

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) presents an analysis of the proposed project's effect on the existing visual landscape of the project area. Information presented in the setting and analysis subsections was obtained from visits to the project site, the Alameda County East County Area Plan (ECAP), and environmental documents associated with surrounding projects.

For purposes of this analysis, aesthetic or visual resources are defined as the natural and built landscape that is visible to humans from public vantage points. The overall visual character of a given area results from the unique combination of natural landscape features including landform, water, and vegetation patterns, as well as built features such as buildings, roads, stadium lights, signs and other structures.

4.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

4.1.1.1 Regional Location

AMP is located on approximately 83 acres within the eastern portion of unincorporated Alameda County, near the boundary with San Joaquin County. Situated on the rolling hillsides associated with the coast range and the eastern slope of the Altamont Pass, Altamont Motorsports Park (AMP) sits at an elevation of approximately 300 feet above sea level (see **Figure 3.0-1, Altamont Motorsports Park Location Map**). The rolling hillsides are covered in a mix of seasonal grasses and small native stands of evergreen trees near low-lying drainages and ephemeral streams. There are approximately 5,000 wind turbines associated with the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area that line the region's ridgelines and cover approximately 50 square miles. These turbines harness wind energy and range from approximately 75 feet to 150 feet in height.

Public viewpoints in the area offer interrupted views of existing land uses due to the varying topography of the rolling hillsides. However, from public roadways and Interstates 205 (I-205) and 580 (I-580), there are long-range views of the San Joaquin Valley to the east as well as distant views of the rolling hills to the north and south. Views to the west terminate at the Altamont Pass as its highest point, which obscures all other lands to the west from view.

4.1.1.2 Surrounding Land Uses

The site is generally bounded by I-205 and I-580 to the north, I-580 to the east, and existing rural residential development to the south and west (see **Figure 3.0-1**). Immediately to the south of the project site is the closest single rural residence to the racetrack. It was constructed in 2005 and sits on a hilltop on a 57.9 acre site. To the west, along Midway Road and south of Interstates 205 and 580 are approximately 11 rural residences on sites of varying sizes. To the north of Interstates 205 and 580 are approximately 14 rural

residences on sites of varying sizes as well. The California Aqueduct is located to the north and east of the project site (north of I-205 and I-580 and east of I-580). Mountain House, a new residential community within San Joaquin County, lies east and northeast of the project site. There are also approximately 5,000 wind turbines along the adjacent ridgelines.

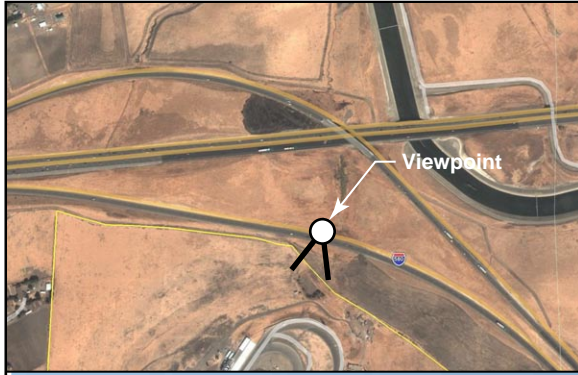
Many of the land uses in the area are visually buffered by rolling hills from I-205, I-580, and other residences. The primary roadways, other than I-205 and I-580, in the area are county roads: Midway Road, which runs north and south; Altamont Pass Road, which extends west to the summit; and Patterson Pass Road which extends west, parallel to I-580.

The visual character of the surrounding area can be described as rural agricultural, with existing wind energy infrastructure and recreational uses intermixed. Most of the rural residential uses in the vicinity have small ranches with grazing land for cattle and other farm animals. The expansive wind energy infrastructure creates a contrasting visual background for these uses. Some of the residential uses are visible from I-280 and I-580, and most are visible from county roadways. The interchange and flyover of I-205 and I-580, adjacent to the eastern project boundary, create an industrial visual character, as these are high volume freeways that carry passenger vehicular traffic as well as a majority of truck traffic traveling to and from the San Francisco Bay Area.

Existing sources of light and glare in the area include vehicular headlights from I-205 and I-580, and residential uses along Midway Road. However, due to the low density of uses in the area, apart from headlights from the Interstates, the area is relatively dark, with no contiguous light source.

