

3.8 AESTHETICS

This section describes the visual and aesthetic resources setting potentially affected by the expansion and enhancement of ferry service throughout the Bay Area.

3.8.1 Environmental Setting

San Francisco Bay is a world-renowned scenic resource, combining water, islands, urban skylines, bridges, and mountains in picturesque and impressive vistas. San Francisco Bay extends from the Sacramento River Delta to the marshlands of Santa Clara County, a total of 548 square miles and 1,000 miles of shoreline. The shoreline of the Bay is lined with commercial, industrial, and residential land uses; points of historic, natural, and cultural interest; recreational areas such as beaches, fishing piers, boat launches; and over 130 parks and wildlife preserves. It is viewed and appreciated from many locations throughout the region. As stated in the San Francisco Bay Plan (BCDC 2002), “Probably the most widely enjoyed ‘use’ of the Bay is simply viewing it – from the shoreline, from the water, and from afar”.

Hills and mountains surround San Francisco Bay. The north-south Coastal Range runs just east of San Francisco and the famously rugged coast is in full dramatic character along the Marin Coast and the Golden Gate. The East Bay hills frame the cities of Oakland and Berkeley and the topography of San Francisco is also famously hilly, providing a dynamic city skyline contrasted against the water and coastal hills.

Islands such as the hilly and forested Angel Island, the historic Alcatraz Island, and the man-made Treasure Island help define the visual character of the Central Bay. They are a dramatic landscape viewable throughout the Central Bay. They also provide spectacular views of San Francisco, the Marin coastline, the hills of the East Bay, and Bay waters extending north and south.

Other unique visual features of the Bay Area include the salt ponds of the South Bay and Suisun Marsh in the North Bay, which contribute to the natural and visual diversity of the area. Wildlife is also a highlight of the Bay’s visual character. People can watch seals, shorebirds, and deer in regional parks. In the spring, after mild but wet winters, the Bay is surrounded by colorful displays of native wildflowers.

The cities, towns, and industry along the Bay are evidence of the large population of people living and working around the Bay. The built environment heavily defines the visual character of the Bay shoreline. For example, residential areas along or within the nearby hills of Marin County, Point Richmond, or the Marina District of San Francisco are noted by many as memorable skylines. Along the Carquinez Strait, the views are a mix of industrial and petrochemical refiners and tanker wharves, interspersed with open shoreline and marsh.

3.8.1.1 Local Visual Setting

The expansion and enhancement of ferry services would affect a wide range of visual settings along the Bay shoreline. Section 3.7.1.2 (Land Use) summarizes land uses around each existing and potential terminal location, which provides additional understanding of the local visual settings. The potential settings range from highly urban landscapes to undeveloped shoreline

parks. General types of visual settings are described below to provide context to potential and existing terminal locations that may be included in the WTA plan.

Urban Environment

Ferry terminals in San Francisco and Oakland are surrounded by dense development including warehouses, high-rise buildings, commercial, and housing. The urban environment provides a unique visual resource and views to and from the Bay, including skylines and shoreline development. Historic structures, such as the Ferry Building in San Francisco or more modern developments such as Jack London Square in Oakland, are examples of the varied urban context behind new or enhanced terminals.

Suburban Environment

Waterfront communities around the Bay provide varied visual settings for potential ferry terminals. These areas are generally less densely developed and have open Bay views due to lower buildings, waterfront promenades, and marinas. Existing terminal facilities at Larkspur, Vallejo, and Alameda are transportation and commuter hubs and are surrounded by retail, business, and residential land uses. Potential terminal locations identified in this EIR, such as Antioch or Pittsburg may utilize existing ports or marinas to develop similar transportation hubs. In some locations, such as the Berkeley marina, the local marina or shoreline is separated from the city center and neighborhoods by freeways, railroads, and/or undeveloped lands.

