



**Routes 7/15 Interchange
Norwalk, Connecticut
State Project No. 102-358**

**Environmental Assessment,
Draft Section 4(F) Evaluation and
Environmental Impact Evaluation**

**Appendix J
Visual Impact Assessment**

August 2022

Prepared for:
Connecticut Department of
Transportation Federal Highway
Administration



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Attachments

Attachment A Public Meeting Minutes



1.0 BACKGROUND AND REGULATORY CONTEXT

This Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) was prepared to identify and evaluate visual impacts and potential mitigation measures associated with the proposed Routes 7/15 Interchange project (Project). This analysis, together with the balance of the Environmental Assessment (EA) /Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) is provided to inform public input and ultimately forms the basis for agency determinations regarding the Project. The assessment identifies the project area's visual character, Key Views, viewer groups, and viewer-group sensitivities. Project effects on viewer groups with high sensitivity to visual changes (especially residents and pedestrians), and new elements that would affect the setting of historic properties, were of particular concern.

The analysis was conducted according to the scope established for this EA and FHWA *Guidelines for the Visual Assessment of Highway Projects (2015)* (Guidelines) [1]. The scope and Guidelines were designed to meet a number of federal and state requirements and guidance, summarized below.

- The **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** was established, in part, to “assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings” [2]. The Act requires Federal agencies to undertake an assessment of the environmental effects, including visual impacts, of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. Alternatives and mitigation for the purposed action are evaluated and decisions are made based upon balanced consideration of the need for safe and efficient transportation; of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed transportation project; and of national, State, and local environmental protection goals. FHWA’s guidance for meeting NEPA requirements for visual impact analysis is provided in the Guidelines.
- The **National Scenic Byways Program** confers “scenic byway” designations on certain roads based on intrinsic scenic, historic, recreational, cultural, archeological, or natural qualities. Byways, including the Merritt Parkway, are designated in partnership with the State and/or local jurisdiction that governs the roadway to support a community commitment to protect the byway, typically through implementation of a corridor management plan. The Merritt Parkway Guidelines for General Maintenance and Transportation Improvements, Merritt Parkway Landscape Master Plan, and Merritt Parkway Bridge Restoration Guide (provided in Appendix H of the EA/EIE) provide guidance for the Project where potential changes to the Merritt Parkway are proposed.
- **Section 4(f)** of the US Department of Transportation Act of 1966 restricts the “use of land from publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and public or private historic sites” for federally funded highway projects. The Section 4(f) evaluation of the Project, including visual aspects, is provided in the EA/EIE.



- The **Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA)** [3] requires evaluation of “substantial aesthetic or visual effects” that may result from a project and lays out an evaluation framework similar to NEPA, which is addressed in the Project EA/EIE.
- **Other:** Conformance with Connecticut and local Plans of Conservation and Development and local zoning is addressed in Section 2 of the EA/EIE. Connecticut’s Open Space acquisition programs and public access/community garden initiatives do not apply to the Project, as land is already state-owned and is not publicly accessible as parkland or community commons. However, the goals in evaluating the Project’s potential impacts on scenic resources and associated mitigation is consistent with the Open Space goal of protecting Connecticut’s diverse and scenic landscapes.

1.1 VIA LEVEL AND APPROACH

The FHWA VIA Guidelines provide for four different levels of documentation based on the scope, complexity, and controversy associated with a particular project. If the project and its impacts are visually inconsequential, typically a memo to file suffices. Routine or minor projects are assessed using an “Abbreviated VIA”. Most projects involving new construction or substantial reconstruction require a thorough examination of the associated visual issues, as provided in a “Standard VIA”. Complex or controversial projects may require an “Expanded VIA”.

This VIA analysis aligns with the approach defined for a Standard VIA, based on FHWA’s Comparative Matrix¹. As discussed in subsequent sections, these Project Characters meet benchmarks defining a Standard level VIA:

- Contains multiple (3) landscape units
- Would likely be the subject of local controversy, but not state/nationwide
- Overall would result in a moderate alteration of the visual environment
- Be viewed by a relatively small number of different view groups
- Have multiple Key Views (16)
- Have moderate to high viewer sensitivity
- Be compatible with local plans
- Have substantial to potentially significant impacts on scenic resources

¹ FHWA Guidelines also offer a “Questionnaire” screening approach. The questions address essentially the same considerations as the matrix approach, and the summary conclusions align with the findings above for a Standard VIA: *This technical study will likely receive extensive local, perhaps state-wide, public review. It would typically include several visual simulations. It would also include a thorough examination of public planning and policy documents supplemented with a direct public engagement processes to determine visual preferences.*



- Have few to no cumulative impacts
- No permits likely to be affected by visual impacts
- May face a legal challenge
- Still simulations of Key Views would be used in assessment.

A Standard VIA is typically used for projects that are anticipated to have substantial adverse or beneficial visual impacts. The Project does not rise to the highest level “Expanded” VIA, which is typically reserved for very complex or controversial projects that are likely to involve controversy at a state or national level.

The VIA components included four phases:

1. Establishment: define and identify the Area of Visual Effect (AVE) and develop a conceptual understanding of the proposed Project’s visual character.
2. Inventory: Identify the components of the AVE, including its visual character, key visual resources including historic sites and structures. Also identify Key Viewers and their sensitivities to their context and adjacent areas.
3. Analysis: Identify potential impacts on visual quality. The analysis includes preparing visual simulations to depict existing conditions and compare to the design alternatives as seen from Key Views at the completion of the project. The analysis considers the visual impacts of each design alternative including changes to visual resources and probable viewer response to these changes.
4. Mitigation: Define the mitigation and enhancement efforts to be included in the Project design.

1.2 AVE

Development of the study area, or Area of Visual Effect (AVE), included desktop review, field observations, and topographical modeling of possible visual impacts resulting from altered

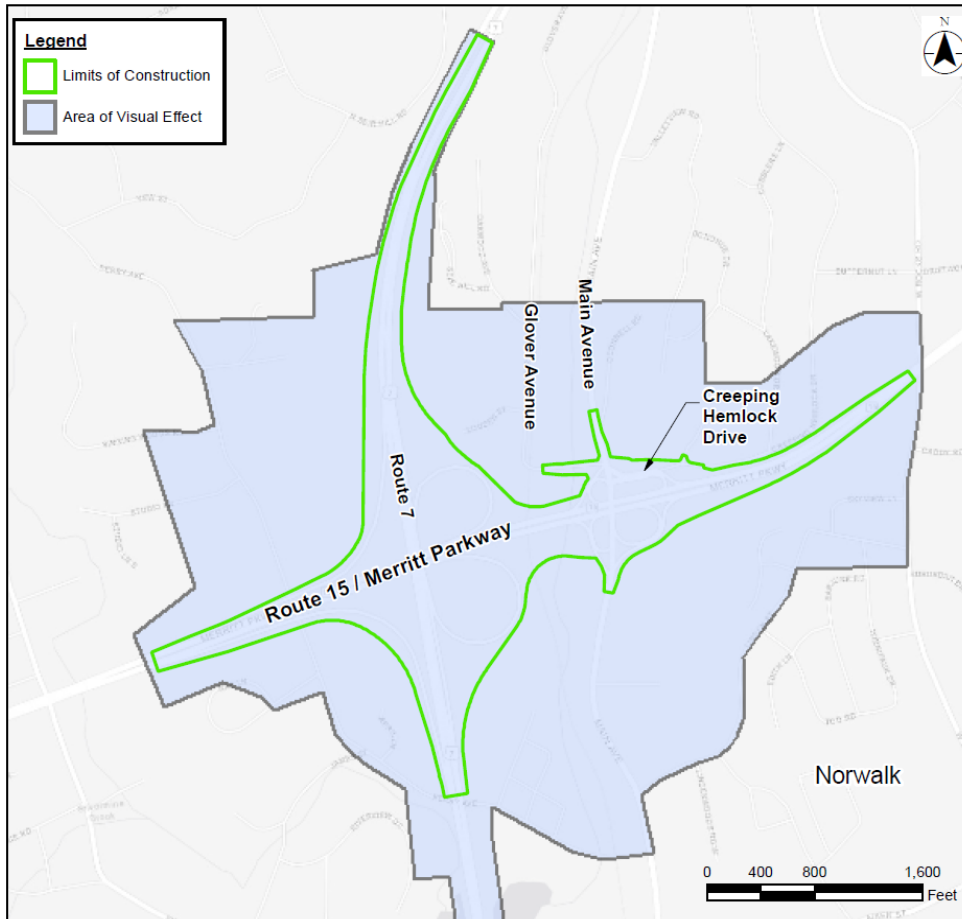


Figure 1.1 Area of Visual Effect

Route 7 and Merritt Parkway entrance and exit ramps and modifications to surface streets including Main Avenue (Figure 1.1²). Delineation of the AVE is further discussed below.

Based on a review of area mapping and project documentation, including prior visual analyses, several primary areas were identified where the existing viewers and viewer groups and their current visual environments could potentially be affected by the proposed project alternatives. These locations include:

1. views of the proposed improvements in both directions of the Merritt Parkway and Route 7;

² Limits of construction depicted in the figure do not include the southern “tail” shown as part of the “Project Site” in the EA/EIE, because construction activities in that area consist of activities within the right-of-way and having minimal vertical profile, such as pavement striping. Per the FHWA Guidelines, *projects such as roadway resurfacing, rehabilitation of highway shoulders, or restriping, etc., would result in no apparent change to the visual qualities of the project area.*



2. views of the Merritt Parkway along Main Avenue in both directions towards the Project;
3. views of the Merritt Parkway, Route 7 and alterations to the local streets from streets in surrounding residential neighborhoods: Indian Hill Road, Perry Avenue, Rae Lane, April Lane, Linden Lane, Linden Heights, Skyview Lane, West Rocks Road, Creeping Hemlock Drive, Lakewood Drive, Silent Grove Court, Seir Hill Road and North Seir Hill Road.

In addition, important views of the project site were identified:

1. from commercial areas along Main Avenue south of the Merritt Parkway northward from Linden Street and north of the Merritt Parkway looking south along Glover Avenue near the Metro-North train station; and
2. to and from the Norwalk River near Glover Avenue.

AVE boundaries were determined by several constraining factors, including physical constraints of landforms which limit views, along with additional sightline restrictions of buildings and vegetation. An example of the constraints analysis, showing limits on certain viewsheds within the AVE is depicted in Figure 1.2. The physical limitations of human sight, in terms of viewers' location, proximity, and lighting conditions, were also taken into account. Virtual and in-person site visits were conducted to review the visual character of the area. The visits and evaluation were performed by a licensed landscape architect experienced in the preparation of VIAs for

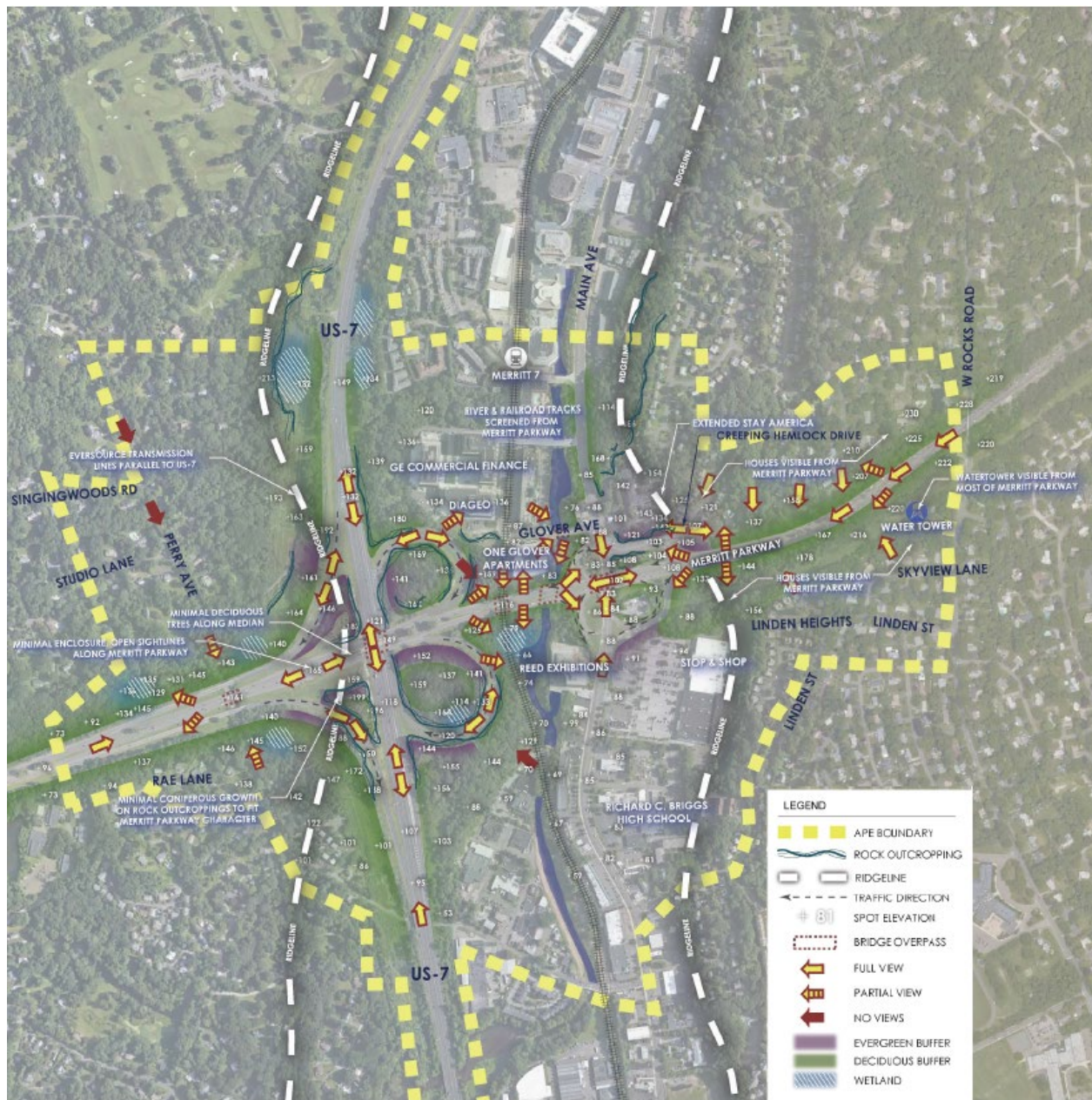


Figure 1.2 Selected Visual Elements within the AVE

transportation projects. The evaluation was coordinated with the professional teams who prepared the evaluation of historical resources and of the Merritt Parkway's scenic landscape.

