

Technical Report: Visual Quality

EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER

Visual resources are those physical features that make up the visible landscape, including land, water, vegetation, and manmade elements. As stated in Fountain's Zoning District Regulations (Section 17.246), scenic views provide aesthetic relief and pleasure for the public and constitute one reason for open space preservation. Other than background views of Pikes Peak and the Front Range, the most important visually sensitive resources along the corridor are largely open areas including Fountain Creek, John Ceresa Memorial Park, and Fountain Creek Regional Park. The El Paso County Planning Department and the City of Fountain verified that there are no protected view sheds in or near the study area.

The travel way of SH 16 is primarily at-grade, at times rising slightly above or dipping below the adjacent landscape. The roadway is a typical rural, two-lane highway with shoulders, signage, and guardrails in some areas. There are no curb and gutter or pedestrian facilities along the roadway.

The following paragraphs describe the study area according to its western and eastern visual characteristics.

Western Portion of the Study Area

At the western boundary of the study area from Fort Carson, SH 16 crosses I-25 above grade on an overpass. The overpass has no pedestrian facilities or sidewalks and is bordered on both sides with crash barriers. Views to the north and south from the overpass overlook the I-25 corridor. To the east are dry grassland and power lines in the foreground, and trees and berms in the middleground.





View looking west toward Fort Carson
Army Base entrance gate

Foreground views to the west primarily consist of dry, barren grassland with rolling hills and sparse shrubbery. Gate 20, an entrance to the Fort Carson Army Post is barely visible in the background. The far background is framed by picturesque views of the Front Range of the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

Continuing east along SH 16, the highway crosses over Fountain Creek. To the north, setbacks and mature trees in the foreground mask the adjacent residential neighborhood. The John Ceresa Memorial Park is also located north of SH 16 along Fountain Creek. The park encompasses the river and recreational facilities for the adjacent neighborhoods. The park is setback from the highway and protected by trees and shrubbery.



Fountain Creek Regional Park
View north to SH 16



View looking west to the Willow Springs
Ponds and SH 16

The Fountain Creek Regional Park is located south of SH 16. The park hosts a riparian corridor vegetated with trees and understory species. Park features such as wood fencing, signage, picnic tables and utility lines are visible in the middleground. The property includes the Willow Springs Ponds, both of which are visible from the roadway. An

aerator is visible in the center of the larger of the two ponds and rises a few feet from the surface of the water.

Eastern Portion of the Study Area

The eastern portion of the study area is visually focused on the crossing over US 85. The overpass has no pedestrian facilities and is bordered on both sides with standard crash barrier guardrails. The landscape directly adjacent to the highway and the large landscape of the interchange interior is dry grassland, with very few trees, small bluffs and depressed areas, and dirt shoulders on the highway. The UP and BNSF railroad double-track lines run under SH 16 adjacent to US 85 on the east side. Approximately 30 trains run through the area daily.



The middle ground views in the northwest corner of the SH 16 and US 85 interchange include light to medium industrial areas with a large auto sales and transmission repairs parking lot. Buildings, overhead signs and banners, large canopy trees and overhead power lines in the middle ground are common visual elements that partially block distant background views of the Front Range.

The foreground landscape in the northeast corner is slightly depressed and filled with dense canopy trees and the railroad line. The middle ground views are of adjacent single-family residential homes. The homes are partially hidden by the adjacent vegetation, but several storage shelters, garages and homes are still visible.

The foreground of the southwest corner of the SH 16 and US 85 interchange is depressed and houses a sprawling parking lot occasionally filled with cars and large trucks and several small, one story storage facility buildings. A small bluff at the corner of the interchange partially hides this parking lot from the adjacent highways. The Widefield Water and Sanitation facility is adjacent to the storage facilities on Willow Springs Road, directly south of SH 16. Small buildings with metal fencing in the foreground are visible from the highway.