3.8.1.2 Regulatory Setting

McAteer-Petris Act

Under the McAteer-Petris Act, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) regulates development within the first 100 feet inland from the Bay. One of BCDC's primary roles is to review proposed development or changes to the shoreline for their aesthetic and visual impact. BCDC has appointed a Design Review Board that evaluates projects and makes recommendations in light of the San Francisco Bay Plan Part IV, Appearance, Design, and Scenic Views, Policies 1-15 (BCDC 2002). Some of the criteria relevant to the WTA program include the following:

- To enhance the visual quality of development around the Bay and to take maximum advantage of the attractive setting it provides, the shores of the Bay should be developed in accordance with the Public Access Design Guidelines.
- All bay front development should be designed to enhance the pleasure of the user or viewer of the Bay. Maximum efforts should be made to provide, enhance, or preserve views of the Bay and shoreline, especially from public areas, from the Bay itself, and from the opposite shore.
- Structures and facilities that do not take advantage of or visually complement the Bay should be located and designed so as not to impact visually on the Bay and shoreline. In particular, parking areas should be located away from the shoreline.

- To enhance the maritime atmosphere of the Bay Area, ports should be designed, whenever feasible, to permit public access and viewing of port activities by means of (a) view points (e.g., piers, platforms, or towers), restaurants, etc., that would not interfere with port operations, and (b) openings between buildings and other site designs that permit views from nearby roads.

Local Regulations

Aesthetic and visual resource regulations vary from location to location based upon the City and County General Plans, Ordinances, and Policies. These local regulations must be identified on a project-by-project basis. Pertinent local aesthetic policies currently in place are listed in Table 3.7.1 of the Section 3.7 (Land Use).

State Scenic Highway Program

The State Scenic Highway Program, created by the State Legislature in 1963, was established to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A highway is officially designated under this program when a local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to the California Department of Transportation for scenic highway approval, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as a Scenic Highway.

When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it defines the scenic corridor, which is land generally adjacent to and visible to a motorist on the highway. The agency then must adopt or document ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor.

3.8.2 Impacts and Mitigation

3.8.2.1 Methods

This programmatic assessment of visual and aesthetic impacts due to proposed water transit service expansion is a qualitative analysis. It is broad-based and regional in nature and does not provide a detailed local visual and aesthetic impact assessment. Broad types of visual and aesthetic impacts were assessed because they could occur at any location throughout the Bay due to increased ferry services.

The issues considered in the analysis include views to and from the Bay, the visual quality of new or enhanced structures, light and glare, and the aesthetic quality of construction or ferry activity along the shoreline. The assumption was made that visual and aesthetic impacts of increased ferry services would be most prominent at the existing and potential terminal locations. Therefore, the assessment focused more heavily on these areas.

3.8.2.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts would be considered significant if they:

- Would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;

- Would substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway; or
- Would create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

3.8.2.3 Impacts

***Impact V-1* The construction and operation of new and enhanced ferry terminals along the Bay shoreline could potentially impact land and water views of San Francisco Bay or degrade the visual character of the Bay.**

The types of impacts that could occur through construction of terminals, enhancement of existing terminals, and expansion of ferry service are summarized below. These impacts would be localized. Region-wide, these structures would affect a relatively small portion of the 1,000 miles of Bay shoreline. The Proposed Project represents only nine potential new terminals. All but one of these terminals (Hercules/Rodeo) would be at already developed shoreline areas. Localized site-specific visual impact analyses of potential terminal locations were not performed for this program-level EIR.

- Block Bay views: New shoreline development could result in new structures or docked vessels. It is possible that in some instances these structures could be visible or even block or restrict existing views of the Bay.
- Construct unsightly buildings: Without careful planning and design, new terminals could result in unattractive development that negatively affects shoreline views.
- Create light and glare: Safety lighting for facilities, walkways, and parking lots could create a new source of light and glare that negatively affects the surrounding community and/or wildlife.
- Construct a building that is inappropriate to a waterfront location: Inappropriate terminal designs could result in parking areas or other inappropriate structures along the waterfront.

Proposed ferry service expansion may also result in positive impacts to visual resources and the aesthetics of the Bay:

- Enhance Bay views: New terminal designs could provide new or enhanced opportunities to view the Bay from piers, platforms, and the ferries themselves.
- Improve the aesthetics of shoreline development: New terminal development could revitalize areas of the shoreline that currently do not take advantage of the Bay setting. Improving areas that currently have debris, contamination, or inappropriate development could result in an enhancement of public views to and from the Bay through the construction of terminals designed to visually complement the Bay and provide public access to the waterfront.