1.3 VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Alternative 21D

Alternative 21D proposes a series of new connecting roads, ramps, and bridges threading into and throughout the Route 7 and Route 15 interchange project area that are not there now. Of



the ten structures proposed to be built with this alternative, only in three locations (Main Avenue, Perry Avenue, and Glover Avenue), do the new bridges replace existing structures in more or less the same place. With two new, large, multi-span fly-over type bridges crossing over Route 7 north and south of the Parkway, the existing visual environment on Route 7 will be greatly changed. A visual simulation³ of Alternative 21D is provided in Figure 1.3.



Figure 1.3 Alternative 21D – Visual Simulation of Aerial View

Overall, this can be considered a major visual increase in the built infrastructure environment compared to the existing built environment.

The new roads and ramps necessary to construct Alternative 21D will require ten bridges overall. Where contextually appropriate and necessary, many of these new bridges would be designed in keeping with the Merritt Parkway's historic vernacular. For instance, any structure that either carries the Merritt Parkway's mainline roadway or one of its immediate ancillary

³ As described in more detail in Section 3.2, simulations were prepared to show geometry and scale of improvements, but are preliminary in that no proposed landscape or bridge detailing is reflected.



elements such as an entrance or exit ramp over or under another road or other feature should be considered part of the Merritt Parkway's design milieu. New ramp bridges over both the Norwalk River and the Metro-North Railroad will be inserted into a semi-wooded context where no such similar structure currently exists. Further rearranging the existing landscape context, several very tall towers that carry electric transmission power lines will require relocation.

The location and configuration of the Merritt Parkway interchange with Main Avenue would enable fully directional and complete connection between Main Avenue and both the Merritt Parkway and Route 7. Elimination of the existing ramps in the southwest quadrant of the Main Avenue interchange would allow for a longer eastbound weaving lane between an eastbound Route 7 entry ramp and an improved exit loop ramp in the southeast quadrant of the Route 7 interchange thus increasing the overall interstate highway "look" of the Parkway and less towards a roadway with features as originally envisioned by its designers.

The dual existing historic Merritt Parkway bridges over Main Avenue would be replaced in the same location with a pair of new structures designed in keeping with the Merritt Parkway vernacular as the Main Avenue roadway below is widened. A wider Main Avenue would appear more open underneath, and though slightly deeper from opening to opening, would allow better views from one side of the Merritt through to the other while also enabling left-turn movements and would have wider sidewalks for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In the westbound direction, the tight Merritt Parkway exit loop ramp in the northwest quadrant (to southbound Main Avenue) would be eliminated. Longer Merritt Parkway ramp acceleration and deceleration lanes would also further the change to the Parkway's visual character as described above. A westbound entrance ramp onto the Parkway would be built between a recently constructed residential apartment building and the Merritt Parkway widening the Parkway and bringing it closer to residents. As currently conceived, the new ramps would be at or slightly below the level of the Merritt Parkway.

Where Glover Avenue crosses over the Norwalk River would be doubled in width, going from a two-lane road to a four-lane road and would lose the rural/country road character of the existing road and bridge structure. A replacement bridge designed in keeping with the historic context of the existing structure will be provided. East of Main Avenue, Creeping Hemlock Drive would also be widened from a three-lane road to a five lane road by realigning and shifting the existing road to the north by way of a large removal of rock outcrop and vegetation. This large change to the existing visual character to this neighborhood would be quite a noticeable difference to the area.

Alternative 26

Markedly different than the new network of ramps, bridges and flyovers proposed in



Alternative 21D, Alternative 26 involves far less new infrastructure and visual change to the existing landscape. Where Alternative 21D requires ten new structures, Alternative 26 requires only four. Alternative 26 has no flyover bridges. Alternative 26 does include a several new ramps to complete the partial interchange (Interchange 39, 40) with traffic movements between Route 7, the Merritt Parkway, and Main Avenue. By replacing some existing ramps with newer, upgraded versions of the existing ramps essentially in the same place with better geometry and building only new ramps where none currently exist, the necessary traffic connections are made with less overall added pavements.



Figure 1.4 Alternative 26 - Visual Simulation of Aerial View

The biggest change to the visual environment associated with Alternative 26 will be the amount of rock cut removal needed to construct four new ramps. These ramps lead to and from two signalized at-grade intersections on Route 7 that previously exhibited a limited access interstate highway visual character. This downsizing of the amount of interstate highway infrastructure in this area, coupled with the extensive rock and vegetation removal, will be very noticeable to residents, workers, and motorists alike.

Similar to Alternative 21D, Alternative 26 includes the same large visual changes to the neighborhood landscape at Creeping Hemlock Road and Glover Avenue described above. Alternative 26 also includes the same changes at Main Avenue described for Alternative 21D above as well. Additionally, Alternative 26 also includes two new ramp bridges over the Metro-North Railroad in the semi-rural/wooded area as does Alternative 21D. Lastly, as in



Alternative 21D, Alternative 26 includes a westbound entrance ramp onto the Parkway built between a recently constructed residential apartment building and the Merritt Parkway widening the Parkway and bringing it closer to residents.

In contrast to Alternative 21D, Alternative 26 does not include any new bridges to carry ramps over the Norwalk River. And unlike Alternative 21D, no powerline tower relocations are required for Alternative 26.

While there will be very noticeable changes to the existing visual environment as a result of the implementation of either of the two build alternatives, the amount of newly constructed infrastructure needed for Alternative 26 is much less than necessary with Alternative 21D and therefore, would a much less visual change from the existing.



2.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section addresses the “Inventory” phase of the FHWA VIA process, including:

- a visual characterization of the AVE, its contributing landscape units and key resources;
- the identification of Key Viewers and their sensitivities to their context and adjacent areas.

As discussed in greater detail in Section 2.4, the AVE consists of three principal landscape units:

- Motorists on the roadways and the immediate spaces flanking the Merritt Parkway or Route 7;
- Neighborhoods and local streets immediately surrounding the project site; and
- Commercial and retail areas within the Project limits.

Key Views within the AVE were selected to represent historic, environmental, and neighborhood character resources, including:

- the Merritt Parkway
- Historic bridges
- Residential neighborhoods
- Environmental settings
- Community settings.

To provide context for the following discussion, landscape unit and Key View locations are provided in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2. Additional photos are provided in the Cultural Resources Assessment Appendix to the EA/EIE.

In addition to aerial and site photos, existing conditions were input into a 3-D virtual model for use as both a design study tool and a public meeting interactive feature which has the ability to portray each of the alternative’s characteristics and aspects in the existing site topography to enable dynamic visualization, including simulated video flyovers, of existing conditions for characterization as well as a baseline for simulations of proposed conditions (discussed further in Section 3.0).

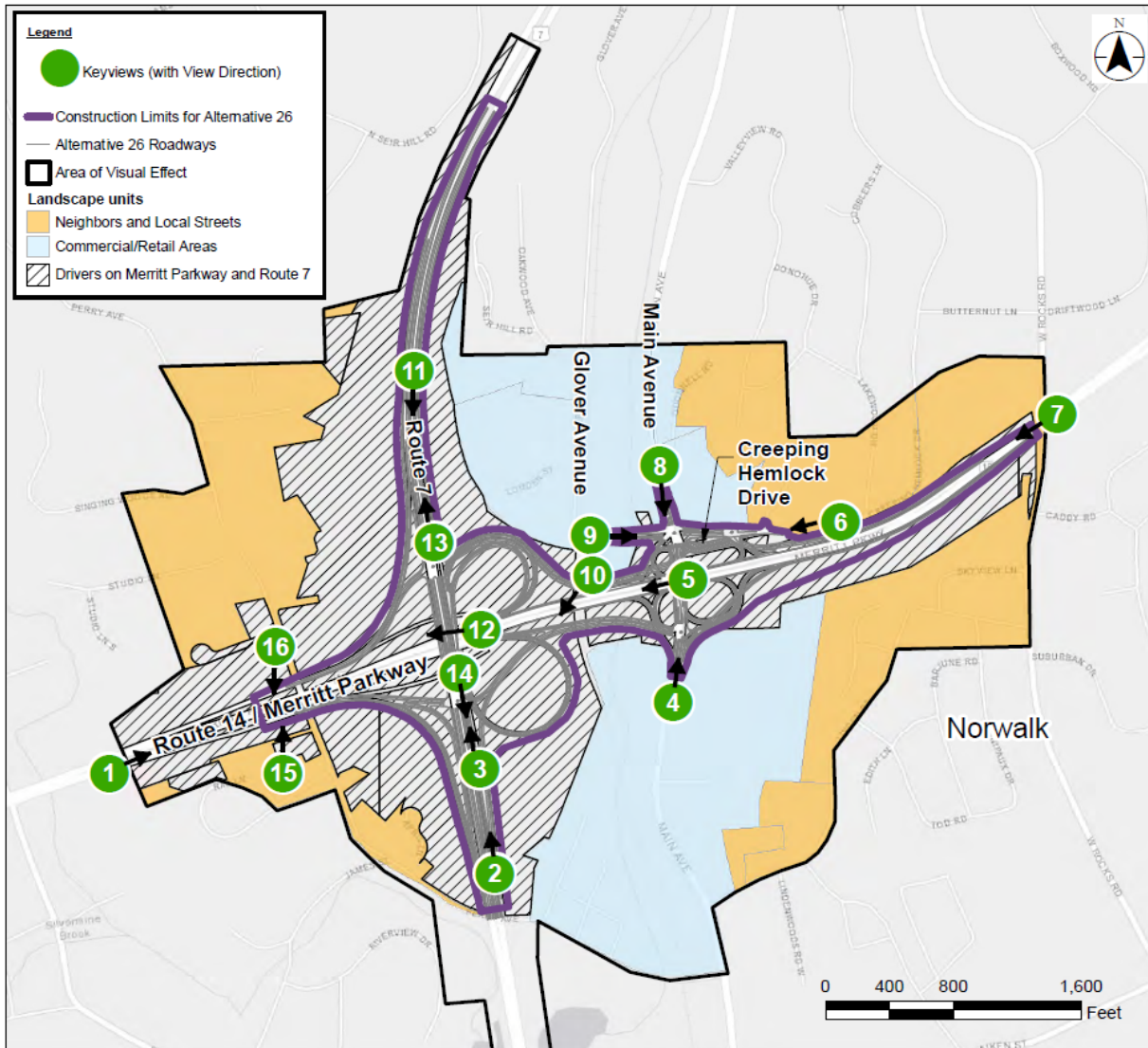


Figure 2.1 Alternative 26 Construction Limits with Landscape Units and Key View Locations