4.1.1.2.1 Project Site

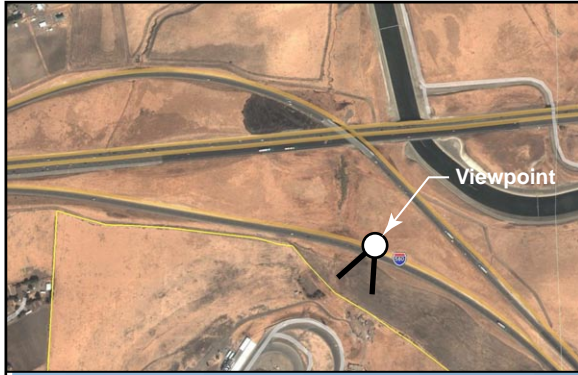
AMP is located on approximately 83 acres, of which approximately 35 acres are developed with the racetracks and related uses. The undeveloped portion of the AMP site has been disturbed in some areas in conjunction with visitor parking, which is designated on vacant hillsides near the racetrack. Native seasonal grasses occupy the area where the freeway signage is proposed. **Figures 4.1-1 through 4.1-3**, public views of the site and surroundings, show the existing undeveloped hillsides surrounding the racetrack and the grandstand area. There are eleven light poles that illuminate the racetrack for nighttime activities. Also, there are smaller lighting fixtures along racetrack structures for safety and pedestrian navigation. These stadium lights, in addition to headlights from vehicles traveling to and from the site, represent existing sources of nighttime light on the project site.



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - May 2008

FIGURE **4.1-1**

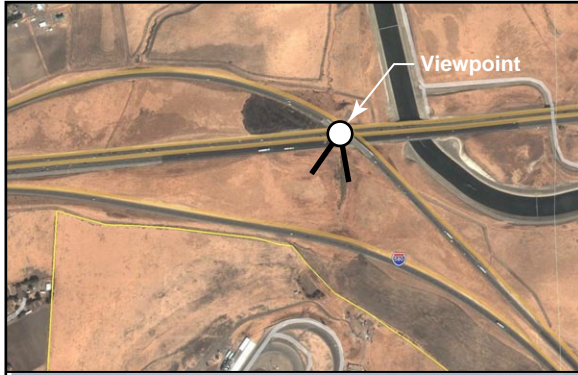
View of the Altamont Motorsports Park from Eastbound Interstate 580



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - May 2008

FIGURE **4.1-2**

View of the Altamont Motorsports Park from Eastbound Interstate 580



SOURCE: Impact Sciences, Inc. - May 2008

FIGURE **4.1-3**

View of the Altamont Motorsports Park from Westbound Interstate 580

Therefore, because the two signs proposed as part of the project use displays that would change at reasonable intervals by electronic process or remote control, the signs would meet the exemption identified above.

4.1.2.2 County of Alameda

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors (the Board) adopted the Scenic Route Element of the County of Alameda General Plan in May 1966. This element, consisting of text and a map, is designed to serve as a guide for establishment of programs and legislation for the development of a system of scenic routes. A primary goal of the element is the preservation and enhancement of scenic qualities and natural scenic areas adjacent to and visible from scenic routes. The element contains objectives, definitions, policies, standards, and implementation measures (County of Alameda 1966).

Scenic routes are defined as consisting of three elements: the right-of-way, the adjacent scenic corridor, and areas extending beyond the scenic corridor. Scenic corridors are either areas that extend beyond a scenic route right-of-way, and are of sufficient scenic quality to be acquired by state or local jurisdictions, or areas to which development controls should be applied to preserve and enhance nearby views or maintain unobstructed distant views along a scenic route and provide a pleasant route of travel (County of Alameda 1966).

The following roadway segments in the vicinity of AMP are designated as scenic routes according to the element:

- Interstate 580 (I-580)
- Altamont Pass Road (from I-580 to Route 239)

A summary of relevant policies excerpted from the County of Alameda Scenic Route Element includes the following:

Provide for Normal Uses of Land and Protect Against Unsightly Features. In both urban and rural areas, normally permitted uses of land should be allowed in scenic corridors, except that panoramic views and vistas should be preserved and enhanced by supplementing normal zoning regulations with special height, area, and sideyard regulations; and by providing architectural and site design review.

