

4.1 Aesthetics

4.1.1 Introduction

This section describes the existing visual and aesthetic resources within the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. The section also describes applicable federal and state plans and policies regarding the protection of visual and scenic resources. Local laws, regulations, policies, and plans are described in Appendix A. The potential impacts on aesthetics from construction and operation of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are evaluated pursuant to the significance criteria under CEQA Guidelines Appendix G.

4.1.2 Terminology Overview

Aesthetics refers to visual resources and the quality of what can be seen or perceived in the environment, including such characteristics as building scale and mass, design character, and landscaping. Key terms used in this section to describe aesthetics are defined below.

Visual character is the unique set of landscape features that combine to make a view, including native landforms, water, and vegetation patterns as well as built features such as buildings, roads, and other structures. In urban settings, the visual character is primarily influenced by the land use type and density, urban landscaping and design, topography, and background setting.

Visual quality is the intrinsic appeal of a landscape or scene due to the combination of natural and built features in the landscape. Natural and built features combine to form unique perspectives with varying degrees of visual quality, which is rated in this analysis as high, moderate, or low. A high visual quality rating is defined as visual resources that are unique or exemplary of the region's natural or cultural scenic amenities. A moderate visual quality rating is defined as visual resources typical or characteristic of the region's natural and/or cultural visual amenities. A low visual quality rating refers to areas generally lacking in natural or cultural visual resource amenities typical of the region.

Viewer concern addresses the general public's level of interest or concern of viewers regarding an area's visual resources and is closely aligned with viewers' expectations for the area. Viewer concern reflects the importance placed on a given landscape based on the human perceptions of the intrinsic beauty of the existing landforms, rockforms, water features, vegetation patterns and cultural features. Viewer concern is generally rated as high, moderate, or low; where high viewer concern is represented by views that are appreciated frequently, for longer durations, and/or by receptors located within a short distance. In contrast, low viewer concern is characterized by views that are not regarded for intrinsic beauty and/or are not seen by many sensitive receptors, or are only seen for short durations and from long distances where views are obstructed. Viewer concern ratings take into consideration viewer activity, view duration, viewing distance, adjacent land use, and special management or planning designation.

Viewer exposure describes the degree to which viewers are exposed to views of the landscape. Viewer exposure considers landscape visibility, distance from which the landscape can be seen by viewers, number of viewers, and the duration of view.

Visual sensitivity reflects the level of interest or concern that viewers and responsible land management agencies have for a particular visual resource, taking into account visual quality, viewer concern, and viewer exposure. Visual sensitivity is a measure of how noticeable proposed changes might be in a particular setting and is determined based on the distance from a viewer, the contrast of the proposed changes, and the duration that a particular view would be available to viewers. For example, areas such as scenic vistas, parks, trails, and scenic roadways typically have a high visual quality and visual sensitivity because these locales are publicly protected, appear natural, view durations are typically long, and close-up views are more commonly available.

Key observation point (KOP) is a unique view or “observation” point from a specific location looking in a specific direction. KOPs were identified during preparation of the PEA and design process and provide typical views and/or views of high interest or concern of the Proposed Project and alternatives areas.

4.1.3 Regulatory Setting

Federal Laws, Regulations, and Policies

No federal laws, regulations, or policies are applicable to aesthetics in relation to the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

State Laws, Regulations, and Policies

California Scenic Highway Program

In 1963, the California State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program, a provision of the Streets and Highways Code, to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of California (California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] 2018a). The state highway system includes designated scenic highways and those that are eligible for designation as scenic highways. According to the California Scenic Highway Mapping System, State Route (SR) 46 and the segment of Highway 101 south of SR 46 are eligible for listing as state scenic highways, though they are not officially designated as such (Caltrans 2018b).

4.1.4 Environmental Setting

Regional Setting

The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are located from 25 to 35 miles east of the Pacific Ocean in an area that is between the Temblor Range and the Santa Lucia Coastal Range, at the southern end of the Salinas River Valley. The topography in this area ranges from flat to gently sloping rolling hills, with some steep slopes (up to 960 feet in elevation) occurring along roadsides. The Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are located in both unincorporated San Luis Obispo County (County) and the City of Paso Robles (City). These areas of the

unincorporated County are dominated by agricultural uses, mainly vineyards. Areas of the City within which the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would be located consist of varied land uses including residential, commercial, and light industrial uses.

Natural features in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives include the Salinas River, Huer Huero Creek, and Estrella River. The Salinas River runs north along Highway 101 and would be adjacent to the Proposed Project's 70 kilovolt (kV) power line reconductoring segment (the river also would run parallel to the 70 kV reconductoring segments under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C). Huer Huero Creek runs northwesterly through the Proposed Project area and generally parallels the Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line segment for about 3 miles. The Estrella River runs north of Alternative SS-1 and abuts portions of Alternative PLR-1C Minor Route Variation 1. The visual character of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas is defined by these varied landscapes, which include vineyards, agriculture, open space, and urban elements.

Existing Visual Character and Views

Proposed Project

The proposed Estrella Substation site occupies an approximately 15-acre area to the north of Union Road. The substation site and surrounding land is characterized by rolling hills occupied by vineyards with wineries, existing 500 kV and 230 kV transmission towers, distribution poles, and a few interspersed single-family residences. Figure 4.1-1 shows the location of KOPs in the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas. Subsequent figures show each KOP, along with visual simulations of Proposed Project features, where available. KOPs 1 (Figure 4.1-2) and 2 (Figure 4.1-3) show representative views of the substation site from Union Road (looking from both eastern and western ends of the site).

From the substation site, the new 70 kV power line alignment runs west, generally parallel to Union Road and follows existing transmission lines. Portions of the new 70 kV power line in this area also would traverse privately-owned land occupied by vineyards and a residence, and would cross Huer Huero Creek. After crossing Huer Huero Creek, the new 70 kV power line would closely follow Union Road for roughly 1.3 mile before meeting the junction with SR 46. This section of the new 70 kV power line would pass by Barney Schwartz Park and the Paso Robles Sports Club, which are located just off of Union Road. KOP 3 (Figure 4.1-4) shows a view of the proposed alignment from Union Road in front of Barney Schwartz Park and is representative of recreationists' views upon entering the park. KOP 4 (Figure 4.1-5) shows a more distant view looking northeast toward the proposed alignment along Union from a ramada within Barney Schwartz Park. This KOP provides a representative view of the existing landscape from within the park looking toward the proposed 70 kV power line.

As noted above, the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line alignment follows Union Road to the junction with SR 46, at which point the 70 kV line crosses over SR 46 in a northerly direct, before passing through an industrial business district (i.e., Golden Hill Industrial Park). This area is relatively flat and characterized by existing industrial uses and structures. KOP 5 (Figure 4.1-6) shows a public view from SR 46 facing west toward the point at which the new power line would cross the highway. From Golden Hill Road at the northern end of the business district, the

proposed 70 kV alignment continues north where Golden Hill Road turns into a private lane used for residential access. The Circle B Homeowners Association is located in this area. KOP 6 (Figure 4.1-7) shows a public view of Golden Hill Road looking north from just north of the San Antonio Winery. North of Lake Place, the alignment turns west and then joins and continues along Buena Vista Drive until ultimately reaching River Road. The landscape in this area is characterized by gently rolling hills, vineyards, pastures, and residential development. The proposed 70 kV alignment is visible in the foreground along Golden Hill Road and Buena Vista Drive, as well as from private lanes and nearby residences. KOP 7 (Figure 4.1-8) provides a representative view of the landscape near where the new 70 kV power line would connect with the existing line on River Road.