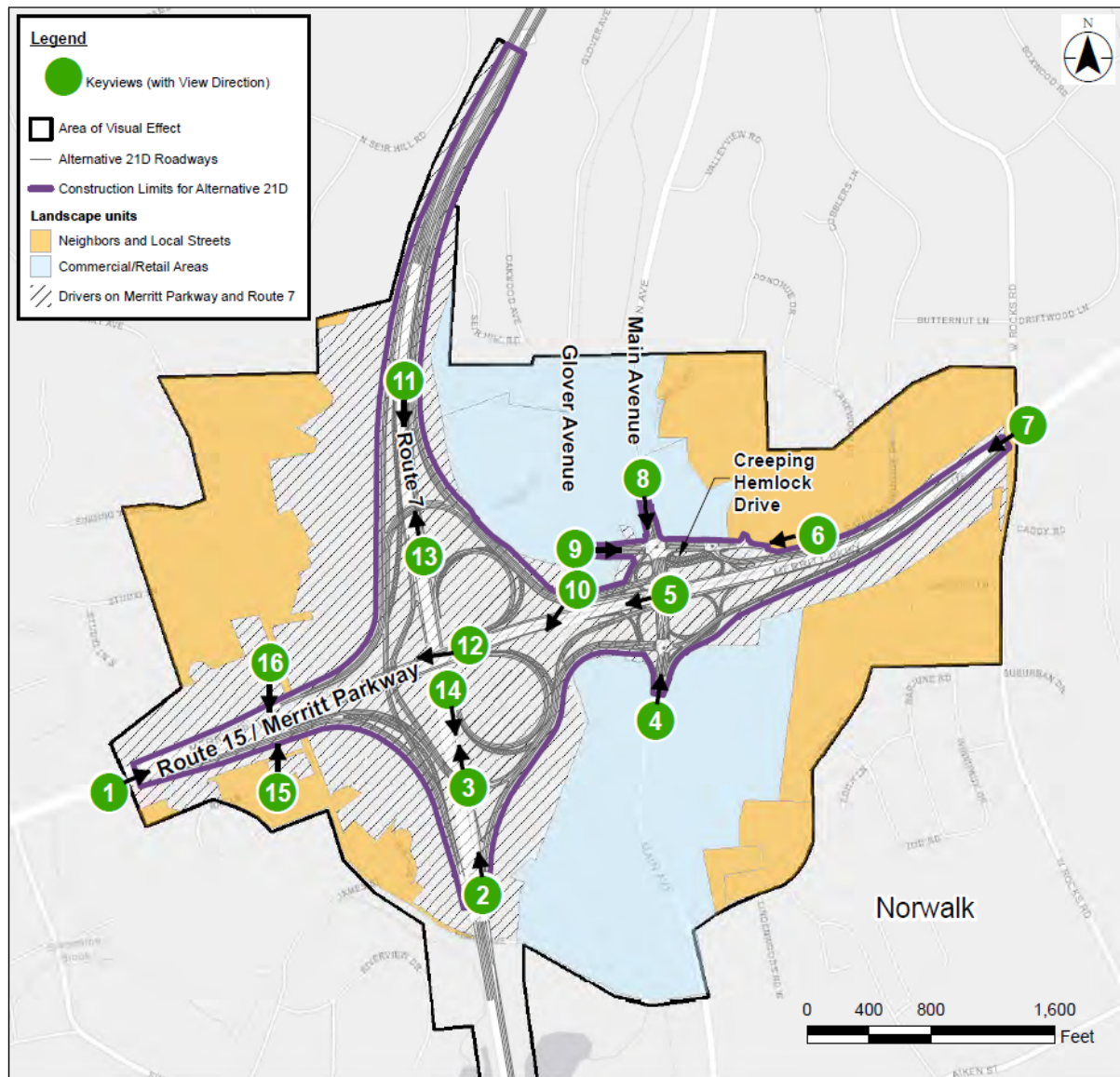


Figure 2.2 Alternative 21D Construction Limits with Landscape Units and Key View Locations



2.1 VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT AREA



Figure 2.3 Typical Merritt Parkway Visual Character



Figure 2.4 Typical Route 7 Visual Character

The visual character of the Project area is of a suburban/semi-rural nature with built-up commercial and retail zones, typical suburban residential neighborhood developments and semi-rural wooded areas that are older and less densely populated. The visual character exhibited by both the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 is of a limited access, multi-lane, high speed roadway located within a rolling, wooded landscape with occasional views to the surrounding context. The visual character specific to the Merritt Parkway, with its unique bridge architecture, horizontal and vertical alignment and programmed landscape views from the roadway, contribute to it being listed on the NHRP (Figure 2.3). Route 7 within the project area has the visual character typically associated with a limited access interstate highway (Figure 2.4). Substantial exposed rock outcrops caused by cuts made during the construction of Route 7 and changes of grade exist along Route 7 and within the cloverleaf ramps of the Merritt Parkway/Route 7 interchange (Figure 2.6).



2.2 VISUAL QUALITY OF PROJECT AREA

While the Merritt Parkway landscape context has been altered since what is generally considered its zenith in the 1950s, the overall visual quality of the project area is still reasonably intact with many of the noteworthy natural and man-made features that originally comprised the Parkway's defining character are still observed throughout. In various segments of the roadway, particularly where a program of safety improvement projects including the clearing of vegetation closest to the edge of pavement and other shoulder upgrades is being instituted, the Parkway's visual character is in transition. While these safety improvements have altered the Parkway's original visual quality, the surrounding landscape will rebound. Good general upkeep of facilities and properties is evident in certain areas, and maintenance appears to be performed fairly regularly.

2.3 VIEWER GROUPS AND VIEWER EXPOSURE

FWHA Guidelines refer to the population affected by the proposed project as viewers. In the inventory phase, viewers are defined by their relationship to the proposed highway project and their visual preferences. The Guidelines divide viewers into two groups: *neighbors* and *travelers*. Neighbors are those people who are near the highway and have "views *of* the road". Travelers are those people who are using the highway and have "views *from* the road." Neighbors and travelers can be further subdivided into categories that help to establish viewer preferences and sensitivity to changes in visual resources.

For this Project, four major viewer group types have been identified based on observations of land use and circulation patterns. While some of these viewer groups share similar if not identical views, the groups differ in their degree of sensitivity to the surrounding views due to the viewer's activity, awareness and duration of viewing time. These viewer groups include:

Travelers:

- Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7
- Motorists on Local Streets

Neighbors:

- Residents and Pedestrians
- Retail, Commercial and Office Workers and Customers.

Note: Riders on the Metro-North railroad are not included as a viewer group. The existing Metro-North corridor is heavily vegetated and the views beyond the right-of-way are limited. Neither Build Alternative would present as a direct, head-on view. Rather, rider views would be limited to momentary sideways views of the project area. Viewers within the Metro-North station area have no views to the work of either alternative.

2.3.1 Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7



With an annualized average volume of 85,900 vehicles using the north and southbound Merritt Parkway and 41,500 using the north and southbound Route 7 on a daily basis, motorists traveling through the project site make up the project's largest viewer group and have the greatest viewer exposure to the project's effects.

The area of the intersection of the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 occurs at the bottom of a dip in the Merritt Parkway's alignment where the Merritt Parkway crosses over Route 7. This low



Figure 2.5 Merritt Parkway East of Main Avenue Interchange

point can be seen from both ends of the AVE on the Parkway (Figure 2.5).

Drivers heading north on the Parkway get their first glimpse of the overall project area and of the interchanges just after they crest the hill immediately east of the Exit 39A exit ramp gore area. Similarly, drivers travelling south on the Parkway get their initial view of the overall project and interchanges area as they round the curve in the Parkway west of the West Rocks Road overpass, east of Exit 40B for Route 7 North, Creeping Hemlock Drive and Main Avenue.



Drivers travelling northbound on Route 7 first see the overpass that carries the Merritt Parkway over Route 7 from the area near the Exit 3 ramp gore that takes northbound Route 7 motorists to the Merritt Parkway southbound.

Drivers travelling southbound on Route 7 first see the overpass that carries the Merritt Parkway



Figure 2.6 Route 7 Looking South to Merritt Parkway Overpass



Figure 2.7 Merritt Parkway Looking North to SB Route 7 Exit and Eversource Power Lines

over Route 7 from a location just north of the Exit 3 ramp gore that takes southbound Route 7 motorists to the Merritt Parkway southbound. The duration of views for all motorists varies and depends on their speed of travel (Figure 2.7). A prominent component of the existing visual landscape is the existing Eversource overhead high-tension power lines that run parallel to Route 7 north of the Merritt Parkway then cross the Merritt Parkway in the vicinity of the current exit and entrance ramps between the Merritt Parkway northbound to Route 7 southbound and Route 7 southbound to the Merritt Parkway southbound (Figure 2.7).

Summary: Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7

Sensitivity	Low to Medium
Duration of View	Duration is a function of travel speeds and proximity of vegetation to the viewer. For example, at 50 MPH, a view ¼ mile away would be seen for 18 seconds

2.3.2 Motorists on Local Streets



There are two distinct types of local streets within the project area:

- Main Avenue, which is a minor urban arterial road that carries 13,200 vehicles daily north of the Merritt Parkway Interchange and 20,900 vehicles daily south of the Merritt Parkway interchange and;
- local streets in the surrounding residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the project.

In both cases, motorists traveling the local streets within the AVE view the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 as major visual elements within the landscape depending on their specific location. Again, the duration of views for all motorists varies and depends on their location, speed of travel, the narrowness or openness of the view and whether the viewer is actively engaged with the surrounding landscape or if the landscape is only a passing visual backdrop to other activities.

Summary: Motorists on Local Streets

Sensitivity Medium to High

Duration of View Medium, varies with viewshed limits and travel speeds

Residents and Pedestrians

Residents are the most sensitive to changes in their personal environment. The density of the neighborhood, the amount of space between the buildings, the height of the surrounding buildings, the presence or absence of mature trees on private and public property, the distance as well as the elevation of their property relative to the project site all affect their views to the surrounding landscape. The degree of visual sensitivity to negative changes increases with proximity to the Project and with the transparency of the views of the project's features.

Pedestrians and bicyclists within the project area experience essentially similar views as residents. The views exist in the same neighborhoods though they are sometimes experienced while moving as their point-of-view varies.

Summary: Residents

Sensitivity High

Duration of View Long

Summary: Pedestrians

Sensitivity Medium to High

Duration of View Short to Medium

2.3.3 Commercial and Office Workers and Customers

The view sensitivity for Commercial and Office Workers and Customers varies depending on



their specific view location and duration. Sites closer to the project site may have a view of the existing highways while sites farther currently do not. Commercial and office workers generally come to the same location on a daily basis and may use either the Merritt Parkway or Route 7 for a portion of their trip. Once inside their place of work, their awareness of either the Merritt Parkway or Route 7 may be limited to an occasional view out a window or brief moments outside. Retail customers may be aware of either roadway as a component in the background that they may have seen while traveling to the shopping destination on one of the local streets mentioned above. Their attention is usually focused on the task at hand and they may be only marginally aware of the landscape beyond.

Summary: Commercial and Office Workers and Customers

Sensitivity Medium to Low
Duration of View Medium to Short

2.4 VIEWER PREFERENCES

At a Public Advisory Committee Landscape Subcommittee meeting held in 2019, public stakeholders were asked to identify the most and least appealing landscape features within the AVE (meeting minutes provided in Attachment A). Attendees were also asked to identify the resources most important to them. Generally, respondents felt that views of the natural and built environments, traffic calming effect of the Parkway and the plant variety and visibility were the more appealing features. The least appealing features generally included the Glover Avenue Apartments and the existing construction staging areas along with non-original bridges. Finally, participants generally felt that views, bridges, scale and natural resources were the most important features to them. Discussions of visual quality continued through subsequent public meetings (examples included in Appendix A include PAC meeting #6, PAC Landscape subcommittee meeting #2, Public Information Session #2, and a meeting with the Merritt Parkway Conservancy) reinforced the general items identified in 2018, and provided additional focus: preserving the natural landscape, adding landscape material, minimizing use of elevated ramps, consideration of optimal treatment of exposed rock faces, restoring/preserving historical character of the Merritt Parkway.

2.5 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF LANDSCAPE UNITS

FHWA guidelines [1] defines Landscape Units as, “Defined areas within the AVE that have similar visual features and homogeneous visual character and frequently, a single viewshed. An ‘outdoor room.’ Typically, the spatial unit used for assessing visual impacts.” This VIA identifies three landscape units:

- Motorists on the roadways and the immediate spaces flanking the Merritt Parkway or Route 7;
- Neighborhoods and local streets immediately surrounding the project site; and
- Commercial and retail areas within the Project limits.



This section provides an analysis of each of the three landscape units, including for each unit:

- a general description of the unit;
- the viewer group(s) considered;
- the viewer's perspectives (viewer position);
- the features viewed by each group; and
- comments on the quality of the view.

Landscape Unit #1: Motorists on the Merritt Parkway or Route 7

Motorists traveling on either the Merritt Parkway or Route 7 experience mostly a limited-access highway situated within a rolling rural landscape. Vehicles on the Merritt Parkway are limited to passenger cars, noncommercial vehicles with combination plates and motorcycles only. Route 7 permits passenger cars, motorcycles, trucks and busses. Neither facility allows bicycles, tractors or pedestrians. The bridge seen from the Merritt Parkway, West Rocks Road, and the Merritt Parkway bridges seen from the immediately surrounding area, the bridge over Main Avenue, the mainline bridge over Perry Avenue, the bridge over the Norwalk River and the bridge over the Metro-North Railroad, are all part of the original parkway construction in the 1930s and are all unique architecturally in their design, typically rigid frame type, and are all contributing resources to the Merritt Parkway's historic designation. Bridges built subsequent to the original construction of the Merritt Parkway, including the Merritt Parkway over Route 7 and the acceleration and deceleration lane ramp bridges over Perry Avenue are not of an historic character as they are of the more typical modern style exhibiting a concrete abutment and either steel or concrete girder-type structural system. These are not considered contributing historic resources to the character of the Merritt Parkway.



Figure 2.8 Merritt Parkway bridge over Perry Avenue



The highway/roadway features included with the construction of the original Merritt Parkway are all undersized by current highway design standards. The acceleration and deceleration lanes of and onto the Merritt's mainline are all shorter than the ramps used in current highway design, and the radii of the on and off ramps to and from Main Avenue are very tight with a low design speed.