Use Landscaping to Increase Scenic Qualities of Scenic Route Corridors. Landscaping should be designed and maintained in scenic route corridors to provide added visual interest, to frame scenic views, and to screen unsightly views.

Underground Utility Distribution Lines When Feasible: Make Overhead Lines Inconspicuous New, relocated, or existing utility distribution lines should be placed underground whenever feasible.

4.1.1.2.2 Site View Shed

For purposes of this analysis, the project view shed is defined as the general area from which the AMP site is visible from public places, which is generally limited to a short time frame (2–3 seconds at the posted speed limit) window while traveling eastbound on I-580, and an as yet undetermined view corridor when driving westbound on I-580. The undetermined view window on westbound I-580 is due to on-going construction of a new flyover ramp, the construction of which partially obstructs views from the existing westbound I-580. To some extent the new flyover will further limit views of the site from the existing portion of I-580; however, the new flyover ramp may afford superior (elevated) views of the raceway when complete and operational. It is anticipated that views of the site from I-580 would be no more than 3 seconds at the posted speed limited. The view corridor would be determined upon operation of the new flyover ramp.

4.1.2 REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

4.1.2.1 California Scenic Highway Designation

According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Scenic Highway Mapping System, the portion of I-580 that is north of the project site is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway, and the portion of I-580 the extends east of the project site is a designated State Scenic Highway. The portion of I-205 near the AMP site is not listed as eligible for Scenic Highway designation. Therefore, the Caltrans Scenic Corridor Protection Program applies to a portion of I-580 near the eastern project boundary. This program is designed to protect and preserve the aesthetic quality of scenic highways. The state has adopted regulations that relate to what advertising is prohibited within State Scenic Highways within the Business and Profession Code Section 5440.1:

Except as provided in Section 5442.5, no advertising display may be placed or maintained along any highway or segment of any interstate highway or primary highway that before, on, or after the effective date of Section 131(s) of Title 23 of the United States Code is an officially designated scenic highway or scenic byway.

The specific exemptions related to advertising displays are cited in Section 5442.5, which states:

Section 5440.1 does not apply to any advertising display if the advertising display is used exclusively for any of the following purposes:

(c) Signs, displays, and devices, including, but not limited to, those that may be changed at reasonable intervals by electronic process or by remote control, advertising activities conducted on the property on which they are located.

When it is not feasible to place lines underground, they should be inconspicuous from the scenic route. Poles of an improved design should be used wherever possible. Combined or adjacent rights-of-way and common poles should be used wherever feasible.

Control Tree Removal. *As a means of preserving the scenic quality of the county, no mature trees should be removed without permission from the local jurisdiction.*

The East County Area Plan (ECAP), which is the governing general plan for the project area, contains goals, policies, and implementation programs that are intended to provide for the protection and preservation of visual resources in eastern Alameda County. The primary goal for visual resources protection in the eastern portion of Alameda County, as described by the ECAP, is “to preserve unique visual resources and protect sensitive viewsheds.” Several policies are identified in the plan to achieve this goal:

Policy 106: Structures may not be located on ridgelines or hilltops or where they will project above a ridgeline or hilltop as viewed from public roads, trails, parks and other public viewpoints unless there is no other site on the parcel for the structure or on a contiguous parcel in common ownership on or subsequent to the date this ordinance becomes effective. New parcels may not be created that have no building site other than a ridgeline or hilltop, or that would cause a structure to protrude above a ridgeline or hilltop, unless there is no other possible configuration.

Policy 107: The County shall permit no structure (e.g., housing unit, barn, or other building with four walls) that projects above a visually-sensitive major ridgeline.

Policy 108: To the extent possible, including by clustering if necessary, structures shall be located on that part of a parcel or on contiguous parcels in common ownership on or subsequent to the date this ordinance becomes effective, where the development is least visible to persons on public roads, trails, parks and other public viewpoints. This policy does not apply to agricultural structures to the extent it is necessary for agricultural purposes that they be located in more visible areas.

Policy 114: The County shall require the use of landscaping in both rural and urban areas to enhance the scenic quality of the area and to screen undesirable views. Choice of plants should be based on compatibility with surrounding vegetation, drought-tolerance, and suitability to site conditions; and in rural areas, habitat value and fire retardance.