The Proposed Project's approximately 3-mile 70 kV reconductoring segment along River Road follows an established utility corridor. The landscape in this area is characterized by steep hills, native and ornamental vegetation, existing distribution lines, and residential neighborhoods. Close-up views of the reconductoring segment would be available from River Road, the crossing at SR 46, Riverglen Drive and the surrounding neighborhood, and many nearby residences. KOP 8 (Figure 4.1-9) provides a representative view of the reconductoring segment from Clubhouse Drive, near North River Road. Approximately 0.5 mile south of the SR 46 crossing, the existing 70 kV power line (to be reconducted) enters a residential neighborhood and follows Riverglen Drive for approximately 0.25 mile. KOP 9 (Figure 4.1-10) shows a representative view of the reconductoring segment from Riverglen Drive. The existing line then crosses Union Road, continues south for approximately 1 mile (generally along hilltops above River Road) and then crosses open pastures and the backside of neighborhoods until it ends at the Paso Robles Substation.

Reasonably Foreseeable Distribution Components

The reasonably foreseeable distribution components would be installed primarily in rural, agricultural areas and within existing road rights-of-way. The reasonably foreseeable southern distribution line segment would pass through agricultural fields following an existing dirt road north from Estrella Substation. Existing visual conditions in this area are similar to those for the proposed Estrella Substation site (i.e., scenic rolling hills occupied by vineyards), which are shown in KOP 1 (Figure 4.1-2) and KOP 2 (Figure 4.1-3). The reasonably foreseeable northern distribution line segment would follow the existing SR 46 right-of-way (installed within the median). This area of SR 46 passes through open space and by Hunter Ranch Golf Course. Visual conditions are scenic and rural. Although not in the same locations as the northern distribution line segment, KOP 5 (Figure 4.1-6) and KOP 10 (Figure 4.1-11) provide representative views from SR 46 in the Paso Robles area. Additional 21/12 kV pad-mounted transformers would be installed primarily along existing roads in rural areas, including areas adjacent to or near agricultural fields and single-family residences.

Alternatives

In general, many of the alternatives would be located in rural, agricultural areas, often where transmission infrastructure already exists. In particular, both alternative substation sites (Alternatives SS-1 and SE-1A) would be located in rural areas, while both Alternative PLR-1A and PLR-1C would allow the new 70 kV power line segment to pass through the more rural area north of Paso Robles Municipal Airport rather than pass through the Golden Hill Industrial Park and other areas within the City. The existing 500/230 kV transmission corridor is a prominent

feature in the area of many of the alternatives and Templeton Substation is adjacent to the Alternative SE-1A site. The Alternative SS-1 site (Bonel Ranch) is adjacent to the Estrella River and Alternative PLR-1C Minor Route Variation 1 follows the Estrella River corridor along Estrella Road. Example front-of-the-meter (FTM) battery energy storage system (BESS) sites 6, 7, and 8 are each adjacent to existing area substations, while the example FTM Site 5 is adjacent to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Air Attack Base, which is next to the Paso Robles Municipal Airport.

Several of the alternatives or portions of alternatives are located in more densely developed areas within the City of Paso Robles. Like the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, both Alternative PLR-1A and PLR-1C would reconductor the existing San Miguel-Paso Robles 70 kV power line to the point where it meets the Paso Robles Substation. Thus, the reconductoring segments for these alternatives would pass through the same residential areas described above for the Proposed Project (see KOPs 8 and 9 in Figure 4.1-9 and Figure 4.1-10). The 70 kV power line under Alternative SE-PLR-2 also would pass through residential and commercial areas of Paso Robles along South River Road north of Charolais Road to Niblick Road. Alternative PLR-3 would be routed through the Golden Hill Industrial Park and the private portion of Golden Hill Road north of San Antonio Winery; but since the 70 kV power line would be undergrounded for this segment, the components would not be visible to surrounding land uses (except for the transition stations at each end of the underground alignment). Example FTM Sites 1-4 would all be located within the City near Paso Robles Substation, including adjacent to the baseball field at Paso Robles High School (example FTM Site 4) and within the Woodland Plaza II shopping center (example FTM Site 2).

KOPs 10 through 23 show existing views at alternative site locations and along alternative alignments, as shown in Figure 4.1-11 through Figure 4.1-17. The visibility and visual conditions, visual quality, and visual sensitivity of the existing environment captured by the KOPs (including those for the Proposed Project) are summarized in Table 4.1-1. Additionally, Table 4.1-2 further describes the visual conditions at the example FTM sites under Alternative BS-2.

Viewer Groups

Viewer groups in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives and their sensitivity to visual changes are described below. Viewer groups with visual access to the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives areas are divided into the categories of residents, motorists, recreationists, and patrons of nearby businesses, including tourists.

Residents

The Estrella Substation site is immediately visible from a few residences located in the surrounding area. Residences located in the vicinity of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would also have views of the 70 kV line to varying degrees. Several KOPs, including KOP 6 (Figure 4.1-7) and KOP 8 (Figure 4.1-9) provide typical views of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line alignment from Golden Hill Road and Clubhouse Drive, respectively, which are indicative of the types of views that many residents may experience. Additionally, portions of power line routing alternative (Alternatives PLR-1A, PLR-1C, and SE-PLR-2) that pass through residential areas of the County and City would be visible by residents in the area. The new substations under Alternative SS-1 or Alternative SE-1A could be visible to the few residences in the surrounding

areas. In general, as a viewer group, residents have a heightened sensitivity to the surrounding viewshed because they have high frequency and longer duration of views, as well as heightened appreciation for the aesthetic environment (e.g., landforms, rockforms, water features, and vegetation patterns) surrounding their residences. Typically, visual sensitivities of residents increase with higher visibility and higher exposure.

Motorists

Motorists traveling on Union Road, SR 46, Golden Hill Road, North River Road, and other local roads would have views of the Proposed Project area and reasonably foreseeable distribution components. Motorists using Wellsona Road would have views of Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C, and those traveling on Estrella Road would have views of Alternative SS-1 and PLR-1C (particularly Minor Route Variation 1). Similarly, Alternatives SE-1 and SE-PLR-2 are visible from El Pomar Drive and South River Road, among other local roads. Example FTM sites under Alternative BS-2 are visible from various local roads.

In general, motorists' views would be temporary and would last for shorter durations. As a result, most motorists in this area would have reduced sensitivity to the surrounding viewshed. However, motorists traveling on scenic corridors such as Union Road and SR 46 (eligible for listing as a state scenic highway) are expected to have a somewhat higher sensitivity to the surrounding viewshed in comparison to other local roads. Motorists represent the largest potentially affected view group for the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

Recreationists

Recreationists with views of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would include users at Barney Schwartz Park (see KOP 3 [Figure 4.1-4] and KOP 4 [Figure 4.1-5]) and Paso Robles Sports Club. Golfers at River Oaks Golf Course would also have views of the Proposed Project's 70 kV reconductoring segment (as well as the reconductoring segment under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C), as would users of the Salinas River Parkway Trail. Golfers at Hunter Ranch Golf Course would have views of the northern reasonably foreseeable new distribution line segment. Additionally, recreational users of the Charolais Corridor Trail would have views of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment along South River Road at Charolais Road. Recreational users of the baseball field at Paso Robles High School would have views of the potential FTM BESS facilities at example FTM Site 4. See Section 4.16, "Recreation," for detailed discussion of the parks and recreational resources in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

Since recreationists tend to have longer view durations, their viewer sensitivity is usually considered higher than an average viewer, although their sensitivity is also influenced by viewing distance, visual quality, and viewer concern.