The highway/roadway features included with the construction of the later additions to the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 including the connecting ramps

between the Parkway and Route 7 in both directions and the acceleration and deceleration lanes on both the Merritt Parkway and on Route 7 are longer and more typical of current highway design standards. The on and off ramp radii are also larger and would allow a higher design speed than the original Merritt Parkway. With one road being of the 1930s and the other from the 1970s, there is a clear and discernable difference between the visual character of the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 as viewed from the roadway.

Perspective: All views are from inside a motor vehicle, either driving or observing as a passenger.

Features: As noted above, the Merritt Parkway's original horizontal and vertical alignment, overpass structures and its programmed views and integration into its surrounding landscape are all contributing resources towards its listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The roadway features and context of Route 7 is more typical of that seen on an interstate highway in the New England region.



Figure 2.9 Stop-controlled on-ramp



View Quality: The view quality is mostly high for the Merritt Parkway as it enjoys a semi-rural setting and views from the road relate the facility to its context by original design intent. Route 7 north of the Merritt Parkway enjoys a similar setting with flanking wooded areas and rock out crops. South of the Parkway, the visual character is more typical of an urban freeway. Whether north or south of the Merritt Parkway, the perceived scale of Route 7 with its larger footprint, is



Figure 2.10 Merritt Parkway Looking North to Exist 39B for Main Avenue

inherently larger than that of the Merritt. Even with many similarly shared roadway elements, Route 7 reads like an interstate with its wider lanes, shoulders and curves. The Merritt Parkway, even in the recently “improved” areas, still retains much more of its original cars-only parkway feel. (Figure 2.10, Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.12).



Figure 2.11 Route 7 Looking South to Exit for Merritt Parkway South



Figure 2.12 Route 7 Looking South to Bridge over Perry Avenue

Landscape Unit #2: Neighborhoods & Local Streets Immediately Surrounding the Project Site

The neighborhoods and features that immediately surround the project site include the Silvermine neighborhood, which is located on both the north and south sides of the Merritt Parkway west of Route 7. Dating from the late Seventeenth/early Eighteenth centuries, this historic neighborhood includes the Silvermine Tavern and 85 other structures that comprise the Silvermine Center Historic District which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

Besides the Silvermine area, other local streets in the immediately project surroundings include the following: Indian Hill Road, Perry Avenue, Rae Lane, April Lane, Linden Heights, Skyview Lane, West Rocks Road, Creeping Hemlock Drive, Lakewood Drive, Silent Grove Court and North Seir Hill Road. All are small scale, wooded local roads (example, Figure 2.13) generally in suburban residential neighborhoods with mostly low-scale buildings with the exception of the newly constructed five-story One Glover Apartments apartment building situated between the southbound Merritt Parkway, the Norwalk River, the Metro-North track and Glover Avenue which because of its location, is quite visible from both the Merritt Parkway and the

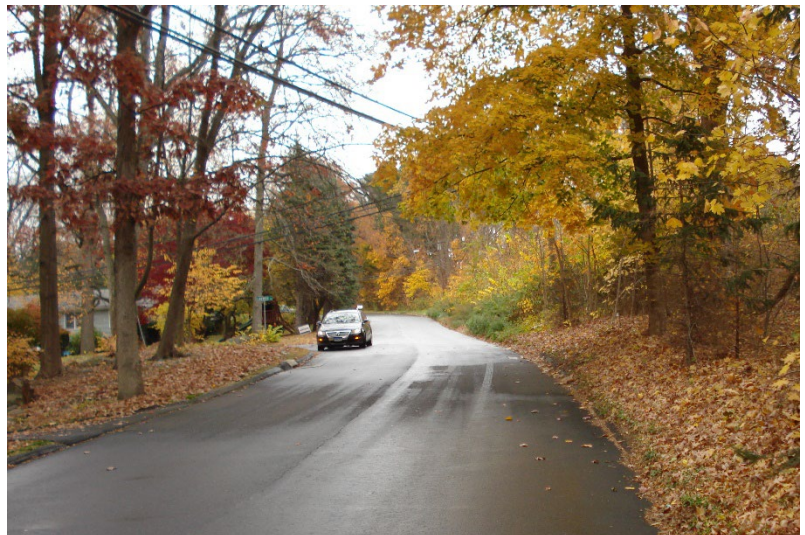


Figure 2.13 Local road/wooded landscape



surrounding streets (see Figure 2.14).

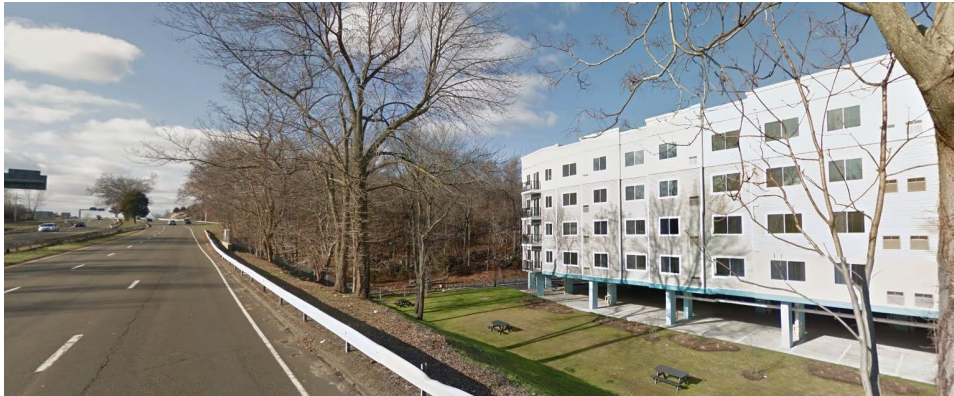


Figure 2.14 Merritt Parkway Looking South; Glover Avenue Apartment Building on Right

Viewer Groups: Residents and Pedestrians, Motorists on Local Streets

Perspective: Residents and pedestrians and motorists on local streets within the areas immediately surrounding the project site have a variety of views of the existing Merritt Parkway and/or Route 7 depending on distance, neighborhood density, vegetation and topography. Residents on North Seir Hill Road have fleeting glimpses of Route 7 while areas of Perry Avenue south of April Lane have more sustained, though still filtered by a tree buffer, views of Route 7.

Residents and motorists on Perry Avenue have views of the structure that carries the Merritt Parkway and associated on- and off-ramps over Perry Avenue. The aesthetic treatment of the historic mainline Merritt Parkway bridge over Perry Avenue is typical of the historic, architecturally detailed, concrete rigid-frame structures of the Merritt Parkway while the two flanking ramp structures, typical of bridges designed and constructed in the 1970s, exhibit none of the distinctive architectural detailing seen on the mainline span.

While the original mainline structure is a rigid frame concrete bridge, the two flanking ramp structures are stub abutment precast concrete single span girder-type structures from a much more recent period of bridge design. Because the original Merritt Parkway mainline structure is between the two newer bridges and with all three at about the same elevation, viewers can only see the middle structure when they are much closer to it. The parallel ramps obstruct approach views of the entire Merritt Parkway bridge elevation in both directions on Perry Avenue. The two outer ramp structures are much more visible in the landscape from a farther distance and for a longer duration (see Figure 2.15).



Figure 2.15 Merritt Parkway Mainline Bridge between Ramp Structures over Perry Avenue

Residents and motorists on Perry Avenue also have views of the overpass structure that carries Route 7 over Perry Avenue. The mainline Route 7 structure is a stub abutment precast concrete single span girder-type structure similar to the two structures that carry the Merritt Parkway ramps over Perry Avenue that exhibit an aesthetic from a much more recent period of bridge design (see Figure 2.16).



Figure 2.16 Route 7 Bridge over Perry Avenue

Several residential properties on Rae Lane have backyards with views of the northbound mainline and Exit 39A ramp of the Merritt Parkway. A vegetative buffer of 50 to 150 feet exists between the properties and the Parkway's edge of pavement and filtered views of the



roadway's light poles and signage are present (Figure 2.17). This figure is representative of what all the residents on Rae Avenue experience. Their exposure is long and their sensitivity is high.



Figure 2.17 Merritt Parkway - Filtered Views from Rae Lane Residential Backyards

Residents in the Linden Heights and Skyview Lane neighborhood have very limited views of the Merritt Parkway, for the most part only from the backyards of a limited number of homes on those streets. The homes are at a higher elevation than the Parkway and are separated from the Parkway by a substantial vegetative buffer. There are no views of the Merritt Parkway from either of the actual streets.

Residents and pedestrians and motorists on West Rocks Road have only a very limited view of the Merritt Parkway until almost on the overpass of West Rocks Road over the Merritt Parkway. The buffering vegetation that exists right up to the overpass filters most views of the Parkway. There is a sidewalk on the west side of the West Rocks Road overpass where pedestrians and bicyclists can observe the Parkway for as long as they wish, although typical overpass chain link bridge fencing on the parapet somewhat obscures the view of the Parkway. A view of the overpass's architectural detailing is not available from this perspective (Figure 2.18).



Figure 2.18 West Rocks Road View of Merritt Parkway, looking North

Residents and pedestrians and motorists on Creeping Hemlock Drive, Lakewood Drive and Silent Grove Court have filtered views through a vegetative buffer of the Merritt Parkway from both their homes and from the streets. Creeping Hemlock Drive in particular is at roughly the same vertical elevation as the Parkway and is in close horizontal proximity to the southbound lanes of the Merritt where the buffering vegetation, primarily deciduous, between the local street and the Parkway at its narrowest is only approximately 50 feet (see Figure 2.19 and Figure 2.20).



Figure 2.19 Creeping Hemlock Drive, view south to Merritt Parkway



Figure 2.20 Lakewood Drive View South to Creeping Hemlock Drive and Merritt Parkway



Features: Features in this district include single and multi-family dwellings on tree-lined suburban streets and semi-rural roads that wind through wooded areas.

View Quality: Because of the wooded and semi-rural context of the residential neighborhoods, the view quality from the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the project site is generally high. Views of the Merritt Parkway and Route 7, when seen, reduce the visual quality somewhat. Views in wintertime, after deciduous trees drop their leaves, are somewhat more pronounced.

Viewer Group: Motorists on Local Non-Residential Streets

Perspective: Motorists along Main Avenue heading north or south have views of the Merritt Parkway mainline directly in front of them.

Features: On this four-lane local arterial roadway, motorists are surrounded primarily by a local commercial shopping district with one and two-story businesses on both sides. Motorists on Main Avenue have direct views of the historic Merritt Parkway mainline bridge over Main Avenue which is the primary visual resource in this district (Figure 2.21 and Figure 2.22).

View Quality: Except for the view of the historic Merritt Parkway mainline bridge over Main Avenue, the overall visual quality in this area is unremarkable.



Figure 2.21 Main Avenue Looking North to Merritt Parkway Mainline Bridge



Figure 2.22 Main Avenue Looking North to Merritt Parkway Mainline Bridge

Landscape Unit #3: Commercial and Retail Areas Within the Project Limits

Both Main Avenue and Glover Avenue have major retail and commercial buildings present as well as several larger residential buildings. The retail shopping district along Main Avenue south of the Merritt Parkway is a local and regional destination with food, restaurant, banking, fitness, automotive services and hard goods stores in one and two-story buildings typically fronted by large parking areas located there. Typically, users arrive by car and park in front of the stores. There are several stand-alone single business buildings as well as several groupings of buildings that have multiple stores in each. Several four, five and six-story commercial office buildings are also located within this corridor (Figure 2.23).



Figure 2.23 Main Avenue, Looking North toward Merritt Parkway



North of the Merritt Parkway, there are primarily entrances to the commercial buildings that also front Glover Avenue and several hotel properties. With the exception of a gas station, no retail establishments are present. The visual character exhibits less elements and is therefore less developed.



Figure 2.24 Main Avenue North of Merritt Parkway; Looking South

The commercial corridor along Glover Avenue consists of a series of eight to twelve-story commercial office buildings along the east side of the street and a series of low, one and two-story commercial buildings with higher commercial buildings along the west side of the street (Figure 2.24). Glover Avenue is also the location where the Metro-North New Haven Line's Danbury Branch railroad track crosses under the Merritt Parkway and Glover Avenue. It is also

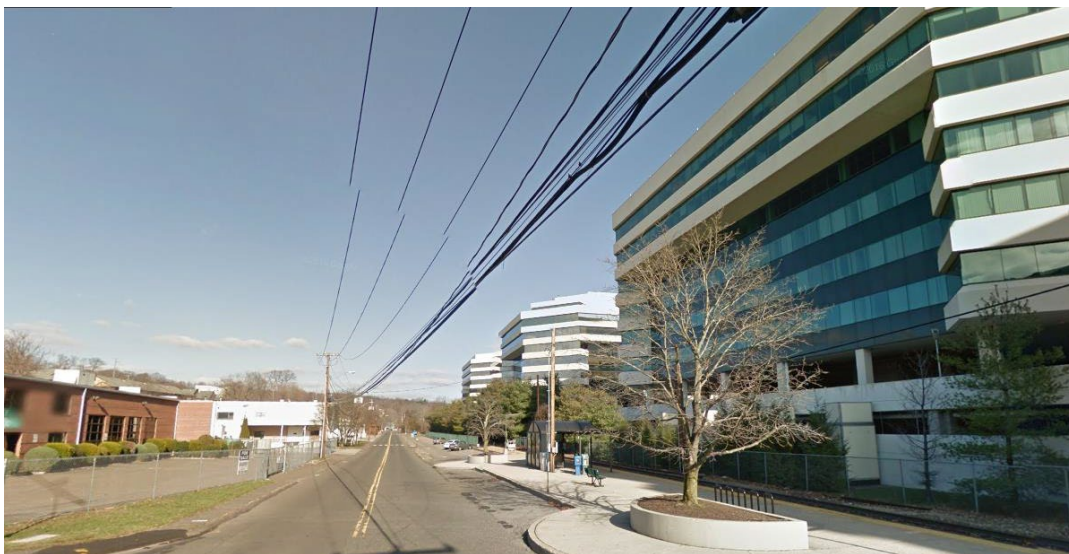


Figure 2.25 Glover Avenue Looking North toward Metro-North Merritt 7 Train Station



the location of the Merritt 7 train station parking lot and its low-level platform (Figure 2.25).