Policy 115: In all cases appropriate building materials, landscaping and screening shall be required to minimize the visual impact of development. Development shall blend with and be subordinate to the environment and character of the area where located, so as to be as unobtrusive as possible and not detract from the natural, open space or visual qualities of the area. To the maximum extent practicable, all exterior

lighting must be located, designed, and shielded so as to confine direct rays to the parcel where the lighting is located.

Policy 116: To the maximum extent possible, development shall be located and designed to conform with rather than change natural landforms. The alteration of natural topography, vegetation, and other characteristics by grading, excavating, filling, or other development activity shall be minimized. To the extent feasible, access roads shall be consolidated and located where they are least visible from public view points.

Policy 117: The County shall require that where grading is necessary, the off-site visibility of cut and fill slopes and drainage improvements is minimized. Graded slopes shall be designed to simulate natural contours and support vegetation to blend with surrounding undisturbed slopes.

Policy 118: The County shall require that grading avoid areas containing large stands of mature, healthy vegetation, scenic natural formations, or natural watercourses.

Policy 119: The County shall require that access roads be sited and designed to minimize grading.

Policy 120: The County shall require that utility lines be placed underground whenever feasible. When located above ground, utility lines and supporting structures shall be sited to minimize their visual impact.

4.1.2.3 County of San Joaquin

The Scenic Highways Element of the County of San Joaquin General Plan was adopted by the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors on October 19, 1978. The purpose of the element is to establish scenic routes in the county and to guide the preservation and enhancement of scenic qualities and natural scenic areas adjacent to and visible from scenic routes (County of San Joaquin, 1978b).

San Joaquin County recognized the value of scenic resources surrounding a 16-mile portion of I-580 and I-5 between Stanislaus and Alameda counties and, in 1974, adopted a Scenic Corridor Zone, designed to give aesthetic protection to county-designated scenic highways. Later in 1974, this 16-mile segment of I-580 and I-5 received official designation as a state scenic highway by its inclusion in the State Master Plan of Scenic Highways. No other highways or roadways within San Joaquin County have been identified as scenic.

4.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

4.1.3.1 Thresholds of Significance

The proposed project would result in a significant impact if it would

- have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

4.1.3.2 Methodology

Field observations of the project site and surroundings were conducted in July and August 2007 and February 2008 in order to observe existing visual conditions in the project vicinity, to photograph representative public views of the site, and to identify key viewing locations. In addition to the field observations, the visual impact assessment is based on review of project materials, project drawings, and technical data provided by AMP, aerial and ground-level photographs of the project area.

4.1.3.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Potential Impact 4.1-1: Would the proposed project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

The designation of a portion of I-580 east of the raceway as a state scenic highway implies that views from that portion of the roadway are considered scenic. Views from I-580 to the west include the rolling hills and the Altamont Pass, with alterations to the natural environment limited to a few scattered residential units, a motocross track, and the wind turbines in the distance. The project site, and in particular, the existing and proposed improvements to the site, are and would not be visible from the designated portion of I-580 due to intervening topography. The exception is that one and potentially both of the proposed freeway signs would be visible.

The proposed freeway signs, because of their height (up to 75 feet tall) and size of their message boards (14-foot by 48-foot light emitting diode (LED) message boards), are expected to be highly visible from the interstates (see **Figure 4.1-4, Visual Simulation of Proposed Freeway Sign from Westbound Interstate 580** and **Figure 4.1-5, Visual Simulation of Proposed Freeway Sign from Eastbound Interstates 205 and 580**). While the raceway is only visible for a limited time period (2–3 second at the posted speed limit from

Interstates 205 and 580), thus the perception of changes to the view shed would depend on individual perceptions of the signs. However, the duration of view of the signs would be longer due to their height and size. The two proposed freeway signs would permanently change the view shed from the existing scenic vistas from I-205 and I-580 which would represent a substantial impact. Reduction of that impact to a less than significant level would require that the signs be reduced in height and size to a point where the purpose of the signs would be lost. Therefore, the proposed freeway signs are considered to be a significant and unavoidable impact of the proposed project, and there is no feasible mitigation.

Conclusion: Significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure: No feasible mitigation.