Patrons of Nearby Businesses

As discussed above, an approximately 1-mile segment of the Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line would traverse through a mix of industrial, commercial, and business park uses (Golden Hill Industrial Park) in eastern Paso Robles after it crosses SR 46. Businesses adjacent to the power line alignment include Paso Robles Self Storage, El Paso Self Storage, Hank's Welding

Services, Paso Robles Waste & Recycle, Crop Production Services, Inc., Mayan Hardwood, Davis Boats, IQMS, Carrier Totaline, Lazer Star, and Artistry in Motion. Other businesses along the Proposed Project 70 kV power line alignment in this area catering more to tourists include Cava Robles RV Park and Riboli Family of San Antonio Winery and Event Center. With the exception of the 1-mile segment discussed above, the majority of the Proposed Project, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and many of the alternatives are located in rural, agricultural areas, where there are few businesses. The northern portion of Alternative SE-PLR-2 would pass through commercial areas of the City along South River Road, while FTM Site 2 would be located within the Woodland Plaza II shopping center, where a number of existing businesses are located.

Patrons of businesses in the area of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would have temporary views of the new power line or distribution/alternative facilities. Patrons of those businesses that cater to tourists, such as Cava Robles RV Park and Riboli Family of San Antonio Winery and Event Center, may have a somewhat higher expectation of the surrounding landscape because these businesses market patronage experiences to include scenic views and drives to and around these properties and surrounding areas (Sun RV Resorts 2020). For these reasons, viewer concern ratings are considered moderate or moderate-to-high.

Scenic Vistas

A scenic vista is generally defined as a viewpoint that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape for the benefit of the general public. Scenic vistas are also typically designated by an agency or department that actively manages the scenic vista to maintain or protect the public view through provision of public access, information, safety and protection of resources (e.g., signage, parking area, and safety fencing/rails). The landscape of the City of Paso Robles and unincorporated areas of San Luis Obispo County is characterized by a combination of vineyards, agriculture, rural residential development, and urban land uses in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives. The following natural landmarks and open space viewsheds are identified in the City of Paso Robles General Plan (2003):

- Salinas River
- Huer Huero Creek
- Field at north end of Ramada Drive (between the railroad and Salinas River)
- Oak-covered hillsides
- East Side creeks/riparian corridors (unnamed creeks #1-5 plus Turtle/Oak Creek)
- View from Barney Schwartz Park southwest toward and into the Chandler Ranch area

Scenic Highways and Corridors

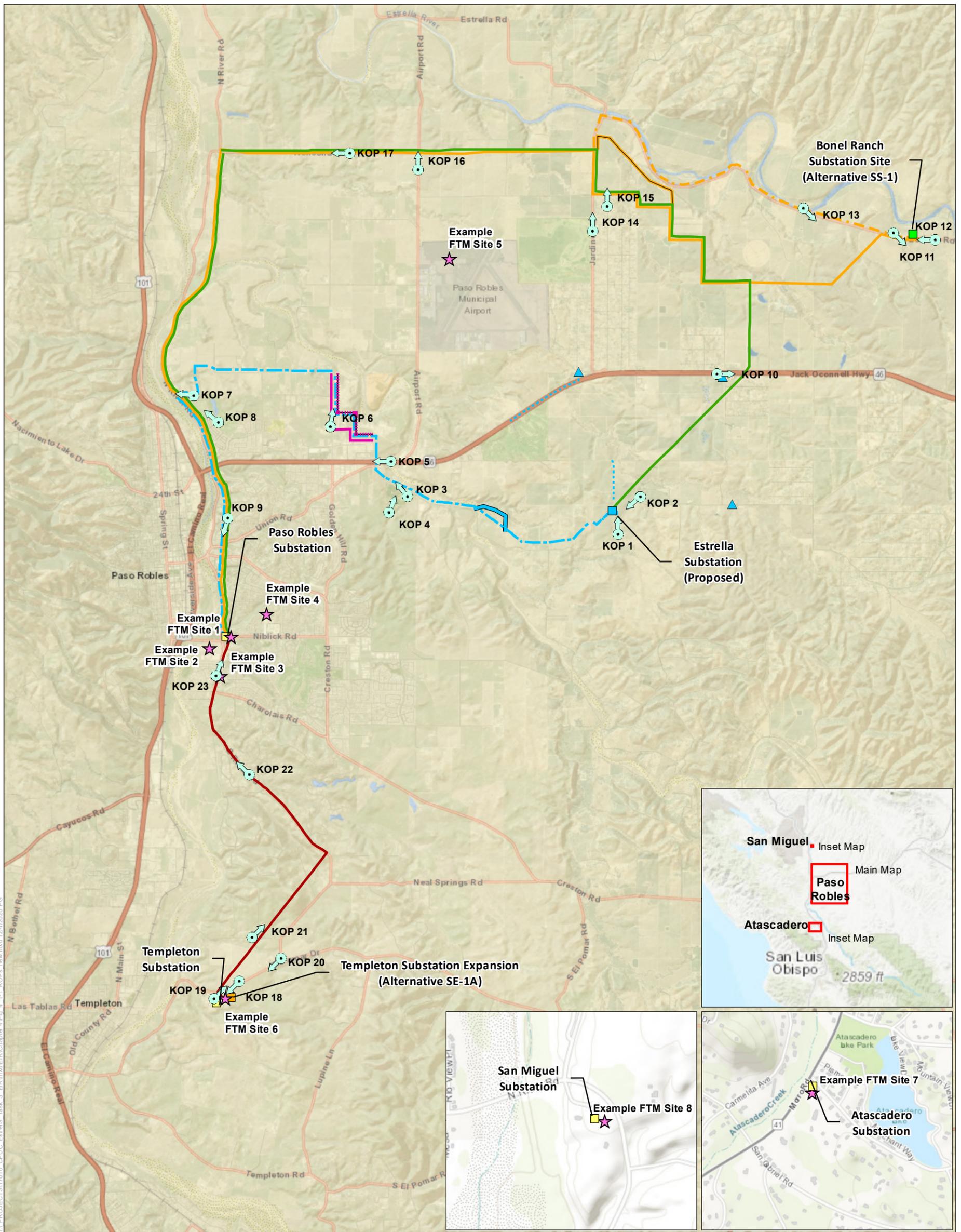
There are no state-designated scenic highways in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, or alternatives. However, SR 46 and the

segment of Highway 101 south of SR 46 in the Paso Robles area are both eligible for listing as state scenic highways (Caltrans 2018b). Additionally, Union Road is considered a visual corridor and gateway in the City of Paso Robles General Plan (City of Paso Robles 2003). The full length of Highway 101 that runs parallel to Paso Robles is also considered a visual corridor in the City's General Plan. Under the Proposed Project, the new 70 kV power line would cross SR 46 near its intersection with Union Road. The Proposed Project's 70 kV reconductoring segment (as well as the reconductoring segments for Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C) is roughly 0.1 mile east of Highway 101. Additionally, the northern reasonably foreseeable new distribution line segment would be installed within the median of SR 46, while Alternative PLR-1A would also traverse SR 46 near the intersection with Branch Road.

Light and Glare

Nighttime lighting is necessary to provide and maintain safe, secure, and attractive environments. Light that falls beyond the intended area of illumination is referred to as "light trespass." The most common cause of light trespass is spillover light, which occurs when a lighting source illuminates surfaces beyond the intended area, such as when building security lighting or parking lot lights shine onto neighboring properties. Spillover light can adversely affect light-sensitive uses, such as residences, at nighttime. Both light intensity and fixtures can affect the amount of any light spillover. Modern, energy-efficient fixtures that face downward, such as shielded light fixtures, are typically less obtrusive than older, upward-facing light fixtures. Glare is caused by light reflections from pavement, vehicles, and building materials such as reflective glass, polished surfaces, or metallic architectural features. During daylight hours, the amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight.

Throughout the vicinity of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives, the primary sources of nighttime lighting and glare are associated with the urban areas of Paso Robles. Nighttime lighting and glare in the more rural areas of the County are substantially less pronounced and associated with scattered residential uses.