The two-span, stone barrel arched historic Glover Avenue bridge over the Norwalk River is a visual resource within this district. Present in the district too but not quite as prominent are the view from Glover Avenue of the Merritt Parkway mainline bridges over the Norwalk River and the Metro-North track (Figure 2.27, Figure 2.22 and Figure 2.28).



Figure 2.27 Glover Avenue Bridge over the Norwalk River, Looking toward Main Avenue



Figure 2.26 Merritt Parkway Mainline Bridge over Norwalk River, Viewed from Glover Avenue Bridge



Figure 2.28 Merritt Parkway Mainline Bridge over Danbury Branch Metro-North Track, Viewed from Glover Avenue

Perspective: Points of view vary by location and distance from and height above the Merritt Parkway or Route 7 and depend on whether the viewer is indoors or outdoors. Views by office workers from upper floors could be sustained but different to the experience a resident may have from their home. The visual experience of most retail users is mostly fleeting and secondary to other objectives.

Features: Depending on what floor the observer is on, the contextual features in closer proximity to the observer are usually of more interest and importance to the viewer than the project site in the distance.

View Quality: The quality of the views in this district is very mixed due to the commercial and retail nature of the area. The most notable visual resources in this district are the series of similarly styled white, eight to twelve-story office buildings that line the east side of Glover Avenue and the historic Merritt Parkway. Due to the varying building heights and the large footprints of the commercial buildings, views of the neighboring office buildings and rooftops generally detract from the overall visual experience of the district.



3.0 POTENTIAL VISUAL IMPACTS

3.1 Alternatives

Introduction

Through the Alternatives Selection process, in addition to the No-Build Alternative, two build alternatives, Alternative 21D and Alternative 26, have been identified as sufficiently viable to move forward for further analysis.

Where the No-Build Alternative would essentially maintain the existing visual context, both build alternatives would have, in certain areas, *no visual impact*, meaning that the change to the existing visual environment would not be visible. In other areas, the project would have *no adverse visual impact*, meaning that a change to the existing visual context would occur but the resultant visual effect would be neither positive nor negative. In other areas, the project's visual impact could be construed as being an *adverse visual impact*, meaning that the project would degrade the existing visual environment. This category of impact would be further designated as either a "minor" impact or a "major", depending on the perceived severity of the impact and lastly, in other areas of the project, the action could be considered a *beneficial* impact where the project would be improving the visual context from what currently exists.

As will be discussed below, both build alternative would exhibit all four types of visual impacts in various areas. Between the two, Alternative 21D would have a greater overall visual impact on the existing visual character as it would involve more and larger scale changes to the landscape within the rights-of-way and the immediate surrounding areas. This would include removal of existing ramps, construction of new replacement and additional ramps more like those seen on a typical interstate highway, new rock cuts, new bridges over the Norwalk River and the Metro-North Rail Road where there currently are no bridges, a new bridge over Main Avenue and changes to local streets in size and alignment.

Alternative 26 would have many but not all of the same type of visual impacts as would Alternative 21D as the total amount of construction would be less. Alternative 26 has new and replacement ramps but not as many or to the same extent that included with Alternative 21D. Alternative 26 keeps several of the existing ramps to and from Route 7 with only minor improvements. The biggest visual change would be the changing of Route 7 from a typical limited-access interstate highway character to that of a signalized arterial roadway with controlled intersections. Alternative 26 would exhibit the same changes to local streets in size and alignment included in Alternative 21D.



3.2 POTENTIAL VISUAL IMPACTS

3.2.1 Introduction

FHWA VIA Guidelines require that once Project Alternatives have been set, an analysis that would identify any potential visual impacts that an alternative may have on any viewer group is necessary. It is assumed that the No-Build would generate no new visual impacts as it is the existing visual condition. An analysis of potential visual impacts for Alternatives 21D and 26 follows:

3.2.2 Potential Visual Impacts of Individual Project Alternatives on Viewer Groups

The potential for a visual impact by the project on a particular viewer group is dependent upon the alternative's location compared to the existing visual condition and the new elements being proposed, the materials and construction type proposed, and any site improvement elements included with the final project. Of particular concern for potential impact is the proximity, exposure, awareness and/or duration of any new roadway facilities by any viewer group with a high sensitivity to visual changes from the existing condition (Residents, Pedestrians and Motorists) and any new element introduced that has a direct correlation to an historic resource's contributing characteristic(s).

3.2.3 Potential Impacts of Project on Key Views from within the Landscape Units

For each Build Alternative, sixteen Key Views have been identified (Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2) as important points-of-view from where potential changes to the existing visual conditions should be evaluated. These Key Views represent the most critical views for the various viewer groups. The potential impacts of the project upon viewers from within the three Landscape Units and the sixteen selected Key Views are anticipated to vary with sensitivity to the view and the extent that the view would be modified. 3-D simulation software was employed to prepare the videos and renderings showing Build and No-Build Alternatives from different views and driving directions, including each of the 16 Key Views. It is important to note that the renderings are not final designs. They do not include landscaping elements, bridge treatments, rock face treatments or infrastructure design details, all of which would be added at a later date as design related decisions are processed. However, they do indicate potential critical design areas, spatial relationships, roadways, and topography. in a readily viewable and understandable format. As such, when combined with the technical documentation in the Environmental Assessment, the renderings provide the basis for determining the potential visual impact on each Key View in the following analysis.

The following section first describes the potential view for each of the build alternatives from each Key View location. It then describes potential visual impacts associated with that alternative at that location for each of the identified viewer groups.



Key View #1 – View Looking Northbound on the Merritt Parkway

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #1 would see a widened, two-lane northbound exit ramp that takes motorists to either Route 7 southbound or a new intersection at Main Avenue. The widened ramp would require removal of vegetation along the roadside and would require more and wider pavement than what currently exists. The bridge for the new ramp over Perry Avenue would be wider than the existing bridge so the view of the bridge's parapet would be altered from what's there today.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #1 would see a single-lane exit ramp similar to what in there now that takes motorists to a new intersection of an at-grade Route 7 urban arterial roadway. The ramp would use the same pavement as what currently exists. The bridge for the ramp over Perry Avenue would be not be changed.

Impacts By Viewer Groups

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – For travelers on the Merritt Parkway mainline, the visual environment changes caused by the additional pavement for the widened bridge over FHWA Perry Avenue for the northbound exit ramp of Alternative 21D would be noticeable thus further degrading the original visual character of the Parkway and would be considered a minor adverse visual impact. Alternative 26 would cause no visual impact. In this alternative, the existing number of lanes and bridges remain unchanged.

Motorists on Local Streets – Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View on the Merritt Parkway and therefore, no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians – With Alternative 21D, several residents on Rae Lane would have a new northbound exit ramp off the Merritt Parkway one lane closer towards them. The proposed lane location however would not impinge on or substantially decrease the existing vegetative buffer that currently exists between the residences and the Merritt Parkway. There would be no change in views with Alternative 26. Both alternatives would have no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group has no view of the Parkway in this location and therefore would have no visual impact.





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Key View #2 – View Looking North on Route 7

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #2 would see the additional pavement of a widened exit ramp to Main Avenue on the northbound side of Route 7 accomplished by the cutting back of the existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop west of Route 7, and a realigned entrance ramp from the Merritt Parkway to Route 7 southbound. Figuring most prominently in this Key View is the new fly-over bridge over Route 7 where there currently is no bridge, to connect Route 7 southbound to the Merritt Parkway northbound.

Alternative 26

Very different than the proposed view created by Alternative 21D, viewers at Key View #2 would experience a fully at-grade four lane urban arterial roadway in place of the freeway section there today and the additional pavement of a widened exit ramp to Main Avenue on the northbound side of Route 7. Both the existing southbound entrance ramp from the northbound Merritt Parkway to the southbound Route 7 and the exit ramp from the northbound Route 7 to the northbound Merritt Parkway would be removed and the area where there was pavement would be landscaped.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – For Alternative 21D, motorists on northbound Route 7 would have a dramatically different view that what's there today. With the cutbacks to the existing rock outcrops, more ramp pavement and the new bridge in their view space, the visual character of Route 7 would have an increased "interstate highway"-like appearance than what is currently seen. As the visual character of Route 7 is currently one of an interstate highway, the proposed changes would be considered of no adverse impact.

For completely different reasons, Alternative 26 would afford northbound Route 7 motorists a dramatically different view from what's existing as well. In place of the current interstate highway visual character today, there would be the much more modestly scaled transportation facility of an at-grade urban arterial roadway. No change to the rock outcrops at this location and landscaping would be seen. Therefore, with this alternative, the proposed changes could be considered a beneficial visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and therefore no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location and therefore no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location and therefore no visual impact.







Key View #3 – View Looking North on Route 7

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #3 would be under a new fly-over bridge over Route 7 that carries a new ramp that connects Route 7 southbound to the Merritt Parkway northbound. A substantial amount of the existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop on the western side of Route 7 would be removed to install the new ramp. The existing loop entrance ramp from the northbound Merritt Parkway to northbound Route 7 would be on a slightly new alignment nearly in the same location as is currently.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #3 would be looking at a new, fully signalized, at-grade intersection on the new Route 7 four-lane urban arterial roadway. A new exit ramp from northbound Merritt Parkway and an entrance ramp to the eastbound Merritt Parkway replace the two freeway-style ramps that make these same connections. A substantial amount of the existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop on the western side of Route 7 would be removed to install the new ramp. There would also be a new entrance ramp from northbound Route 7 to the northbound Merritt Parkway. The areas where ramps were removed would be landscaped.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 - For Alternative 21D, motorists on northbound Route 7 would have a new bridge in their view space but otherwise, the views and visual character of Route 7 from this point-of-view could not be considered a negative visual impact as the existing visual character of Route 7 is one of an "interstate highway"-like appearance remains essentially unchanged. This change to the visual character would be a major visual impact.

Alternative 26 would afford northbound Route 7 motorists a markedly different view from the existing view, but for very different reasons than those described above. In place of the current interstate highway-look that's there today, a much more modestly scaled transportation facility of an at-grade urban arterial roadway would be constructed. To implement this alternative however, substantial alterations to the existing rock crops would be necessary. The overall effect would be a negative visual impact to the area.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and therefore, no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location and therefore, no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location and therefore, no visual impact.







Key View #4 – View Looking North on Main Avenue

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #4 would see at a new, fully signalized, at-grade intersection on Main Avenue that accommodates connections from northbound Route 7 to Main Avenue and the Main Avenue entrance onto northbound Merritt Parkway. The areas where ramps were removed would be landscaped. The biggest visual change from the existing condition is that Main Avenue would be widened in this area to five lanes plus north and southbound bike paths and a sidewalk on each side. To do this, the Merritt Parkway mainline bridges over Main Avenue would be replaced with new structures designed in a compatible style with the Merritt Parkway vernacular. The existing Main Avenue bridges are a pair of single arch, rigid frame structures with masonry veneers of rounded stones in a random pattern and granite voussoir stones that outline the arch's intrados openings. The existing Main Avenue bridge is a contributing resource element to the Merritt Parkway's listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The removal of the historic structures would be considered a major negative impact.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #4 would have a similar change to the visual environment that Alternative 21D creates. Viewers here would see at a new, fully signalized, at-grade intersection on Main Avenue that accommodate the connections from northbound Route 7 to Main Avenue and the entrance from Main Avenue onto northbound Merritt Parkway. The areas where ramps were removed would be landscaped. The biggest visual change from the existing condition is that Main Avenue would be widened in this area to five lanes plus north and southbound bike paths and a sidewalk on each side. To do this, the twin Merritt Parkway mainline bridges over Main Avenue would be replaced with two new structures designed in a compatible style with the Merritt Parkway vernacular. The existing Main Avenue bridges are single arch, rigid frame structures with a masonry veneer of rounded stones in a random pattern and granite voussoir stones that outline the arch's intrados opening. The Main Avenue bridge is a contributing resource element to the Merritt Parkway's listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The removal of the historic structures would be considered a major negative impact.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – For both alternatives, motorists on the Merritt Parkway would have only a fleeting and tangential view of a widened Main Avenue resulting in no adverse visual impact. Main Avenue is not visible from Route 7.