Potential Impact 4.1-2: Would the proposed project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

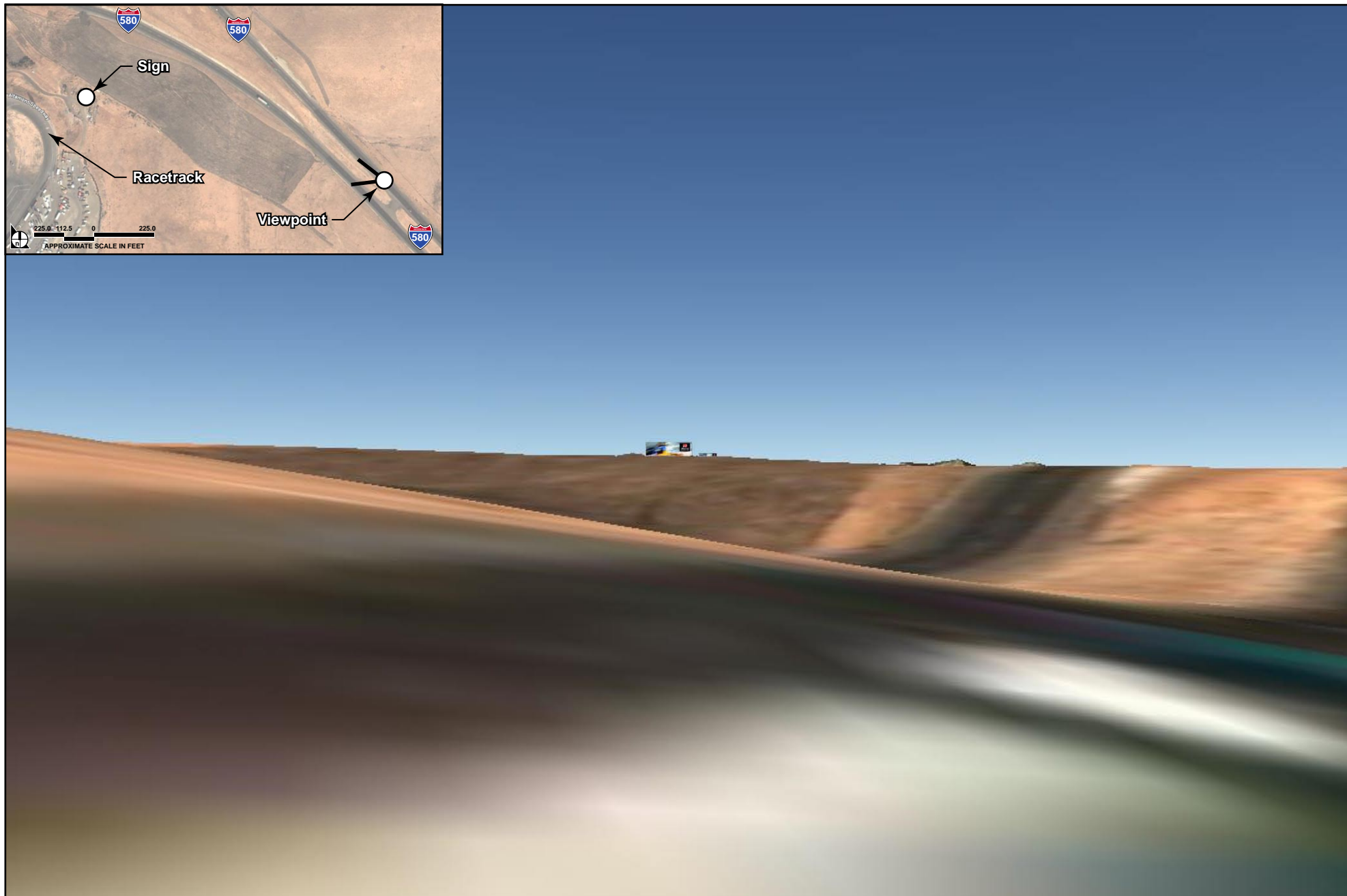
There are no visual resources such as trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings on the AMP site that are visible from that portion of I-580 in San Joaquin County that is designated as a state scenic highway. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

Conclusion: No impact.

Mitigation Measure: No mitigation required.