In the foreground of the southeast corner of the interchange, SH 16 begins to curve southeast and transitions to four lanes, becoming Mesa Ridge Parkway. The Mesa Ridge High School, immediately to the north of Mesa Ridge Parkway at Syracuse Street, is predominant in the middle ground view. The two-story brick building is contemporary and expansive with a well-landscaped campus. East of Syracuse Street, roadway features include a narrow median, standard shoulders and power lines in the foreground. The background view contains rolling hills and dry grassland, with undeveloped land to the south.

VISUAL QUALITY IMPACTS

Visual impacts can be experienced by study area residents, Fort Carson employees and visitors, visitors to Fountain Creek Regional Park, and other motorists passing through the corridor.

No-Action Alternative

The No-Action Alternative would not alter the visual character of the area. All private and public developments planned within the study area would occur regardless of whether or not the Proposed Action is constructed. As the area further develops, land uses will convert from isolated open lands to commercial and residential development, changing some rural visual features to more suburban and urban features.

Proposed Action

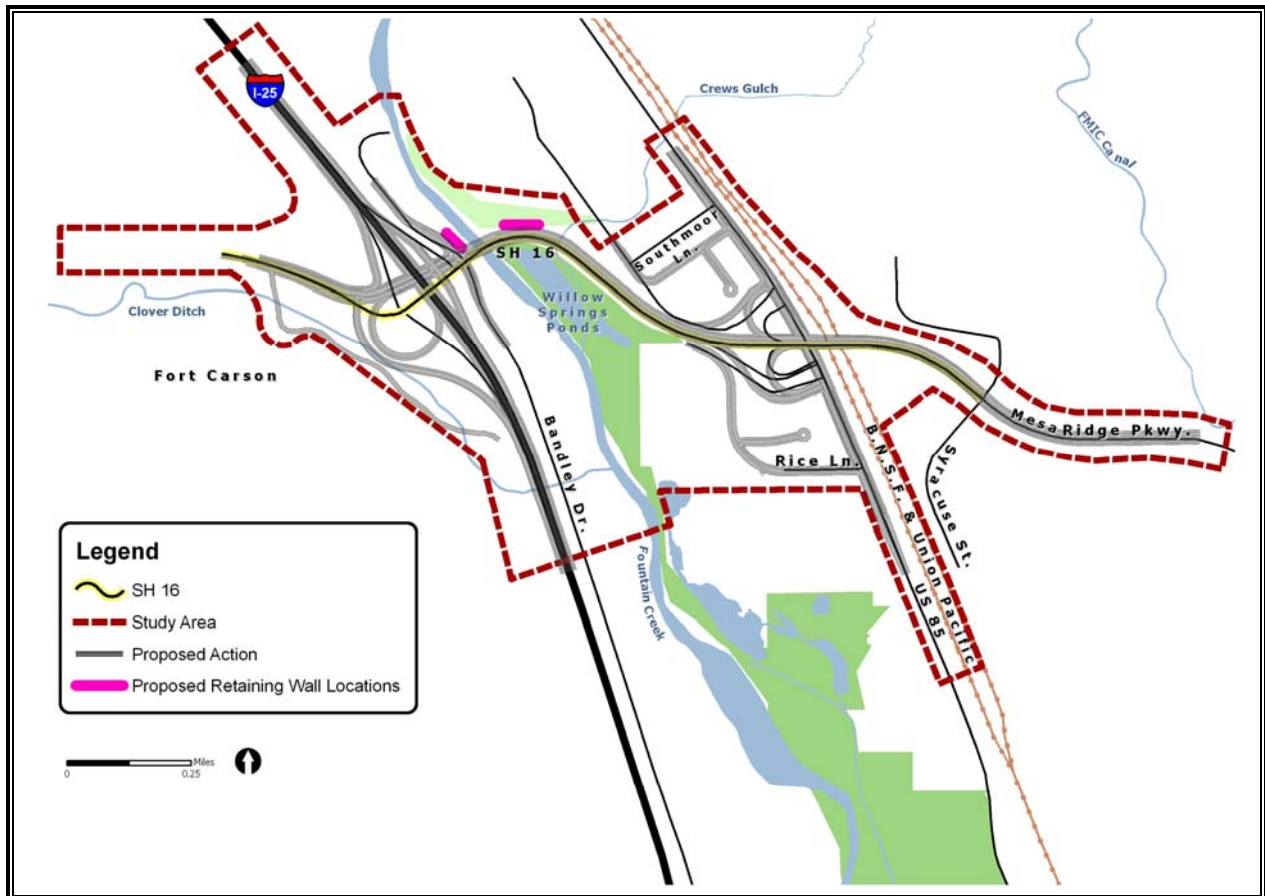
Visual impacts of the Proposed Action were determined through comparing baseline photographs and visual character features with elements of the proposed preliminary design. General features of the Proposed Action that would alter the visual quality of the study area include: additional pavement for roadway widening and construction of shoulders on SH 16; bridge replacements over I-25 and Fountain Creek; and bridge expansion (widening) over Crews Gulch and US 85 where improvements are proposed—both within and outside of the right-of-way. A paved and raised median would be installed from the I-25 interchange east to the bridge over Crews Gulch. The Proposed Action would also result in the removal of seven to ten large plains cottonwood trees along the north side of SH 16 at Fountain Creek.