Motorists on Local Streets – The proposed changes to both Main Avenue and the Merritt Parkway bridge over Main Avenue for both Alternative 21D and Alternative 26 would be visually dramatic. Main Avenue would be widened with an increased number of travel lanes along with new traffic signals, bike paths and sidewalks would alter the character from of how the street appears and functions today to a much larger and more considerable arterial



roadway. This would be perceived as a major adverse visual impact.

For both alternatives, the removal and replacement of the Merritt Parkway bridge over Main Avenue would be a major adverse visual impact as the existing structure is a contributing resource to the Merritt Parkway NRHP historic district. While the existing condition is somewhat cluttered visually, the current landscape is substantially diminished in visual quality with an existing CTDOT staging area flanking the southeast edge of the Main Avenue bridge. Both alternatives would improve this condition. Both alternatives afford opportunities to improve the visual quality of the CTDOT staging area, should it remain at this location.

Residents and Pedestrians – The visual impact of both alternatives as described for motorists (above) would be the same major adverse visual impact but more sustained for the pedestrians in this viewer group as pedestrians in this area would have a view of the changed visual environment for a longer duration and their sensitivity is greater. The addition of sidewalks and bike lanes would however be an overall improvement to the visual and physical character of this area. There are no residents with this point-of-view.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – Similar to the major adverse visual impacts described for pedestrians (above), Commercial and Office Workers and Customers would experience comparable visual changes but with a lower sensitivity as their primary foci would be elsewhere thus rendering this change to the visual character as a minor adverse visual impact.



Figure 3.10 Key View #4 – View Looking North on Main Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.11 Key View #4 – View Looking North on Main Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.12 Key View #4 – View Looking North on Main Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #5 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #5 would see a much wider Merritt Parkway section as it crosses Main Avenue than the four-lane roadway currently there. In addition to the two through lanes in each direction, adding to the width of the Parkway here would be a new on-ramp connection to the northbound Merritt Parkway from Route 7 northbound and the deceleration lane needed for a new ramp that connects southbound Merritt Parkway motorists to either northbound or southbound Route 7. The view of the bridge's parapet would be altered from what's there today. The width of the center median remains unchanged.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #5 would see a wider Parkway section here than the existing, but it won't be as wide as is necessary for Alternative 21D. While there would be a new deceleration lane necessary for a new ramp that connects southbound Merritt Parkway motorists to an at-grade arterial Route 7, unlike Alternative 21D, there would be no new on-ramp connection to the northbound Merritt Parkway from Route 7 northbound. The view of the bridge's parapet would be changed from what's there today. As with 21D, the width of the center median remains unchanged.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – The additional pavements necessary for a widened Merritt Parkway mainline and the new bridge over Main Avenue would be a minor adverse visual impact for motorists on the Merritt Parkway. For both alternatives, the new bridge over Main Avenue may not have parapets like the original bridge thus denigrating the Parkway's historic visual quality.

Alternative 26 would have a somewhat lesser visual change but must be considered a minor adverse visual impact because the added lanes associated with new ramps are shorter than those required by Alternative 21D. This area cannot be seen from Route 7.

Motorists on Local Streets – Motorists on the adjacent local streets would have a sense of a larger Merritt Parkway but the constraints of distance and duration of views limit the viewshed of motorists on local streets and would result in no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of the Merritt Parkway in this location.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group can only view the Parkway from a distance and their view of the roadway is peripheral and would result in no visual impact.



Figure 3.13 Key View #5 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Existing View



Figure 3.14 Key View #5 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.15 Key View #5 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #6 – View Looking West on Creeping Hemlock Drive

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #6 would see a new alignment of Creeping Hemlock Road that would be straightened and widened from its current 2 lane configuration: one eastbound and one westbound, to a five-lane section with four lanes westbound and one lane eastbound. The new alignment cuts substantially into the existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop on the north side of the street. The newly aligned Creeping Hemlock Road meets at a new, signalized T- intersection with Main Avenue and Glover Avenue. The exit ramp of the southbound Merritt Parkway to Creeping Hemlock Road is realigned and would be longer and closer to Creeping Hemlock Road as well. Former ramp pavement would be removed.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #6 would see the same realignment of Creeping Hemlock Road that is included in Alternative 21D that is straightened and widened from its current 2 lane configuration; one eastbound and one westbound, to a five-lane section with four lanes westbound and one lane eastbound. The new alignment cuts substantially into the existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop on the north side of the street. The newly aligned road meets at a new, signalized T- intersection with Main Avenue and Glover Avenue. The exit ramp of the southbound Merritt Parkway to Creeping Hemlock Road is realigned and would be longer and closer to Creeping Hemlock Road as well. Areas that were formerly ramp pavement would be removed.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – As this point-of view is off the Merritt Parkway's mainline on the periphery and can only be seen momentarily by motorists on the Merritt Parkway and would result in no visual impact. This point-of-view is not available from Route 7.

Motorists on Local Streets – The changes to the visual environment from either alternative are dramatic. Where the existing road is a local, one-lane-in-each-direction, slightly curved street with a parkway partially visible off to one side, the new road proposed in both alternatives would be five lanes wide, arrow-straight with substantial rock removal required. The existing vegetated buffer between Creeping Hemlock Road and the Parkway would be eliminated thus exposing the neighborhood to unfiltered views of the mainline. These changes would be a major adverse visual impact to the of the neighborhood closest to the Parkway. The reestablishment of the existing buffer is possible.

Residents and Pedestrians – The changes to the visual environment described for the local motorist (above) would be greater for this viewer group due to this group's longer



exposure, closer proximity and heightened sensitivity. This change would be a major adverse visual impact

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – There are no Commercial and Office Workers and Customers in this area and therefore, no visual impact.



Figure 3.16 Key View #6 – View Looking West on Creeping Hemlock Drive – Existing View



Figure 3.17 Key View #6 – View Looking West on Creeping Hemlock Drive – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.18 Key View #6 – View Looking West on Creeping Hemlock Drive – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #7 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #7 would see minor changes to the current visual character of the Merritt Parkway. Modifications to the righthand shoulder in advance of the realigned and lengthened exit ramp to Creeping Hollow Road and the merging of the northbound on-ramp from Main Avenue would cause the landscape buffers along outer limits of the Parkway to be pushed back along with some additional pavement for the ramps that would be required. The center median however would remain in its current configuration, and the Parkway's visual character would appear mostly but not totally unchanged.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #7 would see the same minor change to the current visual character of the Parkway as is seen with Alternative 21D. The same slight modifications described above would have the Parkway's character appear mostly unchanged.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – The only viewer group with this view, motorists on the Merritt Parkway would have a view that is changed from what's existing and not inconsistent with other safety improvements being implemented the length of the Parkway such that it would considered no adverse impact.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and therefore, no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of the Parkway in this location and therefore, no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers - This viewer group has no view of the Parkway in this location and therefore, no visual impact.



Figure 3.19 Key View #7 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Existing View



Figure 3.20 Key View #7 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.21 Key View #7 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #8 – View Looking South on Main Avenue

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #8 would see a similar five-lane roadway section for Main Avenue as what's there currently. The concrete sidewalk on the west side of the street north of Glover Avenue would be carried all the way south to the intersection with Glover Avenue and Creeping Hemlock Road. Farther beyond the intersection, viewers begin to see in the distance the new bridge that is wider that carries the Merritt Parkway over Main Avenue.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #8 would have the same view from this Key View as what comprises Alternative 21D. It would be a similar five-lane roadway section for Main Avenue as what's there currently. The concrete sidewalk on the west side of the street north of Glover Avenue would be carried all the way south to the intersection with Glover Avenue and Creeping Hemlock Road. Farther beyond the intersection, viewers begin to see in the distance the new bridge that is wider that carries the Merritt Parkway over Main Avenue.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – The change to the existing visual environment for this viewer group is *de minimis* as the view is fleeting and peripheral and therefore, no visual impact. This view is not available to travelers on Route 7.

Motorists on Local Streets – While the intersection of Main Avenue, Glover Avenue and Creeping Hemlock Road would be new, the road and its confines would remain largely the same. This alternative will install signals, lights, etc. that are consistent with the existing condition. Therefore, no visual impact would result. There is an opportunity to place the existing overhead utility wires underground so as to improve the existing visual character of the area.

Residents and Pedestrians – Pedestrians and cyclists in this area would experience an improved visual and physical environment with new sidewalks. Their visual change could be considered a beneficial visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – Views of the new intersection would only be available to patrons of the gas station and the donation center on the corners. The overall visual change would be considered to have no adverse impact. Views from the higher floors of the surrounding office buildings would be considered to have an overall minor beneficial impact.



Figure 3.22 Key View #8 – View Looking South on Main Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.23 Key View #8 – View Looking South on Main Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.24 Key View #8 – View Looking South on Main Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #9 – View Looking East on Glover Avenue

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #9 would see a new Glover Avenue bridge over the Norwalk River as Glover Avenue would be realigned towards the new Glover/Main/Creeping Hemlock intersection and for improved traffic pattern purposes, would be widened from its current one lane in each direction to three lanes eastbound and one lane westbound. The new alignment would bring Glover Avenue closer to the One Glover Avenue Apartments building on the south side of the road. A new four-lane bridge would replace the existing twin arch masonry structure with a small sidewalk and pipe railing on each side built in 1912. The existing bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #9 would have the same new view along Glover Avenue as proposed in Alternative 21D. There would be a new Glover Avenue bridge over the Norwalk River as the road would be realigned towards the new Glover/Main/Creeping Hemlock intersection and for improved traffic pattern purposes, would be widened from its current one lane in each direction to three lanes eastbound and one lane westbound. The new alignment would bring Glover Avenue closer to the One Glover Avenue Apartments building on the south side of the road. A new four-lane bridge would replace the existing twin arch masonry structure with a small sidewalk and pipe railing on each side built in 1912. The existing bridge is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – Viewers on both of these roads can not see the proposed changes to Glover Avenue in the area and therefore, there would result in no visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets – Where there was once a simple, two-lane, historic masonry arch structure over the Norwalk River, both alternatives propose a new and notably wider structure. The visual impact of the replacement bridge on a new alignment would be quite noticeable and be considered a major adverse visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians – Located closer to the One Glover Avenue Apartments residential building on Glover Avenue, the new bridge proposed for both alternatives that replaces an historic structure and this visual change would have a major adverse visual impact to this viewer group.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – In this location, office workers in the Merritt On The River office building on Glover Avenue have the same visual environment as do residents, only with a lessened sensitivity. The visual impact from both proposed



alternatives would be considered a minor adverse visual impact for this group.



Figure 3.25 Key View #9 – View Looking East on Glover Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.26 Key View #9 – View Looking East on Glover Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.27 Key View #9 – View Looking East on Glover Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #10 – View Looking South From Glover Avenue

Alternative 21D

At the bend of Glover Avenue by the tracks of the Danbury branch of Metro-North Railroad, viewers at Key View #10 looking south would see a new bridge that carries Ramps 'D' and 'WS' over the railroad. This new bridge would be in closer to the viewer than the existing historic concrete twin barrel-arch Merritt Parkway mainline structure which carries the parkway over the railroad and would stay in place. The new ramp structure would obscure the view of the existing mainline bridge from this vantage point.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #10 would experience the same view as that of Alternative 21D where the new bridge that carries Ramps 'D' and 'WS' over the railroad would obscure the view of the existing mainline bridge from this vantage point.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – Motorists on both the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 would have a no view of this area and therefore there would result in no visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets – As seen off to the side as one crosses the Metro-North tracks, the existing view of the historic Merritt Parkway mainline bridge over the Metro-North tracks would be completely blocked with the new ramp structure proposed in either of the alternatives. This change to the visual environment is considered an adverse visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians – The residents of units in the One Glover Avenue Apartments building that face the Merritt Parkway and pedestrians along Glover Avenue would have a minor adverse visual impact with the presence of the new ramp structure proposed in either of the alternatives.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – Workers in the Merritt On The River office building on Glover Avenue would not see the new ramp bridge and therefore would have no visual impact from either alternative's new ramp in front of the existing Merritt Parkway bridge.



Figure 3.28 Key View #10 – View Looking South From Glover Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.29 Key View #10 – View Looking South From Glover Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.30 Key View #10 – View Looking South From Glover Avenue – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #11 – View Looking South on Route 7

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #11 would still have a view of a roadway with a freeway-style visual character that has two southbound and two northbound lanes plus shoulders and a concrete center median barrier. The new elements associated with this alternative include a lengthened exit Ramp 'SW' from southbound Route 7 to southbound Merritt Parkway, a new entrance Ramp 'WN' to northbound Route 7 from southbound Merritt Parkway and a new flyover bridge Ramp 'WS' between the viewer and the existing Merritt Parkway mainline that carries southbound Merritt Parkway traffic to southbound Route 7. The lengthened southbound exit ramp and the new northbound entrance ramp would require large areas of vegetation and rock to be removed. Areas that were once ramp pavement would be landscaped.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #11 would be looking at the at-grade signalized intersection of a five-lane (three southbound, two northbound) principle arterial roadway in place of the existing freeway-style roadway. The four-legged intersection handles movements to and from north and southbound Route, Ramp 'WS' from Main Avenue and the southbound Merritt Parkway and Ramp 'F' which is an on-ramp to the southbound Merritt Parkway.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – For Alternative 21D, viewers on Route 7 would experience a new highway configuration that would still have the same interstate highway visual character as the existing. Extensive swaths of the existing landscape buffer on both sides would be removed and this would be an adverse visual impact. Overall, however, while different than the existing, the visual environment would remain that of an interstate highway. Viewers on the Merritt Parkway would experience a momentary side view of Route 7 from the southbound Merritt Parkway mainline, their visual experience would remain essentially unchanged and therefore there would be no adverse impact.