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Proposed Project

- Estrella Substation
- 70kV Route
- 70 kV Minor Route Variation 1
- Reasonably Foreseeable Distribution Components**
- New Distribution Line Segments
- ▲ Additional 21/12 kV Pad-Mounted Transformer
- Existing Infrastructure**
- Existing Substations

Project Alternatives

- ★ Front-of-the-Meter (FTM) Battery Storage Sites (Alternative BS-2)
- Alternative SS-1: Bonel Ranch Substation Site
- Alternative SE-1A: Templeton Substation Expansion - 230/70 kV Substation
- Alternative PLR-1A: Estrella Route to Estrella Substation
- Alternative PLR-1C: Estrella Route to Bonel Ranch, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 1
- Alternative PLR-1C: Minor Route Variation 2
- Alternative PLR-3A: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 1
- Alternative PLR-3B: Strategic Undergrounding, Option 2
- Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

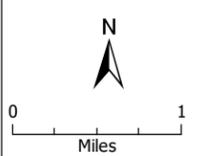
Aesthetic Features

- ▲ Key Observation Points (KOPs)

Figure 4.1-1
Key Observation Points

Source: ESRI 2018, PG&E 2019, SCWA 2017

Note: The route variations shown are offset and simplified in order to display the alignments of the alternative routes that may overlap in places



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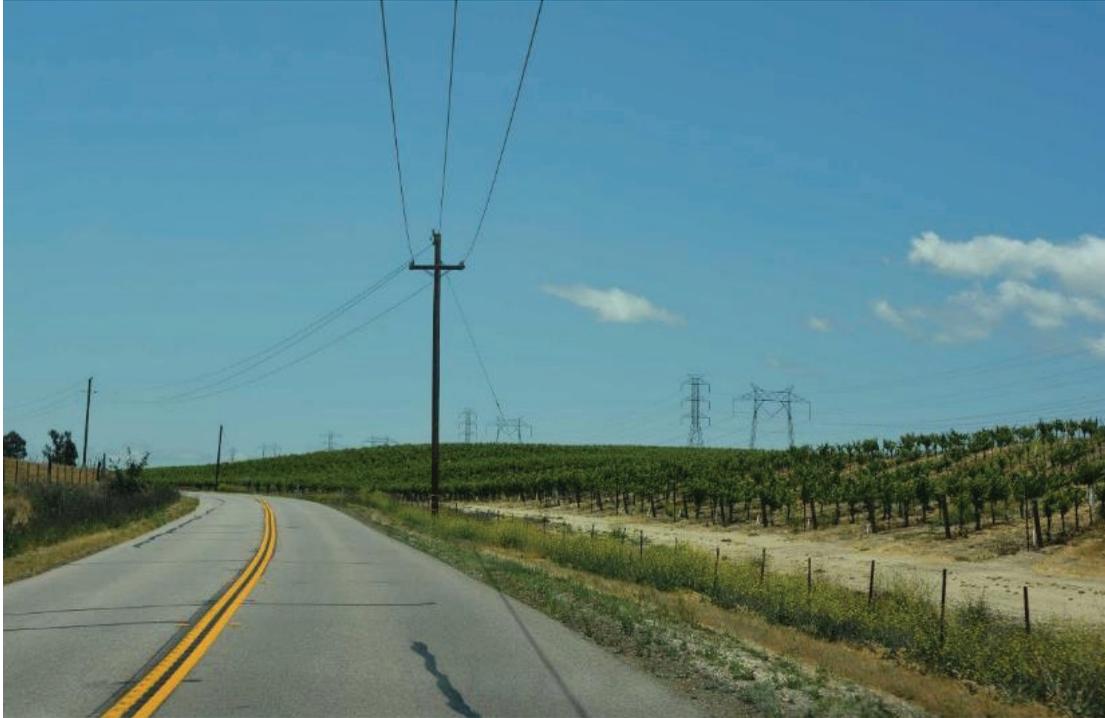
KOP 1. Existing view from Union Rd. looking northeast toward the proposed Estrella Substation site.



Visual simulation of the Estrella Substation from KOP 1.

Source: SWCA 2019

Figure 4.1-2. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 1



KOP 2. Existing view from Union Rd. looking west toward the proposed Estrella Substation site.



Visual simulation of the proposed Estrella Substation from KOP 2.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-3. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 2



KOP 3. Existing view looking northwest toward the proposed 70 kV power line from Union Rd. in front of Barney Schwartz Park.



Visual simulation of the proposed 70 kV power line looking northwest from Union Rd. in front of Barney Schwartz Park.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-4. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 3



KOP 4. Existing view looking northeast toward proposed 70 kV power line along Union Rd. from a ramada within Barney Schwartz Park.



Visual simulation of the proposed 70 kV power line looking northeast toward Union Rd. from a ramada within Barney Schwartz Park.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-5. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 4



KOP 5. Existing view looking west from SR 46 towards Paso Robles where proposed 70 kV power line would cross the highway.



Visual simulation of KOP 5 looking west from SR 46 towards Paso Robles.

Source: SWCA 2017



KOP 6. Existing view facing north toward the proposed 70 kV power line route from Golden Hill Rd.



Visual simulation of KOP 6 facing north toward the proposed 70 kV power line from Golden Hill Rd.

Source: SWCA 2019

Figure 4.1-7. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 6



KOP 7. Existing private view looking northwest from a private lane toward the point where the proposed 70 kV power line connects to the reconducted segment.



Visual simulation of KOP 7 from a private lane looking northwest toward the point where the proposed 70 kV power line connects to the reconducted segment.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-8. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 7



KOP 8. Existing long-range view looking west from Clubhouse Dr. toward the proposed 70 kV reconducted segment and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.



Visual simulation of KOP 8 from Clubhouse Dr. looking west toward the 70 kV reconducted segment and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-9. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 8



KOP 9. Existing public view looking south along Riverglen Dr. toward the proposed 70 kV reconducted segment and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.



Visual simulation of KOP 9 from Riverglen Dr. looking south toward the proposed 70 kV reconducted segment and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.

Source: SWCA 2017

Figure 4.1-10. Existing and Simulated Views of KOP 9



KOP 10. Existing view from SR 46 looking east toward power line and Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.



KOP 11. Existing view looking southeast toward Bonel Ranch Substation site (Alternative SS-1) along the Alternative PLR-1C power line route from Estrella Rd.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-11. Existing Views from KOPs and 10 and 11



KOP 12. Existing view looking west toward Bonel Ranch Substation Alternative (SS-1) along Alternative PLR-1C power line route from Estrella Rd.



KOP 13. Existing view looking southeast along Alternative PLR-1C (Minor Route Variation 1) power line route from Estrella Rd.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-12. Existing Views from KOPs and 12 and 13



KOP 14. Existing view looking north toward power line routes of Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C along Jardine Rd. and intersection with Oak Tree Valley Place (east of Links Golf Course of Paso Robles).



KOP 15. Existing view looking north toward Alternative PLR-1A power line route alternative from northern end of Whispering Oak Wy.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-13. Existing Views from KOPs and 14 and 15



KOP 16. Existing view looking north toward Alternative PLR-1A power line route from Airport Rd.



KOP 17. Existing view looking west along Alternative PLR-1A power line route from Wellsona Rd.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-14. Existing Views from KOPs and 16 and 17



KOP 18. Existing view looking southwest along Alternative SE-PLR-2 power line route toward Templeton Substation Alternative (SE-1) from El Pomar Dr.