Planning of any development or change in or near the shoreline of the San Francisco Bay is subject to considerable regulatory review by local, state, and federal resource and permitting agencies. Site and terminal planning and its associated regulatory review process for all proposed ferry terminal projects would follow the BCDC Bay Plan policies on appearance, design, and scenic views (BCDC 2002). The policies provide guidelines for enhancing the visual quality of development around the Bay while preserving views of the Bay and shoreline. In

In addition, the BCDC Design Review Board would review all proposed development that affects the appearance of the Bay in accordance with the Bay Plan. Local, city, and county ordinances, regulations, and policies would also apply on a project-by-project basis.

Summary of Impact V-1

- The Proposed Project would involve the construction of new terminals and could involve the improvement of existing terminals. These could have potentially significant impacts on views of the Bay or the visual character of waterfront areas. Light and glare could also have potentially significant impacts on wildlife. Potential impacts to wildlife are addressed in Impact B-21 in the Biology Section (3.5).

Mitigation V-1.1: When feasible, the following shall be included in ferry terminal design:

- Locate terminal facilities so as not to obstruct or detract from views of the Bay from nearby public thoroughfares;
- Design terminals and layout to integrate with the surrounding landscape and historical structures to preserve, and take advantage of, existing views of the Bay and shoreline.
- Design terminal facilities to provide new or enhanced point access areas or view areas such as piers, platforms and walkways;
- Design and site terminals so as to maintain and enhance the visual quality of the shoreline and visual public access to the Bay; and
- Vessels should be standardized to support system-wide operations and to work interchangeably at all terminals. Vessel berthing should be configured so as to allow maximum feasible visual access to the Bay.

Mitigation V-1.2: The WTA established Intermodal and Architectural Design Guidelines (ARUP 2001) that shall be considered in the planning and design of new and enhanced ferry terminals (Parsons Brinckerhoff 2002). The design objectives may include, but are not limited to, making the ferry system more attractive, integrating terminals with the local urban context, and taking advantage of waterfront views. The ideal terminal facility will serve as a catalyst to ferry service expansion in the Bay Area. The specific design of each terminal facility should be developed at a local level to ensure compatibility with the surrounding visual environment. In addition, site-specific studies on the potential impacts of light and glare on wildlife may be necessary to determine appropriate mitigations. This would be most relevant for the Hercules/Rodeo site, which is the only proposed new terminal site that would not be in an area having existing maritime uses.

Impact After Mitigation: The WTA design guidelines would promote aesthetic planning criteria that guide the initial development of projects in a manner consistent with preservation of views and scenic resources. In addition, future development of projects will not proceed without meeting BCDC and local planning requirements. At some sites, Impact V-1 could still be potentially significant after implementation of Mitigations V-1.1 and V-1.2.

***Impact V-2* An increase in the number of ferryboats operating on San Francisco Bay could impact views of the Bay or degrade the visual character of the Bay.**

The current ferry services use 15 boats systemwide, with over 80,000 trips annually. Ferries share the Bay with commercial, military, and recreational boats making their way to and from the eight ports and 21 marine terminals throughout the Bay. Views of the Bay therefore include many types of vessels.

The proposed expansion of ferry service under the Proposed Project would expand service by approximately four times. Ferry activity on the Bay would increase from approximately 85 daily trips to a projected 336 daily trips.

The potential visual impact of additional ferryboats making trips across the Bay is subjective. It could be seen as an enhancement of the maritime atmosphere and Bay views similar to existing views, which include ferry services, shipping activity, and recreational boating. It could also be seen as a detriment to views of the Bay. There are no established significance criteria that provide a framework to determine whether increased ferry vessels on the Bay would be considered a significantly detrimental impact. Increases in service may be relatively unnoticeable to most Bay Area residents and travelers. In addition, the visual impact would be partially minimized by the concentration of routes along some common alignments. Given the total volume of boat traffic on the Bay, and the maritime history of the Bay, the impact on visual resources of expanded ferry service is expected to be less than significant.