With Alternative 26, the change to the existing visual environment would be extensive as it would afford southbound Route 7 motorists a very different view from what's existing. In place of the existing interstate highway visual character, a much more modestly scaled transportation facility of an at-grade urban arterial roadway would be in its place. There would be no reduction to the landscape buffers on either side of the corridor. The change to the visual environment with Alternative 26 can be considered a beneficial visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and therefore, no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location and therefore, no visual impact.



Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group has a marginal view of Route 7 and any change to their visual environment would be considered of no adverse impact.



Figure 3.31 View Looking South on Route 7 – Existing View



Figure 3.32 Key View #11 – View Looking South on Route 7 – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.33 Key View #11 – View Looking South on Route 7 – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #12 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway

Alternative 21D.

Viewers at Key View #12 would experience several changes to the existing visual environment of the Merritt Parkway mainline. While the Merritt Parkway's alignment would remain basically the same, the cuts to the rock outcroppings on the north side of the Parkway needed to build Ramp 'SE' and Ramp 'WS' from southbound Route 7 would be substantial. The additional amount of pavement and the new parapets of the new and wider bridges that carry the mainline of the Merritt Parkway over these two new ramps would also be noticeable to Parkway users.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #12 would not see the same changes that motorists would in Alternative 21D would. The Merritt Parkway mainline bridges over Route 7 would remain the same and because the ramps from Route 7 southbound to the Merritt Parkway westbound use the same basic alignment as what exists today, the rock removal needed for Alternative 21D would not be necessary for this alternative.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – With the new bridges that would carry the Merritt Parkway mainline over the two new ramps, the visual character of the Merritt Parkway in this location would be diminished as two new and non-original structures would have been added to the Merritt Parkway's mainline visual environment. This would diminish the viewsheds that had been the originally programmed along the mainline and therefore, it must be considered an adverse visual impact.

With no new bridges needed to carry the Merritt Parkway mainline over any new connecting ramps, there would be no adverse impact for motorists on the Merritt Parkway mainline with Alternative 26.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and therefore have no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of the Merritt Parkway in this location and therefore have no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers – This viewer group has no view of the Merritt Parkway in this location and therefore have no visual impact.



Figure 3.34 Key View #12 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Existing View



Figure 3.35 Key View #12 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.36 Key View #12 – View Looking South on the Merritt Parkway – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #13 – View Looking North on Route 7

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #13 would still have a view of a freeway-style roadway on Route 7 with two southbound and two northbound lanes plus, shoulders, a concrete center median barrier and a northbound C-D road for the exit to the southbound Merritt Parkway. The new elements associated with this alternative include a lengthened exit Ramp 'SW' from southbound Route 7 to southbound Merritt Parkway and, most prominently, a new flyover bridge Ramp 'WS' that carries southbound Merritt Parkway traffic to southbound Route 7. A substantial amount of existing previously excavated, partially vegetated rock outcrop would be removed to construct new Ramp 'SE' that connects the southbound Route 7 to northbound Merritt Parkway. Existing vegetation on both sides of the road would also be removed as well.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #13 would experience a large visual change compared to the existing visual character at this location when looking at the at-grade signalized intersection of a five-lane (three southbound, two northbound) principle arterial roadway proposed in place of the existing freeway-style roadway. The four-legged intersection handle movements to and from north and southbound Route, Ramp 'WS' from Main Avenue and the westbound Merritt Parkway and Ramp 'F' which is an on-ramp to the westbound Merritt Parkway. Existing vegetation on both sides of the roadway would be removed to construct the ramps that access the intersection.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – With Alternative 21D, the construction of the new flyover ramp 'WS' would add more interstate-style highway elements to the overall existing interstate highway visual character of Route 7, neither improving nor diminishing the highway's overall visual character thus making it no adverse impact. Since there is no visual resource that the new structure would visually obstruct, there would be no adverse impact in this regard. However, motorist's view from the Merritt Parkway of a highway with an additional flyover ramp would reduce the visual character of the adjacent facility, and, along with the extensive amount of rock outcrop and existing vegetation removal necessary to construct this alternative, the overall result would be considered an adverse visual impact.

Alternative 26 would afford northbound Route 7 motorists a dramatically different view from what's existing. In place of the current interstate highway visual character that's there today, the much more modestly scaled transportation facility of an at-grade urban arterial roadway with no change to the rock outcrops and minor changes in adjacent landscaping would be seen. With this alternative, the proposed changes to the visual environment at this location could be considered a beneficial visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View and



therefore would experience no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location this Key View and therefore have no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location this Key View and therefore have no visual impact.



Figure 3.37 Key View #13 – View Looking North on Route 7 – Existing View

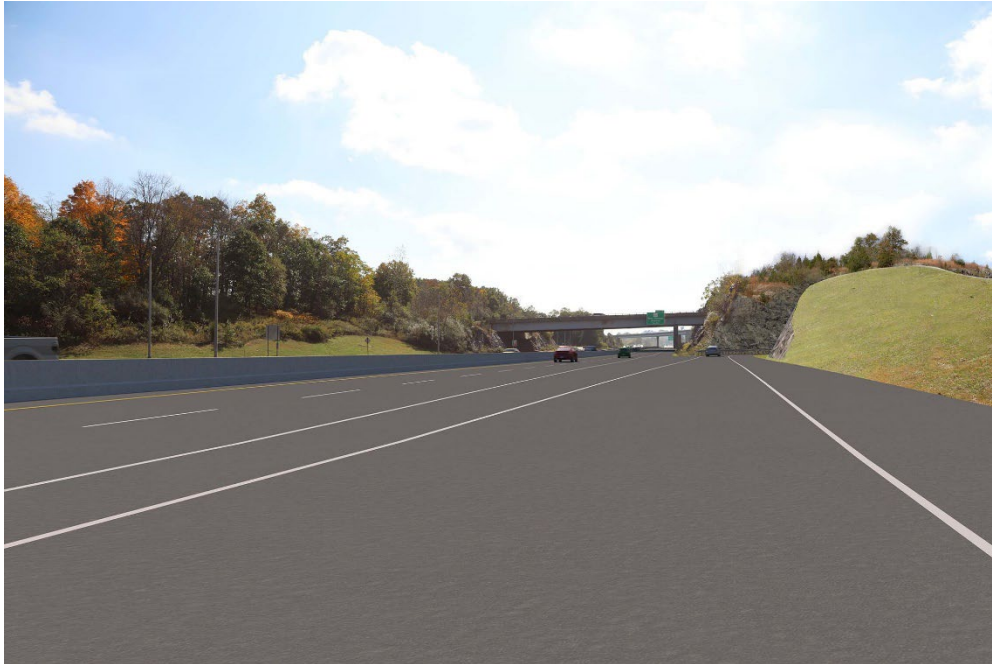


Figure 3.38 Key View #13 – View Looking North on Route 7 – Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.39 Key View #13 – View Looking North on Route 7 – Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #14 – View Looking South on Route 7

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #14 would have a view of a highway with a freeway-style visual character with two southbound and two northbound lanes plus shoulders, a concrete center median barrier along with a northbound C-D road and entrance ramp from the eastbound Merritt Parkway to northbound Route 7. Also, in this view is the new flyover bridge carrying the connecting ramp “SE” from southbound Route 7 to the eastbound Merritt Parkway and the eastbound Merritt Parkway to Main Avenue. The existing large rock outcrops on the east side would be reduced and on the west side of Route 7 would remain in place. The existing vegetation flanking the road would be partially removed.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #14 would be looking at an at-grade signalized intersection of a seven-lane (four southbound, three northbound) principle arterial roadway in place of the existing freeway-style roadway. A new four-legged intersection would handle movements to and from north and southbound Route 7, Ramp ‘A’ from the eastbound Merritt Parkway and Ramp ‘H’ which is an on-ramp to the eastbound Merritt Parkway. To construct this intersection at-grade, large amounts of the rock outcrops on the east and west sides of Route 7 along with some existing vegetation flanking the roadway would be removed.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – With Alternative 21D, the addition of a new flyover highway ramp, the rock and vegetation removal would emphasize the general interstate highway visual character already present on Route 7. The addition of additional interstate highway visual elements combined with the degradation of the existing natural edges of Route 7 must be considered an adverse visual impact to viewers on Route 7.

With Alternative 26, the change from interstate highway visual character to an at-grade urban arterial roadway would be considered a beneficial visual impact. However, because the amount of rock and existing vegetation removal is large, this must be considered an adverse visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets - Motorists on local streets have no view from this Key View this Key View and therefore have no visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians - This viewer group has no view of Route 7 in this location this Key View and therefore have no visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers - This viewer group has a marginal view of Route 7 and any change to their visual environment must considered no adverse impact.



Figure 3.40 Key View #14 – View Looking South on Route 7 – Existing View



Figure 3.41 Key View #14 – View Looking South on Route 7 - Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.42 Key View #14 – View Looking South on Route 7 - Proposed View for Alternative 26



KEY VIEW #15 – VIEW LOOKING NORTH ON PERRY AVENUE

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #15 would see a new bridge structure over Perry Avenue that would carry a widened exit ramp off the northbound Merritt Parkway. The new ramp would replace an existing ramp structure at the same line and grade, in the same location which was an adverse visual impact on the historic resource's integrity of setting when it was constructed. The replacement structure would maintain this adverse visual impact and should be considered a continuation of an earlier adverse visual impact. Mitigation of this impact is possible with the design of the new ramp most in architectural harmony with the style of the original Merritt Parkway mainline structure.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #15 would not experience a change in visual character as the existing ramp structure over Perry Avenue would remain in its present location in this alternative and its current adverse visual impact on the Merritt Parkway would be continued.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – Motorists on both the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 would have no view of either of the proposed alternatives from this point-of-view and therefore would have no visual impact.

Motorists on Local Streets – With both alternatives, the circa-1990 concrete steel-girder bridge in front of the historic Merritt Parkway bridge over Perry Avenue (on both sides of Merritt Parkway main line; see also View #16) already had an adverse visual impact on the historic bridge's integrity of setting. Alternative 21D's new ramp structure would replicate and continue that current adverse impact with a new structure in the same place as the existing ramp structure. Alternative 26 maintains the existing visual environment and therefore would be considered no new adverse visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians – The visual impact for this viewer group would be the same for each alternative as that described for Motorists on Local Streets (above).

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers - This viewer group has no view of the Merritt Parkway ramp bridge over Perry Avenue and therefore would result in no visual impact.



Figure 3.43 Key View #15 – View Looking North on Perry Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.44 Key View #15 – View Looking North on Perry Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.45 Key View #15 – View Looking North on Perry Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 26



Key View #16 – View Looking South on Perry Avenue

Alternative 21D

Viewers at Key View #16 would not experience a change in visual character as the existing ramp structure over Perry Street would remain in its present location in this alternative. The existing ramp is located directly in front of the original Merritt Parkway Perry Avenue overpass which obscures the Perry Avenue bridge's visibility and diminishes the historic resources' integrity of setting and therefore already has had an adverse visual impact on the historic resource's integrity of setting. This alternation would not change this condition and therefore would have no new adverse visual impact.

Alternative 26

Viewers at Key View #16 would not experience a change in visual character as the existing ramp structure over Perry Street would remain in its present location in this alternative. The existing ramp is located directly in front of the original Merritt Parkway Perry Avenue overpass and it already has had an adverse visual impact on the historic resource's integrity of setting. This alternation would not change this condition and therefore would have no new adverse visual impact.

Impacts By Viewer Group

Motorists on the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 – Motorists on both the Merritt Parkway and Route 7 would have no view of either of the proposed alternatives from this point-of-view and therefore would have no visual impact

Motorists on Local Streets – For either alternative, there is no change in the visual environment no new adverse visual impact.

Residents and Pedestrians – For either alternative, there is no change in the visual environment and no new adverse visual impact.

Commercial and Office Workers and Customers - This viewer group has no view of the Merritt Parkway ramp bridge over Perry Avenue and therefore would have no visual impact.



Figure 3.46 Key View #16 – View Looking South on Perry Avenue – Existing View



Figure 3.47 Key View #16 – View Looking South on Perry Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 21D



Figure 3.48 Key View #16 – View Looking South on Perry Avenue - Proposed View for Alternative 26

3.3 SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES AND VISUAL IMPACTS

Two Build Alternatives, 21D and 26, plus a No-Build Alternative were analyzed for their visual impact to the project area.

Both Build Alternatives widen Main Avenue to provide turning lanes and improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities on Main Avenue and therefore, both build alternatives include the full replacement of both Merritt Parkway mainline structures over Main Avenue. Both Build Alternatives also include the replacement of the Glover Avenue bridge over the Norwalk River along with the realignment of Creeping Hemlock Drive thus necessitating substantial rock cut back.

