pass. The alternative would require removing mature street trees along the existing landscaped strip and the south side of Leary Way NE starting west of the Leary Way NE bridge over the Sammamish River and continuing east to near the BNSF Railway (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-19, Photo 19b). This portion of Leary Way serves as a gateway into Downtown Redmond; therefore, the transition of elevated profile to at-grade and widening the tree canopy could lower the visual experience of the entryway. The removal of the landscaping and trees would lower the visual quality classification of this part of Leary Way NE from high to medium. Sound Transit has prepared designs that show how proposed landscaping may minimize visual effects (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-19, Photo 19b). The portions of the E4 route along the BNSF right-of-way and extending over the SR 520 interchange would be visually consistent with the character of this area.

Maintenance Facilities

The maintenance facility would not be out of character with the land uses around it, and most of the alternative maintenance facility sites are located in areas that are not visible to large numbers of people. The potential maintenance facility alternatives are located in areas that have been categorized as having low visual quality. The maintenance facility would have a perimeter fence and/or landscaping where necessary to screen views. The design of the facilities is subject to appropriate design reviews required by the cities where they would be located.

Maintenance Facility alternatives located in the Bel-Red subarea are compatible with adjacent land uses currently, but the City of Bellevue has adopted future land use plans that would limit future industrial uses in the area. The 116th Maintenance Facility (MF1) may require screening from the adjacent medical and hospital-oriented uses but would not cause a reduction of visual quality. The BNSF Maintenance Facility (MF2) and the SR 520 Maintenance Facility (MF3) would be visually consistent with the existing visual character and quality of areas near them. MF3 is the most visible of the maintenance facilities, because it would be located between NE 20th Street and SR 520 and would be seen from both travel routes, as well as from Viewpoint Park and parts of the Bridle Trails Neighborhood. The design and landscaping would consider such views, but would be consistent with the character of the areas near it and would not lower visual quality. Perhaps the most visually compatible of the maintenance facilities, SE Redmond Maintenance Facility (MF5) is surrounded by light industrial land

uses with no future plans of changing from these current land uses. The industrial park is already screened by commercial uses and mature growth.

4.5.3.3 Impacts During Construction

Construction of the East Link Project would result in temporary impacts on the visual environment. The removal and demolition of existing buildings and the changes in roads, natural vegetation, and landscaping would change the existing condition of the visual environment to varying degrees for varying amounts of time. Activities related to building the project would also have temporary impacts on the visual environment and would include the presence and movement of equipment and materials, exposure of soils, glare and lights associated with nighttime construction, storage of construction materials, and general visual changes to the viewed landscape during the period of building the project. Staging areas would be required in Downtown Bellevue as large as 6 acres and include construction equipment, vehicles, and activities. These areas would be screened from view where appropriate.

In addition, parks would be affected during construction. Similarly, in Segment B, the alternatives would affect Mercer Slough Nature Park. Some of the Segment C alternatives would affect Surrey Downs Park, Pocket Parks, and McCormick Park during construction and require rebuilding affected park areas; and all Segment E alternatives would affect trails and nearby parks to some extent. Nearby residents and park users would be adversely affected by the loss of the affected parks and project construction for approximately 3 to 5 years and in some cases longer, until the restored parks' revegetation has matured. The severity of the impacts on the visual environment would depend upon the duration and the intensity of construction activities and their locations.

4.5.3.4 Consistency with Comprehensive Plans

Sound Transit's assessment of the East Link Project's consistency with visual-resource goals and policies of relevant local comprehensive plans found that none of the general plans or subarea plans contain specific goals and policies for aesthetic or visual resources. However, most of the plans contain guidance relating to maintaining and improving the appearance of the physical environment. With one possible exception, the alternatives would be consistent with these general plan and subarea plans. The possible exception is the elevated station and elevated profile of the 110th NE Elevated Alternative (C8E) as it passes over 110th Avenue NE. The alternative would likely not meet the

intent of the urban design element in the *Bellevue Comprehensive Plan* with respect to avoiding shadows and allowing access to sunlight in areas that receive heavy pedestrian use (City of Bellevue, 2007). As design of the East Link Project progresses beyond the alternative selection phase, specific ordinances, regulations, and design guidelines would be reviewed to help guide final design and consistency with the development directives of the municipalities along the selected route. Appendix F4.5, Table 4.5-1, presents an analysis of the consistency of the project alternatives with relevant local plans.