Construction at the SH 16/I-25 and SH 16/US 85 interchanges would involve widening existing bridges and ramp reconfigurations. The height of the new bridges would remain similar to the existing. New interchange ramps at US 85 would convert lands currently utilized for a commercial business to paved roadway. These ramps would be

located closer to existing businesses, which would decrease the existing visual buffer to the adjacent highway.

Retaining walls would be required at two locations along the proposed roadway, potentially obstructing existing views of natural areas (**Figure 1**). A retaining wall varying in height from 4 feet to 10 feet and 370 feet long would be required between SH 16 and John Ceresa Park. This wall would avoid encroachment of the roadway slopes into the Park. An additional wall would be needed along the east side of Bandley Drive between Bandley Drive and Fountain Creek. This wall would be approximately ten feet tall and 200 feet long.

Figure 1
Proposed Retaining Wall Locations



Increased lighting associated with the SH 16/US 85 interchange would be noticeable to some residents directly east of the interchange but would not directly illuminate any homes or yards.

A majority of the improvements associated with the Proposed Action would occur within the right-of-way immediately adjacent to the existing roadway and would result in minor impacts to visual quality in the study area. No substantial direct or indirect visual impacts are anticipated to occur. Impacts discussed above represent a response to the growth occurring in the area, and the transition of the area's character from rural to urban over time.

VISUAL QUALITY MITIGATION

Impacts will be lessened through the implementation of good urban design practices and vegetation treatments. The proposed retaining walls will be designed with appropriate color and surface texture to minimize their visual intrusion. CDOT will coordinate with the El Paso County Department of Parks and Leisure Services regarding appropriate aesthetic treatment for these retaining walls.

Mitigation measures for impacts to the visual character of SH 16 include:

- ▶ Provide architectural interest or color into retaining wall design, bridges and other structural features, in coordination with local standards and guidelines.
- ▶ Disturbed areas will be revegetated with a native seed mix as soon as practicable.
- ▶ The median from I-25 to Crews Gulch will have a patterned concrete finish to lessen the visual impact of a widened cross section.
- ▶ All new structures, signing, lighting, etc. for the project will be consistent with local standards and guidelines. CDOT will coordinate with Fort Carson and local jurisdictions on design guidelines to determine the most appropriate actions to lessen visual impact. Such actions could include:
 - Adoption of an entrance-type concept for Gate 20.
 - Design simple and low-maintenance access points.
 - Installation of Variable Message Signs (VMS) at appropriate locations.

- ▶ Roadway lighting will be kept to a minimum and be designed to minimize light trespass beyond the SH 16 right-of-way, pursuant to requirements of Colorado's "Dark Skies" legislation, which regulates outdoor lighting on state projects to minimize light pollution. High mast lighting will not be utilized.

- ▶ Revegetation will include planting of plains cottonwood or other riparian trees in the low terrace on the west bank of Fountain Creek.

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