Potential Impact 4.1-3: Would the proposed project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

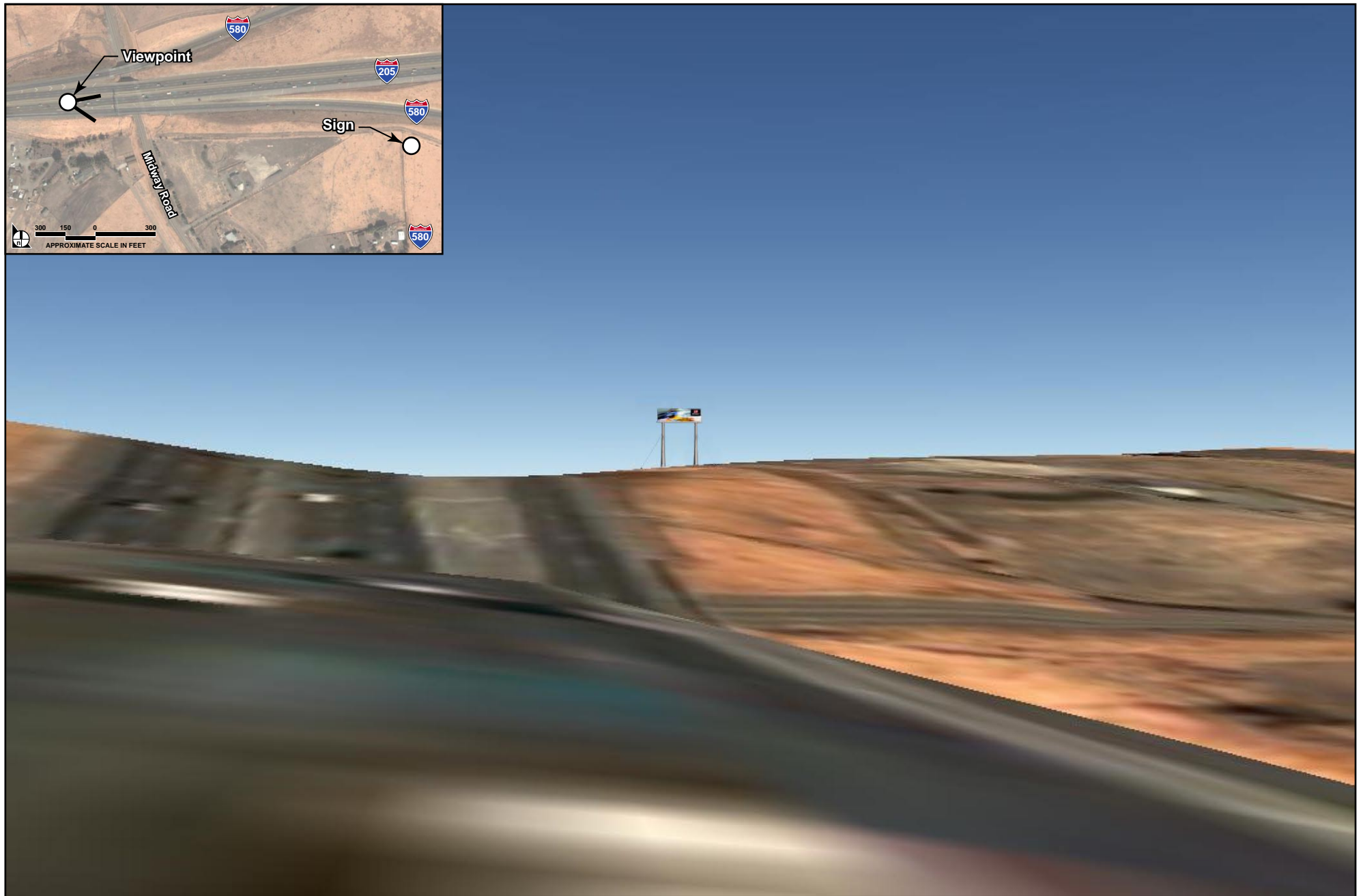
Views of the project site from developed properties are limited to the single family residence located immediately south of and upslope from the project site. Those views are unobstructed views of the majority of the raceway site. These views are defined as private views of the project site. Public view of the existing grandstand from off-site locations is limited to a brief view window for motorists traveling along I-580 as it turns south due to existing topography. Because that view is typically from a vehicle traveling at 65 miles per hour or 55 miles per hour for trucks (the posted speed limit on that portion of I-580) the actual viewing period is limited to no more than approximately 2–3 seconds. The design of the proposed grandstand roof would be a flat plane that would generally parallel the existing incline of the grandstand. The grandstand roof would only be visible from I-580 for a 2–3 second period and would not substantially alter the existing visual character of the site. This is considered a less than significant impact.