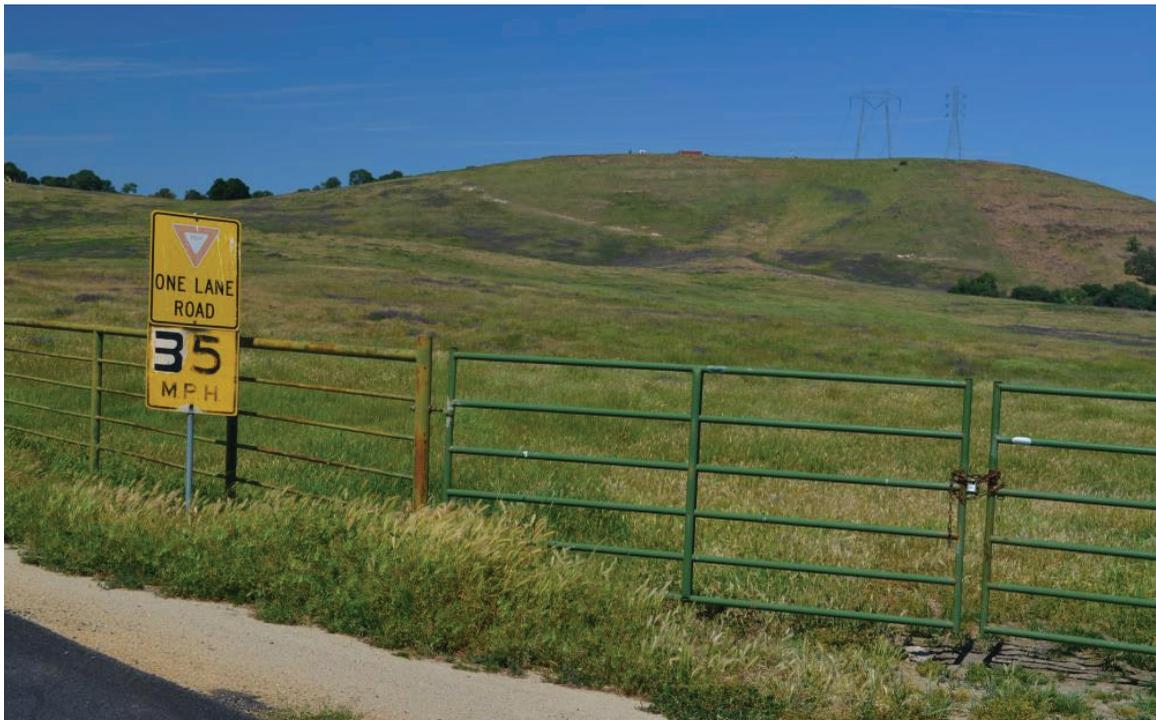
KOP 19. Existing view looking northeast toward Alternative SE-PLR-2 from toward the Templeton Substation Alternative. View includes existing 230 kV and 500 kV transmission lines.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-15. Existing Views from KOPs and 18 and 19



KOP 20. Existing view looking southwest toward Templeton Substation (Alternative SE-1) from El Pomar Drive west of Neal Springs Rd (near residence on El Pomar).



KOP 21. Existing view looking northeast toward Alternative SE-PLR-2 power line route from Concho Way.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-16. Existing Views from KOPs and 20 and 21



KOP 22. Existing view looking northwest toward Alternative SE-PLR-2 power line route from Spanish Camp Rd. and River Rd.



KOP 23. Existing view looking north-northeast toward Alternative SE-PLR-2 power line route from South River Rd.