Summary of Impact V-2

- The Proposed Project would result in an increase in the number of vessels operating on San Francisco Bay. This could have an adverse impact on scenic views of the Bay or the visual quality of waterfront areas. Given the variety of vessels plying the Bay and the frequency of their passage, it is expected that additional ferries would have a less than significant impact on scenic views.

***Impact V-3* Increased ferry operations could increase the amount of visible exhaust over the Bay.**

Visible exhaust plumes from existing ferry engines are the result of various conditions, but can indicate that an engine is not completely burning the fuel. Incomplete combustion results in unwanted pollutant emissions. These emissions can include particulates that may be visible in the exhaust, resulting in darkened plumes. Internal combustion engine emissions also include a large proportion of water vapor, a normal product of combustion, which may also be visible under certain conditions (such as very cold temperatures or an engine that is not completely warmed up).

For the Proposed Project, all ferries proposed for new routes would be based on state-of-the-art engine and fuel technology that would have minimal or nonexistent plumes. The modern ferry vessels on current routes would also use the clean technology (SCR and particulate traps). This technology goes beyond U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Tier 2 standards in reducing emissions. By the year 2025, it is assumed that all ferries operating on the Bay will be based on the cleaner technology and visible exhaust plumes would be significantly reduced or nonexistent. Therefore, visual impacts from exhaust plumes are considered to be less than significant.

Summary of Impact V-3

- The Proposed Project would increase the number of ferries and trips on the Bay, but all boats would use clean technologies. As a result, visible exhaust plumes would be minimal or nonexistent. Therefore, visual impacts from exhaust plumes are considered to be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

***Impact V-4* Expanded and enhanced ferry services, including terminals and additional ferry boats, would not impact scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway.**

Sections of Bay Area Highways 280, 580, and 680 have been designated as scenic corridors under the State Scenic Highway program but do not provide motorists with expansive or continuous views of the Bay. Therefore, these corridors would not be affected by an increase in visible ferries on the Bay or the construction of new terminals along the shoreline.

Summary of Impact V-4

- The Proposed Project includes additional terminals and an increase in the number of vessels operating on San Francisco Bay. This development and boat activity would not be highly visible to motorists and it does not represent a visual impact to scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway.

***Impact V-5* Expanded and enhanced ferry terminals and services throughout San Francisco Bay could result in light and glare impacts.**

Ferry terminal facilities could include structures, parking lots, roadways, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities that would be lit for public safety. Terminals proposed within or adjacent to existing marinas, ports, or shoreline development would add to existing light and glare, but may not necessarily create a substantial new source. Potential terminal facilities in parkland or less developed areas would be more likely to create a new source of light and glare, and this impact could be adverse and significant. New light sources may represent a potentially significant impact to light-sensitive land uses such as nearby residential areas.

Increased ferry trips on the Bay would add to the existing vessels that already cross Bay waters. Early morning or late day/evening vessel trips would show navigation lighting as well as cabin and deck lighting. The increase in frequency of trips and new routes to terminals not currently serviced would increase and introduce these sources of light on the Bay and at terminals, but it would be transitory and the lighting would not be a substantial source of glare to light-sensitive land uses. Therefore, this vessel lighting would not be considered adverse or significant.

Summary of Impact V-5

- The Proposed Project would include the construction of new terminals and possibly the improvement of existing terminals. These could result in potentially significant light and glare impacts.

Mitigation V-5.1: Ferry terminal designs will be required to develop site-specific lighting plans. Outdoor lighting shall be focused and directed to the specific location (e.g., roads, walkways), be

shielded to avoid the production of glare, and minimize up-light and light spill. Fixtures shall be located, aimed or shielded to minimize stray light to or across property boundaries. Light design shall use down-cast, low glare, shields, or equivalent designs to minimize light and glare on surrounding land uses.

Impact After Mitigation: Impact V-5 would be minimized through Mitigation V-5.1, but the potential remains for significant impacts depending on site-specific locations and settings, and applicable local regulations. This impact remains potentially significant.

References

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