SOURCE: Google Earth - 2008, Impact Sciences, Inc. - May 2008

FIGURE **4.1-4**

Visual Simulation of Proposed Freeway Sign from Westbound Interstate 580



SOURCE: Google Earth - 2008, Impact Sciences, Inc. - May 2008

FIGURE **4.1-5**

Visual Simulation of Proposed Freeway Sign from Eastbound Interstates 205 and 580

The two proposed caretaker residences would be sited on the upper elevations of the project site toward its western boundary (see **Figure 3.0-8**). That portion of the project site is minimally visible from I-205 and I-580. The two residences would not be expected to be more than 20 feet tall, which, when viewed from I-205 and I-580, would be minimally visible at most and would not substantially alter the existing visual character of the site. This is considered a less than significant impact.

The intent of the two proposed freeway signs is to display information about the AMP, and their proposed size and location is appropriate for that intended purpose. Because the proposed locations of the two signs are a lightly developed area with scattered rural residential development, there is no appreciable built environment into which the proposed signs would visually dissolve or fade. The proposed signs would be highly visible from I-205 and I-580. The design and siting of the proposed signs would substantially alter the existing visual character of the site and the view shed. Reduction of that impact to a less than significant level would require that the signs be reduced in height and size to a point where the purpose of the signs would be lost. Although each person's perception of visual impacts is different, the proposed freeway signs are conservatively considered to be a significant and unavoidable impact of the proposed project, and there is no feasible mitigation.

Conclusion: Significant and unavoidable.

Mitigation Measure: No feasible mitigation.

Potential Impact 4.1-4: Would the proposed project create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

The new residences would represent new sources of nighttime illumination similar to other existing residential lighting in the project area. Their impact in terms of lighting on the immediate project area and when viewed from afar would be less than significant due to the low intensity of conventional residential lighting.

Lighting associated with vehicle headlights and the stadium lights represents an existing condition and would not change substantially under project conditions. Therefore, lighting associated with these uses would result in less than significant impacts to light and glare.

The two proposed LED signs along the site's I-205 and I-580 frontage would be 14 feet tall by 48 feet wide. The height of the top of the signs would be no more than 75 feet above the ground surface at the sign site. The sign would be designed such that lighting intensity would be automatically diminished by a minimum of 50 percent after 10 PM. Further, the proposed signs would be dimmable to 1 percent of full brightness for nighttime operations.

At and near the project site the illuminated signs would represent a potentially significant new source of light and glare that could affect passing motorists, and depending on final sign panel orientation, could directly impact one or more existing residences adjoining the project site. In addition to direct views of the sign panels, the general light output from the signs would have a tendency to produce a glow or halo around the signs that would extend the visible range of the physical sign. This glow or halo effect would be magnified during periods of fog due to refraction of light off of water molecules that comprise fog. The significance of the potential impact would be mitigable to less than significant levels with the built-in ability to reduce the brightness of the signs during daytime and nighttime operations.

Based on observations of similar large LED signs in the San Francisco Bay Area, these types of signs have the potential to be visible at distances of 10 miles or more (the central area of the City of Tracy is approximately 7 miles due east of the AMP site). At that distance, the human eye can identify the sign in general but not discern any specific message or image. Also at that distance, depending on the color and pattern of text, images, and backgrounds, it is possible to discern when a message changes from one image to the next. The magnitude of the signs' light and glare is heightened inasmuch as the signs would be located in what is effectively an area lacking any appreciable existing illumination. The significance of the potential impact would be mitigable to less than significant levels with the built-in ability to reduce the brightness of the signs during daytime and nighttime operations.

Conclusion: Potentially significant.

AES-1: The maximum brightness of the LED freeway signs shall be established after their installation for both daylight and nighttime periods. The maximum brightness level during daylight hours shall be set no brighter than field observations by the Alameda County Planning Department determine pose no impacts to motorists on I-205 or I-580. The maximum brightness level during nighttime hours shall be set no brighter than field observations determine pose no impacts to motorists on I-205 or I-580 and that further do not allow the signs to be visible from the City of Tracy's western city boundary.

Significance After Mitigation: Less than significant.