Source: Horizon West and PG&E 2019

Figure 4.1-17. Existing Views from KOPs and 22 and 23

Table 4.1-1. Key Observation Point Visual Characteristics Summary

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
KOP 1: Looking northeast toward Estrella Substation site from Union Road.	Representative close-up view of the proposed Estrella Substation site from the nearest residence and from the perspective of motorists traveling on Union Road. Landscape is predominantly agricultural, consisting of vineyards, although existing 230 kV and 500 kV transmission lines and towers are visible in the middleground. The vineyards and rolling topography have a high visual appeal and dominate the viewshed relative to the built structures.	Moderate -to-high	High	Moderate	Moderate -to-high
KOP 2: Looking southeast toward Estrella Substation site from Union Road.	Representative close-up view of the eastern side of the Estrella Substation site from the perspective of motorists traveling west along Union Road. Similar to KOP 1, the landscape is predominantly agricultural, consisting of mostly vineyards, although views of the 230 kV and 500 kV transmission lines and towers are visible in the middleground and existing utility poles and a distribution line along Union Road are visible in the foreground. Views of vineyards are generally considered scenic for motorists and tourists traveling along Union Road.	Moderate -to-high	High	Moderate	Moderate -to-high
KOP 3: Looking northwest toward the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route from Barney Schwartz Park at Union Road.	Representative view of the proposed 70 kV power line route along Union Road from the Barney Schwartz Park entrance. From this viewpoint, the landscape predominantly consists of residential development and the local baseball park, Union Road and existing distribution lines and supporting structures.	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate -to-high	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
KOP 4: Looking northeast toward the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route from a ramada within Barney Schwartz Park.	Representative view from a recreationist's perspective. The landscape visible from KOP 4 is dominated by the baseball park, 100-foot-tall stadium light poles, fencing, and concession stands that are visible in the foreground. Residential development and existing distribution lines and supporting structures, and pastures are visible in the middleground. The new 70 kV power line would also be in the middleground.	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
KOP 5: Looking west toward the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route from SR 46 (close range view for motorists).	Representative view from perspective of motorists traveling west on SR 46. From this viewpoint, the visible landscape predominantly consists of pastures, wineries, and residences, as well as existing distribution lines and supporting structures. The number of viewers potentially seeing the Proposed Project components from this vantage point is high but consist of motorists traveling at high speeds on SR 46.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
KOP 6: Looking north from Golden Hill Road toward the Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line segment (and undergrounded segment under Alternative PLR-3).	Representative views from perspective of motorists traveling on Golden Hill Road and the closest residence. This particular area is characterized by rural residential uses and tourist attractions including the winery and event center and the Cava Robles RV Park. From this viewpoint, the landscape includes mature trees, security gate, road leading to the Cava Robles RV Park (pictured at right in the photo), and open space. No existing overhead distribution lines are apparent from this KOP. Overhead distribution lines that had existed along this portion of Golden Hill Road prior to 2017-2018 were undergrounded as part of the Cava Robles RV Park construction (Dawson,	Moderate-to-High	Moderate-to-High	Moderate	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
	pers. comm., 2020). The Cava Robles RV Park property, shown at right in KOP 6, also was designated as Parks and Open Space (POS) (see Figure 4.11-1 in Section 4.11, “Land Use and Planning”) by the City of Paso Robles during the City’s review and approval of the Cava Robles development.				
KOP 7: Looking northwest from a private lane along the new 70 kV power line route near the junction with the existing San Miguel-Paso Robles 70 kV power line (i.e., reconductoring segment).	Representative view of where the Proposed Project’s new 70 kV power line segment transitions to the reconductoring segment of the existing line along River Road, from perspective of a private residence on this lane. Views from this KOP are dominated by agricultural fields, trees, and foothills in the background. The number of viewers from this KOP would be low, but the views would be close-up and duration would be high for nearby residents.	Moderate	Moderate-to-High	Moderate-to-High	Moderate-to-high
KOP 8: Looking west from Clubhouse Drive toward Proposed Project’s 70 kV reconductoring segment (and reconductoring segments for Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C).	Clubhouse Drive is a public road adjacent to a private club and the River Oaks Golf Course in a residential area just east of North River Road. This photo provides a representative view of the reconductoring segment from residential areas. From this KOP, views predominantly include open fields with vegetation in the foreground; existing distribution lines and supporting structures in the middleground, and rolling hills in the background.	Moderate	Low	Moderate-to-high	Low
KOP 9: Looking south along Riverglen Drive along the Proposed Project’s 70 kV reconductoring segment (and	Riverglen Drive is a public road in a residential area of Paso Robles. This photo provides a typical close-up view of the reconductoring segment from residential areas along the alignment. Views from this KOP are	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	High	Low-to-Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
reconductoring segment for Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C).	predominantly developed with residences, trees, and existing distribution and power lines and supporting structures. A high number of residences would have close-up and long duration views of the reconducted power line in this location.				
KOP 10: Looking east from SR 46 near Branch Road toward the Alternative PLR-1A alignment.	Alternative PLR-1A would parallel the existing 500/230 kV transmission corridor. This photo provides a representative view from the perspective of a motorist traveling on SR 46 with fleeting views due to the speed of travel. Views from this KOP mostly consist of agricultural lands, residential development, transmission lines and supporting infrastructure.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
KOP 11: Looking southeast from Estrella Road toward the Bonel Ranch Substation Site (Alternative SS-1).	Representative view of the substation site under Alternative SS-1 from the perspective of a motorist traveling on Estrella Road. Views from this KOP mostly consist of agricultural land, open pastures, a few residences, distribution lines and supporting structures. Undeveloped foothills can be seen in the background. There are a low number of viewers in this area, but a high duration of views for nearby residents.	Moderate-to-High	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate
KOP 12: Looking west from Estrella Road toward the Bonel Ranch Substation Site (Alternative SS-1).	Represents a typical view of the western side of the substation site under Alternative SS-1 from the perspective of a motorist traveling on Estrella Road. Views predominantly consist of agricultural land, open pastures, fencing, distribution lines and supporting structures. There are a low number of viewers in this area, but a high duration of views for nearby residents.	Moderate-to-high	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
KOP 13: Looking southeast from Estrella Road along the Alternative PLR-1C, Minor Route Variation 1 alignment.	Represents a typical view for a motorist using Estrella Road in the location where the 70 kV power line would be installed under Alternative PLR-1C, Minor Route Variation 1. Views from this KOP predominantly consist of open agricultural land, fencing, distribution lines, and mature trees. There would be a low number of viewers in this area, but high duration of views for nearby residents.	Moderate -to-high	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate
KOP 14: Looking north along Jardine Rd from near the intersection with Oak Tree Valley Place (east of Links Golf Course of Paso Robles) towards the Alternative PLR-1A/-1C alignment.	Represents a typical view for a motorist using Jardine Road and a resident located on this road looking toward where the 70 kV power line would be installed under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C. From this KOP, views mostly consist of residential development, the golf course to the west, existing distribution lines and supporting structures, and agricultural land. The duration of views of the alternative components from this area would be high for nearby residents, but low for motorists.	Moderate	Moderate-to-High	Moderate	Moderate
KOP 15: Looking north from the northern end of Whispering Oak Way toward the Alternative PLR-1A/-1C alignment.	Represents a typical view of the 70 kV power line alignment under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C from the perspective of a resident on Whispering Oak Way. Views consist of fencing, distribution lines, agricultural land, and some trees. There are a relatively low number of viewers in this area, but a high duration of views for nearby residents.	Moderate	Moderate-to-High	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate
KOP 16: Looking north from Airport Road toward the Alternative PLR-1A/PLR-1C alignment.	Represents a typical view of the 70 kV power line alignment under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C from the perspective of a motorist traveling on Airport Road. Views from this KOP include vineyards in the foreground	Moderate	Moderate-to-high	Moderate	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
	and distribution lines in the middleground. There would be a moderate number of motorists in this area, and there are a few scattered residences.				
KOP 17: Looking west from Wellsona Road in an area west of Airport Road along the power line route of Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C.	Represents a typical view of the 70 kV power line alignment under Alternatives PLR-1A and PLR-1C from the perspective of a motorist traveling on Wellsona Road. Views of agricultural pasture lands and distribution lines can be seen from this KOP.	Moderate	Moderate-to-high	Moderate	Moderate
KOP 18: Looking southwest from El Pomar Drive toward the Templeton Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A).	Represents a typical view of the Templeton Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A) from the perspective of a motorist traveling on El Pomar Drive. While the landscape includes vegetation and agricultural lands, this view is dominated by existing transmission towers, electrical lines, and supporting structures.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
KOP 19: Looking northeast from El Pomar Drive toward the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment and the Templeton Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A).	Represents a typical view of the start of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment and the Templeton Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A) from the perspective of a motorist traveling on El Pomar Drive. Similar to KOP 19, this view is dominated by the existing transmission towers and electrical lines.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
KOP 20: Looking southwest from El Pomar Drive west of Neal Springs Road (near residence on El Pomar) toward the Templeton	Represents a typical view of the Templeton Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A) (from a greater distance than KOP 18) from the perspective of a motorist and nearby residence on El Pomar Drive, as well as the St. Hilaire Winery. View consists of agricultural land, existing electrical lines, and mature trees.	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
Substation Expansion Site (Alternative SE-1A).					
KOP 21: Looking northeast from Concho Way toward the Alternative SE-PLR-2 route.	Represents a typical view from a few rural residences with views along the portion of Alternative SE-PLR-2 that parallels the existing 230/500 kV transmission corridor. From this KOP, views of largely undeveloped rolling hills and the existing 230/500 kV transmission line can be seen.	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Low	Moderate
KOP 22: Looking northwest from South River Road (near its intersection with Spanish Camp Road) along the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment.	Represents a typical view of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment from the perspective of a motorist traveling on South River Road. From this view, foreground views include mature trees, fencing, and rolling hills. Due to the lack of development and dominance of trees and vegetation, this particular KOP has a high visual appeal.	Moderate -to-High	High	Moderate	Moderate -to-high
KOP 23: Looking north-northeast from South River Road (just north of its intersection with Riverbank Lane) along the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment.	Represents a typical view of the northern section of Alternative SE-PLR-2 within the City of Paso Robles from the perspective of a motorist traveling on South River Road or local resident in the area. Residences are apparent behind a wall to the left of the photo (i.e., west of South River Road). At the time the photo was taken, construction activities on the parcel to the east of River Road were underway, as dirt stockpiles and orange construction cones are shown. From this KOP, views are dominated by residential development, electrical distribution lines and supporting structures, landscaping trees, and ongoing construction activity to the east. This area is characterized by a high number of motorists and	Low	Low-to-Moderate	High	Moderate

KOP Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions	Visual Quality ¹	Viewer Concern ²	Viewer Exposure ³	Visual Sensitivity ⁴
	residences that would have close-up views of the power line route. Residences would have long duration views of the alternative components, although these views would be partially screened by trees and the retaining wall.				

Notes: KOP = key observation point; kV = kilovolt; POS = Parks and Open Space

1. A high visual quality rating is defined as visual resources that are unique or exemplary of the region’s natural or cultural scenic amenities. A moderate visual quality rating is defined as visual resources typical or characteristic of the region’s natural and/or cultural visual amenities. A low visual quality rating refers to areas generally lacking in natural or cultural visual resource amenities typical of the region
2. A high viewer concern rating might occur when views are appreciated frequently, for longer durations, and/or by receptors located within a short distance. A moderate viewer concern rating would occur when views have an average level of intrinsic beauty or frequency of viewers. A low viewer concern rating would be common for views that are not regarded for intrinsic beauty, are not seen by many sensitive receptors, and/or are only seen for short durations and from long distances.
3. A high viewer exposure rating is defined as having direct landscape visibility, close-range views, increased number of viewers, and for a longer duration. A moderate viewer exposure is defined as having partial visibility and an average number of viewers. A low viewer exposure rating is defined as having obstructed visibility, long-range views, decreased number of viewers, and short duration of view.
4. A high visual sensitivity rating is defined as foreground views, views of high frequency and duration, and/or views where a contrast from the surrounding character would be highly noticeable. A moderate visual sensitivity rating is defined as middle ground views, views of moderate frequency and duration, and/or views where a contrast from the surrounding character would be moderately noticeable. A low visual sensitivity rating is defined as background views, views of low frequency and duration, and/or views where a contrast from the surrounding character would be marginally noticed.