Alternative 21D can be considered the more “built out” of the two alternatives as it includes a new fly-over bridge over Route 7 that requires substantial rock cuts that Alternative 26 does not have along with all new connecting ramps to facilitate all the required movements between the Merritt Parkway, Route 7 and Main Avenue in a traditional highway interchange configuration. Alternatively, Alternative 26 takes a less typical “highway design improvement” approach to making these connections with the conversion of Route 7 from a typical high-speed interstate highway configuration with standard acceleration and deceleration loop ramps to an at-grade urban arterial with intersections and traffic signals.

In the most general terms, Alternative 21D imparts more overall noticeable adverse visual



impact on the project area than Alternative 26 as it includes more constructed features that add to the overall “highway” feel of the project area. While both build alternatives impart various degrees of adverse visual impacts in certain areas, some in common with each other, Alternative 26 has fewer ramps and bridges than Alternative 21D so the cumulative total of adverse visual impact to the project area can be considered lower than that of Alternative 21D.



4.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

Section 3.0 identified and described the level of potential visual impacts that may be caused by either of the two proposed project build alternatives. It is the purpose of this section to identify and recommend potential mitigation measures for identified adverse visual impacts as identified in Section 3.0.

As prescribed in the FHWA's Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessments, mitigation measures would be required in instances where adverse impacts have been identified for various viewsheds and viewer groups. Mitigation measures would be necessary to address FHWA impacts that are determined to occur once one has analyzed a potential proposed view with the finishes and treatments developed as part of and included in the proposed future build condition are included in the evaluation.

As prescribed in the FHWA's Guidelines for Visual Impact Assessments, mitigation measures would be required in instances where negative impacts have been identified for various viewsheds and viewer groups. Mitigation measures would be necessary to address any impact that is still determined to occur once one has analyzed a potential proposed view with the finishes and treatments developed as part of and included in the proposed future build condition are included in the evaluation. Finishes and treatments that could be included as a component of the proposed design might include replacement bridges and structures in architectural styles sympathetic to and in harmony with the overall architectural style of the Merritt Parkway constructed with materials such as concrete with rubbed finishes and detailing and/or stone veneer similar to that seen on the abutment and wing walls of the bridge that carries the Parkway over Main Avenue. Additional mitigation measures above what the proposed design would include as a component of the proposed design would be identified through discussions with the interested parties and project stakeholders and confirmed by the State.



Attachment A: Public Meeting Minutes

STATE PROJECT NO. 102-358 - Route 7/Route 15 Interchange
DRAFT EA-EIE Appendix N6 - Section 106 Consultation



Route 7-15 Norwalk

Route 7 - 15 Interchange
State Proj. No. 102-358
Subject: PAC Landscape Subcommittee Meeting #2
Date/Time: November 21, 2019 01:30 PM
Location: Fodor Farm, Norwalk, CT

Attendees:

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company	Attended
Yolanda	Antoniak	yolanda.antoniak@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
Drew	Berndlmaier	Dberndlmaier@norwalkct.org	City of Norwalk	Yes
Mike	Calabrese	Michael.Calabrese@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
Marguerite	Carnell	MCarnell@ahs-inc.biz	Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc.	Yes
Tom	Doyle	Thomas.Doyle@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
John	Eberle	John.Eberle@stantec.com	Stantec	Yes
Andy	Fesenmeyer	andy.fesenmeyer@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
Wes	Haynes	wes@merrittparkway.org	Merritt Parkway Conservancy	Yes
Lydia	Henson	lhenson@empirestaterealtytrust.com	Empire State Realty Trust, Inc	Yes
Jo-Anne	Horvath	dahorvath@att.net	Creeping Hemlock	Yes
Alan	Kibbe	akibbe@att.net	NASH	Yes
Ken	Livingston	klivingston@fhiplan.com	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.	Yes
JoAnn	McGrath	jmcgrath@marcuspartners.com	Marcus Properties	Yes

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Mark	McMillan	Mark.McMillan@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
Nancy	Rosett	n_rosett@yahoo.com	Norwalk Bike Walk Commission	Yes
Gary	Sorge	gary.sorge@stantec.com	Stantec Consulting Services Inc.	Yes
Ariana	Vera	avera@westcog.org	Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG)	Yes
Matt	Verry	Matthew.Verry@ct.gov	CTDOT	Yes
Peter	Viteretto	viteretto@heritagelandscapes.com	CT ASLA	Yes
Chris	Wigren	cwigren@cttrust.org	Connecticut Historical Trust	Yes

Meeting Items

10.1

Topic: PROJECT MANAGEMENT/MEETINGS/PUBLIC OUTREACH

Status: Open

Discussion:

Yolanda Antoniak of the CTDOT, welcomed the attendees to the meeting. She presented the overall purpose of the meeting and reviewed the agenda. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Review revisions to Phase I/II Cultural Resources Public Report
- Discuss methodology/ criteria for landscape assessment within the Environmental Document and subsequent design of the preferred alternative.

Yolanda referenced the September 2018 Landscape Subcommittee and Public Landscape Workshop, which provided valuable insights for our work and has been used as a starting point for much of this meeting's discussion.

Marguerite Carnell of AHS was introduced to speak about the revisions to the Phase I/II Cultural Resources Public Report. Based on the comments received during the May Section 106 Consulting Parties meeting and additional comments received, the Report was updated to include a more detailed discussion of the development of the Visual impact Assessment Area (VIAA) and Area of Potential Effects (APE). The additional details were based on a desktop review of the project areas, visual character, key views and viewpoints from various viewers perspectives (e.g. residents, commuters, etc.). The work was conducted in conformance with FHWA guidelines for the visual assessment of highway projects.

AHS also addressed a question about the potential for indirect effects on historic districts that are located outside the APE: at this stage of the design, those impacts have not yet been determined. When additional



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technical studies are completed, it's possible that the APE could be enlarged if any of those indirect impacts will extend beyond the current boundaries of the APE. AHS did assess potential vibration impacts and have determined there will be no effects on any of the historic districts.

Marguerite also clarified the National Register status of the Silvermine Avenue Historic District. This Historic District has been approved for National Register study by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and that nomination is currently in progress.

She stated that stakeholders asked for a more detailed discussion of the integrity of the Parkway's landscape elements, which have changed over time. AHS expanded the report to include eight historic character-defining features which may help to inform the assessment criteria of design alternatives: roadway width, alignment, views, bridges, medians and verges, plantings, signage, and guiderails.

Gary Sorge of Stantec, was then introduced to present an overview of the process to develop a set of Landscape Assessment criteria that will be used in the environmental document and subsequent design of the preferred alternative. He gave an overview of the development of the draft criteria. This included a review of existing documents such as the 1994 Merritt Parkway Master Plan (highlighting key words and identifying them as being incorporated into our adapted assessment criteria), National Park Service criteria for scenic parkways, CTDOT maintenance and design guidelines, and a review of comments from the September 2018 Public Landscape Workshop.

He stated that this project area is unique and over time, the section of the Merritt Parkway within the project area has been aesthetically diminished and is not a good representation of the Merritt Parkway design features. In the project area, there is a more commercial and overall developed feel than most of the Parkway. He stated we want to develop a criteria assessment that recognizes the uniqueness of this project area. He stressed the importance of considering the Merritt Parkway as "an experience" to drivers, passengers, residents of the surrounding area. He stated that the overall goal of the project is not to recreate the Parkway at its peak in the 50's, 60's (as stated in 1994 Master Plan goals), but to identify feasible rehabilitation actions.

Peter V. commented that the Merritt Parkway Master Plan is not a cultural landscape report and therefore has no historical basis.

Gary then asked the PAC Subcommittee whether they were comfortable with our approach to developing criteria, namely of using the previously discussed guidelines (1994 Merritt Parkway Master Plan, National Park Service criteria for scenic parkways, CTDOT maintenance and design guidelines) as a 'starting' point for assessment criteria but updating to address current conditions and develop a modern day assessment. The PAC Subcommittee concurred.

Gary then presented a series of photographs from the project area, identifying positive and negative attributes of the current landscape conditions (e.g. lack of buffers as a negative attribute, certain land forms and hills as a positive attribute).

Gary then introduced the landscape evaluation criteria matrix. He described the overall approach that led to the development of the matrix.

A set of general comments and questions followed.

Comment: Consider two additional criteria: Circulation as its own category (area roadways are curved and historically narrow but not fenced and define the roadway section) and Rehabilitation (enhance existing landscape features/heal "scars" of past construction activities). There is a need to integrate the "engineering" hardscape into the natural landscape.

Gary then led a discussion of each specific category and assessment criteria, reiterating that the assessment criteria is to provide for an evaluation of the alternatives in the EA and to apply later as a design tool:



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Views

Gary S. noted spatial organization is key, understanding the park-like and pastoral feel of Merritt Parkway. He stated that the Parkway experience can and should begin on access ramps (i.e. ramps should reflect Parkway character)

Comment: We need opportunities to see the landscape and have views of the Norwalk River from Merritt Parkway and Glover Avenue. Need to consider the sense of visual permeability, e.g. open parapets.

Comment: The view coming from Westport is pastoral, an open, grassy landscape with a view of an intersection; intent should be to maintain and rehabilitate a visually cohesive, consistent landscape. See historical photos that depict open landscape with young plantings. The bridges are "tucked in" without "big frames." The bridges and topography are complementary.

Q: Is the Project Team considering views of Merritt Parkway and Norwalk River from adjacent buildings?

A: Yes, to the extent possible.

Vegetation and planting design

Chris W. emphasized the term "naturalistic" for plantings, intended to blend in with the natural landscape.

Peter V. emphasized the contrast and features of the median vs perimeter of understory as a place for flowering trees and the need to preserve buffer and woodlands only if they're valuable. He suggested that the plantings review should consider opening views where they are significant.

Peter V. suggested buffers and woodlands need to be preserved and views/visual resources can take priority over compromised/less valuable areas.

Q: How is the staging area currently located near the Stop & Shop property, incorporated into this Project?

A: Andy Fesenmeyer of the CTDOT replied that it's used as a staging area for multiple projects and will be discontinued as a staging area upon their completion. The area will be landscaped as part of this project.

Topography

Gary S. noted that the Parkway is typically at a higher grade than adjacent areas and mentioned the challenge of treating steep slopes on the Merritt Parkway which we cannot change.

Chris W. noted that in many areas grading was an 'engineered' design and not consistent with Parkway landscape intent. "Those areas were criticized by Merritt Parkway landscape architects".

Peter V. noted some of these areas are planted heavily with pines. He also suggested that the transition slopes along with grading higher than the Parkway were important considerations. He stated that some areas could be fixed while others may not be.

Amenities

Gary stated that the project area consisted of a lot of 'fix-it' projects and lacked a consistent 'theme', especially as it relates to access and egress ramps.

Gary S. advocated for extending Merritt Parkway style guiderails and sign types to ramps. He reiterated that the Parkway experience can and should begin on access and egress ramps.

Chris W. suggested a goal to de-clutter critical areas near the on- and off-ramps.

Peter V. noted the requirement for separating the Parkway from pedestrians. He hopes this can be handled with naturalized features instead of fencing. "We should avoid 6-foot chain-link fences, which collect invasive species."



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Sustainability

Joanne H. mentioned the maintenance of the Parkway is of utmost importance, that while in the first year after construction the landscape might all look good, years later it is in need of work.

Peter V. also stated that consideration should be given to the sustainability of trees, etc. and suggested sufficient soil (3-5 feet deep) is necessary to allow for optimum growth.

Natural Features

Q: Joanne H. asked if the Project Team will try to "expose" bridges.

A: Yes, if it makes sense to highlight distinct features. We would also look to remove invasive species that have grown over some of the bridges.

Peter V. noted we should address "damage", such as out-of-scale raw rock outcroppings that currently exist in the Project Area, or other 'scars' that need to be healed.

Mark McMillan of the CTDOT emphasized that these criteria will help us evaluate the two alternatives, which is part of the NEPA process. He suggested perhaps there are other questions to ask, e.g., which alternative provides a better opportunity for healing landscape scars?

Safety

Gary S. noted the potential need for more signage based on having more connections/roadway options. Peter V. stressed improving geometry and visibility, creating clear sightlines to enhance safety. Peter stated he would provide the Project Team with additional comments by email. The landscape design should help to provide a less confusing interchange area for user experience/movement through the Project Area.

Peter V. noted that stormwater detention areas must be thoughtfully designed and attractive (integrate engineering & landscape design).

Joanne Horvath agreed safety is important, including for DOT workers.

Gary S. mentioned the need to consider how is landscape reinforcing/providing more clarity for motorists making choices? We should keep the design elements simple and reduce visual clutter for better driver decision making.

Andy Fesenmeyer then closed the meeting by discussing the next steps:

- Finalizing the Phase I/II report
- Continuing interagency coordination
- Complete Draft Environmental Document- early 2020
- Hold Public Hearing- Spring 2020
- Finalize Environmental Document-Summer 2020
- Select Preferred Alternative Summer 2020
- Begin design, using selected/edited criteria

John E. stated that the comments and edits received today would be incorporated and a final assessment criteria table provided all for their use.

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Follow up Action Item(s)

Item	Description	Held By	Date Due	Status	Date Closed
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The foregoing is considered to be a true and accurate record of all items discussed. If any discrepancies or inconsistencies are noted, please contact the writer immediately.