4.5.4 Potential Mitigation Measures

4.5.4.1 Mitigation for Operational Impacts

In addition to including Sound Transit's measures to minimize visual impacts and build a visually compatible transit facility as discussed at the beginning of Section 4.5.3.2, Sound Transit would consider implementing a number of site-specific measures to mitigate visual impacts. The following paragraphs describe specific areas of impact and potential mitigation measures.

Bellevue Way SE between the South Bellevue Park-and-Ride Lot and the intersection with 112th Avenue SE – impacts from the Bellevue Way (B1), 112th SE At-Grade (B2A), 112th SE Elevated (B2E), and 112th SE Bypass (B3) alternatives. Sound Transit would re-landscape areas along this section of Bellevue Way SE that would be removed to widen the street, construct a series of retaining walls (B1), or construct the elevated structure (B2E). Ornamental patterns or textures on retaining walls could improve their appearance and would be considered by Sound Transit for retaining walls located along Bellevue Way SE. Sound Transit would coordinate with the City of Bellevue and neighborhood during design of these alternatives. Sound Transit would coordinate with homeowners on the hillside west of Bellevue Way SE who would look out and see the elevated structures associated with B2E to consider means to screen views of the structure. Vegetative screening would be provided by Sound Transit for residences where it would be practical and effective.

112th Avenue SE and the SE 8th Street station – impacts from the 112th SE At-Grade (B2A) and Elevated (B2E) alternatives and as connectors to alternatives C4A and C7E, south of Main Street. These alternatives do not have a substantial adverse impact because they do not change the medium visual quality to low along 112th Avenue SE between SE 8th Street and Main Street, and mitigation is not required. However, the character of 112th Avenue SE in this

area would change. As described in Section 4.5.3.2, Sound Transit would save existing plantings and provide landscaping where possible along this section of 112th Avenue SE and design the SE 8th Station and landscaping to be compatible with the area character and enhance its visual aesthetic, including incorporating art elements at the station.

110th Residential areas north of NE 8th Street – impacts from the 110th Elevated Alternative (C8E). Sound Transit would evaluate C8E during final design to minimize bulk, reduce shadows, and improve pedestrian environment by enhancing visual aesthetics of the columns and elevated structure.

NE 12th Street near McCormick Park – impacts from the 108th NE Tunnel (C3T), Couplet (C4A), and 110th NE Elevated (C8E) alternatives. Sound Transit would develop plans for a redeveloped McCormick Park following construction. The park would be developed in conjunction with the City of Bellevue and with input from the community to reestablish a linear landscaped park along the north side of NE 12th Street and to screen project components from the park and nearby residences where appropriate.

NE Leary Way – impacts from the Leary Way NE Alternative (E4). The light rail would be located as close to Leary Way as practical to minimize clearing of mature trees. Sound Transit would coordinate with the City of Redmond and provide landscaping between Leary Way and the light rail elevated and at-grade trackway where there is space to do so (see Appendix F4.5, Exhibit F4.5-22, Photo 22b). This would help screen the light rail guideway and reduce the visual impact to the NE Leary Way entry into Downtown Redmond.

West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE – impacts from the Redmond Way Alternative (E1). Sound Transit would minimize clearing during construction and, in consultation with the City of Redmond, plant trees and/or other vegetation along the edge of West Lake Sammamish Parkway NE, as illustrated in Appendix F4.5, Photo 17b (this simulation does not depict the additional planting). This would help screen views of the columns and structure from the street and from nearby condominiums and reduce the apparent bulk of this part of the elevated structure.

4.5.4.2 Mitigation for Construction Impacts

Sound Transit would evaluate all staging areas for viewer sensitivity and, where appropriate, provide visual mitigation that may include walls, fences, or other measures at main staging areas to screen ground-level views into the staging areas from sensitive viewers such as residents, park users, and pedestrians.