Table 4.1-2. Example Front-of-the-Meter Battery Storage Sites Visual Characteristics Summary

Site Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions of Site	Visual Quality	Viewer Concern	Viewer Exposure	Viewer Sensitivity
Example FTM Site 1: Immediately adjacent to Paso Robles Substation.	The vacant site is surrounded by residential uses to the north, the Paso Robles Substation to the west, and commercial development to the south. Site is primarily visible to motorists traveling on Niblick Road and residences on Cary Street and Quarterhorse Lane, as well as commercial uses to the south of Niblick Road. Some mature trees provide visual screening of the site along Niblick Road. Motorists and residences are likely accustomed to viewing electrical infrastructure present at the Paso Robles Substation. There would be a high number of motorists with views of the site, while nearby residences would have a high duration of views.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	Low-Moderate
Example FTM Site 2: Within the shopping center located southwest of the intersection of Niblick Road and River Road.	Vacant site is surrounded by parking lots of surrounding commercial uses and is primarily visible to patrons of nearby commercial development.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	High	Low-to-Moderate
Example FTM Site 3: Along South River Road south of Serenade Drive on the easterly side of the street.	Vacant site is bordered by mature trees to the east and South River Road to the west. Site is primarily visible to motorists using South River Road. A few residences to the west of the site (across South River Road) may have partial views of the site, though mature trees and a barrier wall screen views of the site.	Low-to-Moderate	Low-to-Moderate	High	Low-to-Moderate

Site Number and Location	Visibility and Visual Conditions of Site	Visual Quality	Viewer Concern	Viewer Exposure	Viewer Sensitivity
Example FTM Site 4: Within Paso Robles High School adjacent to the baseball field.	Primarily visible to students and faculty at Paso Robles High School. A few residences on Appaloosa Drive may have partial views of the site from their backyard, but these views are expected to be mostly screened by fencing.	Low-to-Moderate	Low	Low	Low-to-Moderate
Example FTM Site 5: On the north side of Satellite Drive adjacent to the CAL FIRE Air Attack Base, which is next to the Paso Robles Municipal Airport runway.	Site is currently vacant and surrounded by airport facilities, industrial uses, CAL FIRE Air Attack Base, and agricultural uses to the north. Views of the site are limited to workers and patrons at surrounding industrial businesses and the CAL FIRE facility. More distant views are accessible from Airport Road.	Low	Low	Low	Low
Example FTM Site 6: Adjacent to the existing Templeton Substation, on the southerly side of El Pomar Drive.	Vacant site is currently used for agricultural purposes, overall visual conditions are largely characterized by the electrical infrastructure at the adjacent Templeton Substation. Site is primarily visible to workers at the Templeton Substation and motorists from El Pomar Drive.	Low-to-Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
Example FTM Site 7: Immediately adjacent to the existing Atascadero Substation.	Vacant site is located just south of the Atascadero Substation along Morro Road. Mature trees present along the western side of the property provide some visual screening. Site is visible to motorists traveling on Morro Road and attendees at the Cornerstone Church to the east and southeast of the site.	Low-to-Moderate	Low	Moderate	Low-to-Moderate
Example FTM Site 8: Within or immediately adjacent to the existing San Miguel Substation.	The site is elevated above North River Road. Views of the site from North River Road are screened by a berm.	Low	Low	Low	Low

Notes: CAL FIRE = California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection; FTM = front-of-the-meter

4.1.5 Impact Analysis

Methodology

The visual impact analysis evaluates the visual changes that would occur from implementing the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. This assessment is also based on a review of maps, site photographs, aerial photographs, and visual simulations (which provide a “before” and “after” illustration of the potential changes that would occur with implementation of the Proposed Project; see Figure 4.1-2 through Figure 4.1-10). Visual simulations were provided by NextEra Energy Transmission West, LLC (NEET West) and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) (2017a and 2019). Analysis of the impacts of the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives on existing visual resources is based on evaluation of the extent and implications of the visual changes, considering the following factors:

- Specific changes in the visual composition, character, and specifically valued qualities of the affected environment;
- Visual context of the affected environment;
- Extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and
- Number of viewers, their activities, and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by actions that would be taken under the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives.

The visual impacts were compared against the thresholds of significance discussed below. An assessment of visual quality is subjective, and reasonable disagreement can occur as to whether alterations in the visual character of the potentially affected area would be adverse or beneficial.

Criteria for Determining Significance

Based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, it was determined that, except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives would result in a significant impact on aesthetics if they would:

- A. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- B. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- C. In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; or

- D. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

For criterion C, as described in Section 4.1.4, the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, and alternatives are located primarily in non-urbanized areas. For this reason, the impact analysis focuses on substantial adverse impacts of the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings.

Environmental Impacts

Proposed Project

Impact AES-1: Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista – *Less than Significant*

As described in Section 4.1.4, a scenic vista is generally considered a view of an area that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape for the benefit of the general public. Within the area of the Proposed Project, several open space viewsheds have been identified by the City of Paso Robles in its General Plan, including the field at the north end of Ramada Drive (between the railroad and Salinas River), oak-covered hillsides, and the view from Barney Schwartz Park southwest toward and into the Chandler Ranch area (City of Paso Robles 2003). In general, construction and operation of the Proposed Project would not affect these scenic vistas.

The Estrella Substation would be placed within an existing vineyard and would not affect or substantially obstruct views of oak-covered hillsides that exist throughout the greater Paso Robles area. The Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would not affect the view southwest from Barney Schwartz Park; however, the power line would be visible from Barney Schwartz Park looking to the north. This view and the simulated change following development of the Proposed Project are shown in Figure 4.1-5. As indicated in the figure, there would be little discernable change to the viewshed from this location as a result of the Proposed Project. The field at the north end of Ramada Drive would be well south of the southern terminus of the Proposed Project's 70 kV reconductoring segment (and on the other side of the Salinas River) and this scenic vista would not be affected. In general, while the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line may be visible from several viewpoints throughout the City of Paso Robles and surrounding area, the degree of change relative to baseline conditions would be minor and would not substantially affect the scenic views. As a result, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Impact AES-2: Substantial damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway – *Less than Significant*

While there are no state-designated scenic highways in the Proposed Project area, SR 46 is eligible for designation as a scenic highway. Thus, this analysis considers potential impacts to SR 46 as falling within the scope of Impact AES-2. As shown in Figure 4.1-6, the new 70 kV power line segment would cross SR 46 in an area where there is an existing distribution line that crosses the highway. Although the Proposed Project's 70 kV poles would be taller (likely 50 to 60 feet taller) than the existing ones and composed of a different material (steel vs. wood), the 70 kV power line would not substantially impair views from SR 46 or screen landscape features that are not already affected by the presence of the existing distribution line. While motorists

accustomed to traveling along SR 46 may notice the increased height of the 70 kV poles, the new 70 kV power line would not substantially damage scenic resources from SR 46 because the power line would generally be consistent with the existing visual setting.

The reconductoring segment of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would also be visible from a different location of SR 46. The reconductoring segment would follow the same alignment as the existing San Miguel-Paso Robles 70 kV power line, which crosses over the highway near the River Road underpass. The existing power line would be replaced, which could result in slightly taller replacement poles. The height difference between the replacement and existing poles would be largely indistinguishable. Therefore, the reconductoring segment would not substantially alter views from the highway, especially since motorists are already accustomed to the existing power line. Westbound motorists traveling on SR 46 would continue to have views of the hillsides in the background.

Construction activities would result in temporary adverse effects to the views discussed above within and adjacent to SR 46, such as from the presence of construction equipment and establishment of staging and work areas. These impacts, however, are considered less than significant as they would be temporary in nature. Construction activities would not affect any existing rock outcroppings or historic buildings at the two above-described crossings at SR 46. Construction of the reconductoring segment would be limited to replacing existing poles, so there would be no substantial change from existing conditions; however, it is possible that trimming or removal of some trees may be required for the construction activities in this area. At the location where the new power line segment would cross SR 46, review of Google Earth aerial imagery shows no rock outcroppings or buildings in this area that would be affected by the construction activities. Several trees are present at this crossing, which could potentially be affected (i.e., trimming or removal) by construction activities; in general, these effects would not represent a substantial change to the existing scenic resources associated with SR 46 and, therefore, would not be significant.

