

4.8 Visual Resources

4.8.1 Visual Resource Analysis

The analysis of potential impacts to visual resources caused by construction or operation of the proposed improvements was completed based on FHWA's Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (1981). The following criteria were used to assess the visual impact of the build alternatives:

- What are the visual characteristics of the site and the proposed project site/alternative?
- How would implementation of the project affect the visual character of the study area?
- Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, such as trees, wetlands, woodlands, or other landscape features?
- Would the project substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the surrounding areas?
- Would the project create a new source or substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?
- What major groups (e.g., neighborhoods, vehicle passengers) are likely to see the project? How would the major groups be affected by the various alternatives?

Visual resources are aspects of the environment that determine the physical character of an area and the manner in which it is viewed. Visual resources include scenery viewed at various distances, as well as cultural manmade modifications, vegetation, and other landforms.

4.8.2 Visual Impact Assessment

The study area is generally developed with the exception of protected lands (e.g., forest preserves, parks, etc.). The original landscape has been fully altered and contains suburban/urban development (primarily industrial uses) accompanied by supporting infrastructure (roads, parking lots and driveways), intermixed with urban landscaping, open space (including old fields), or limited forested cover. Much of Thorndale corridor and the western edge of the O'Hare Airport is industrial in nature and characterized by large-scale industrial buildings and warehouses. Similarly, most of the O'Hare West Bypass corridor (both north and south sections, and for both Alternatives 203 and 402) is either industrial or airport-related. One exception is on the north section of Alternative 203, which contains a residential area (east of York Road/Elmhurst Road near IL 72/Touhy Avenue). Most undeveloped lands in the area are surrounded by development and consist primarily of urban open space (e.g., mowed lawn and old field successional areas) and to a lesser extent degraded woodlands. The area is exposed to the scale of transportation development represented by the proposed build alternatives. Thus, its character is somewhat resilient to more hardened manmade features, such as major highway and transit corridors.

The proposed build alternatives generally would maintain the character of the area without creating unusual contrast in landscape, land use, or developed features. Roadway and transit improvements in the Thorndale corridor or on the western edge of O'Hare Airport

would be seemingly appropriate and do not give rise to something that does not fit the scene of the study area.

Key locations where the roadway structures will be elevated and visible from nearby areas include I-90 and the north section of the O'Hare West Bypass (both alternatives); the Elgin O'Hare Expressway and the O'Hare West Terminal Interchange (both alternatives); and south bypass connection options and I-294 (both Options A and D). Generally, the viewsheds in the study area are short, with truncated sightlines. The viewsheds would not differ under either alternative, the typical view being largely industrial and commercial development to the other side of the roadway. The exception would be the O'Hare West Bypass (for Alternative 203, both the north and south sections; for Alternative 402, the south section), where vehicle passengers (not necessarily drivers) would have a closer view of airport operations, which tend to fascinate some people.

Overall, the proposed transportation improvements bring more of the same to the study area without causing a major visual disruption to community centers, neighborhoods, or recreational areas. There are some locales for which design treatment are warranted to lessen visual or other human disturbance. For those areas, specific mitigation may be evaluated and addressed in Tier Two of the process.