For the reasons described above, the new power line and reconductoring segment would not substantially damage views from state-designated scenic highways. Union Road is not a state-designated scenic highway; therefore, no impact would occur under this significance criterion from construction and operation of the Estrella Substation. As a result, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Impact AES-3: In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality – *Significant and Unavoidable*

Construction

During the construction period of the Estrella Substation (approximately 8 months), construction activities (e.g., vegetation removal and staging of construction materials, equipment, vehicles, temporary structures, and workers) would be visible to motorists and tourists along Union Road, as well as nearby residents. Construction of the new substation would occur on a 15-acre parcel adjacent to Union Road, although local topography would provide some screening of construction activities.

The Estrella Substation would be constructed in a rural (i.e., non-urbanized) setting where wine and agricultural production activities typically involve use of trucks and equipment similar to some construction equipment that would be used for constructing the proposed substation. While the new substation would be constructed in the vicinity of a few residences, wineries, and tasting rooms, views from these land uses would be mostly screened by topography or vegetation. The site's visual character and moderate-to-high visual quality would be adversely affected by the presence of construction vehicles, equipment, and workers; however, these effects would be temporary. Additionally, Union Road is already commonly used by construction equipment and vehicles supporting wine and agricultural production activities in the area. Therefore, construction of the Estrella Substation would not substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Construction of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line segment would have similar effects on aesthetics as the Estrella Substation, although the power line construction would take longer (18 months total). Construction activities would include some grading and vegetation removal (e.g., for site preparation and establishment of work areas, pull and tension sites, and staging areas), installation of new power poles, removal of existing poles and distribution lines, and conductor stringing/pulling. Topography, vegetation, and existing structures would provide some screening along the power line route. In general, the presence of construction vehicles, equipment, materials, and workers along the Proposed Project's 70 kV route would adversely affect the visual character and quality of the area, while the grading and vegetation removal would alter landforms and vegetation along the alignment. Again, however, these impacts would be temporary.

Motorists, residents, recreationists, and tourists in close proximity to the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line route would have views of the construction equipment and activities at varying levels and durations from SR 46 and local roads including Union Road, Golden Hill Road and North River Road. In particular, the reconductoring segment of the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line would pass through more densely developed (i.e., urbanized) areas of Paso Robles, where some residents would have close-up views of the construction activities. View durations for motorists would vary depending on topography, vegetation screening, and the curvature of the road itself. Typically, view durations would be shorter along curvy roads but longer along straight roads where power line construction activities occur parallel to the road. Nonetheless, construction activities along the power line route would be temporary at each work area as construction progresses and the visual effects would not be dissimilar from any other type of construction project in the area. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

Operation

Development of the Estrella Substation would result in a permanent change to the landscape and would be clearly visible from KOPs 1 and 2, as shown in the visual simulations in Figure 4.1-2 and Figure 4.1-3. The substation would permanently alter the site's visual character from a rural setting to a more industrial environment. The visual simulation from KOP 1 shows a representative view of the substation from the perspective of eastbound motorists and the residence to the southwest of the substation site. As shown in the simulation, prominent views from Union Road would include substation facilities, towers, fencing, a new access road, the 230 kV interconnection and new 70 kV power line. KOP 2 shows a representative view of the

substation from the perspective of westbound motorists. Close-up views of the substation facilities would also be clearly visible from this perspective.

As indicated in Table 4.1-1, the visual quality of the site is moderate-to-high because the vineyards and rolling topography provide high visual appeal and dominate the viewshed relative to the existing utility poles and transmission lines nearby. Because Union Road is frequently used by motorists and tourists visiting wineries who typically consider views of vineyards as scenic, viewer concern is high and the overall visual sensitivity is moderate-to-high. Union Road also is designated by the City of Paso Robles as a visual corridor and gateway into the City of Paso Robles, meaning that the City has identified this as an important visual resource, and limits or restricts the range of activities, design and/or development along the roadway such that a positive visual impression is maintained and natural features are preserved and/or incorporated (City of Paso Robles 2003). The two closest residences, one at the southwest corner of the parcel, and another east of the substation site, would have fairly unobstructed and long duration views whereas motorists would have short duration views of the facility. Overall, due to the scale and prominence of the new substation, it would be visually inconsistent with the surrounding landscape, which is characterized by vineyards and agricultural operations. This would represent a substantial adverse effect on the visual character and quality of the proposed substation site and surrounding landscape in the absence of applicant proposed measures (APMs) or mitigation measures.

The Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line segment would have similar adverse effects on the existing visual conditions, although the degree of impact would vary by location. Effects would be most pronounced in areas of the proposed 70 kV alignment that do not have existing transmission or distribution lines and in areas subject to immediate views from residents and recreationists. Dissimilarly, the reconductoring segment would replace existing poles and reconductor the existing power line; thus, it would not substantially change the existing visual character or quality in this area or be inconsistent with zoning regulations (transmission structures are allowed in all zoning districts along the alignment). As shown in Figure 4.1-4 through Figure 4.1-10, the aesthetic impacts of the new 70 kV power line would be incremental in many locations, and therefore not significant. However, the changes to the visual landscape at KOP 6, in particular, would be significant. As described in Table 4.1-1, overhead distribution lines that had existed along this section of Golden Hill Road were undergrounded as part of the Cava Robles RV Park construction in 2017-2018 (Dawson, pers. comm., 2020). Additionally, the Cava Robles RV Park property, which is adjacent to Golden Hill Road, was designated as Parks and Open Space (POS) (see Figure 4.11-1 in Section 4.11, "Land Use and Planning") by the City of Paso Robles during the City's review and approval of this development. Therefore, introducing a new power line to this area of Golden Hill Road would substantially degrade the visual character of the area, resulting in a significant impact.

As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, the Applicants would implement APM AES-1, which would require installing decorative rock and/or other hardscape landscaping between Estrella Substation and Union Road. This would reduce the effects of the substation on the existing visual character and visual quality. However, the substation would still appear as a dominant contrasting feature relative to the surrounding vineyards and would substantially degrade the landscape's visual character. This would be a significant impact. **Mitigation Measure AES-1**, described below, would require that landscaping, including drought- and fire-resistant native shrubs, be incorporated along Union Road in front of the substation (to the

extent that this does not increase fire risk) and that materials and paint colors be selected for Proposed Project features that would reduce visual contrast and complement the surrounding landscape. Mitigation Measure AES-1 would also require that transmission structures have a dulled finish.

While Mitigation Measure AES-1 would reduce the adverse effects on the visual character and quality of views of the Estrella Substation site and along the 70 kV power line alignment, it would not reduce these impacts to a level that is less than significant. The substation facilities would still dominate views from Union Road, and considering the moderate-to-high visual quality and sensitivity of this site, as well as the designation of Union Road as a local scenic corridor, the impacts on the visual character and quality would be significant. Likewise, even incorporating the elements described in Mitigation Measure AES-1, the 70 kV power line would still have a significant adverse effect on the visual character and quality of views in the area of Golden Hill Road. No other feasible mitigation is available to reduce these adverse effects. (Note: undergrounding the power line is not considered mitigation and is instead being evaluated as an alternative [Alternative PLR-3] to the Proposed Project.) As a result, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Mitigation Measure AES-1: Use Landscaping, Design and Architectural Elements to Complement the Surrounding Visual Landscape.

HWT and PG&E shall implement the following measures:

- Incorporate drought- and fire-resistant native shrubs within the hardscape landscaping proposed in APM AES-1 between Union Road and the Estrella Substation. For alternative substation sites, incorporate drought- and fire-resistant shrubs between the adjacent roadway and the substation. Coordinate with CAL FIRE / County Fire Department to ensure that any shrubs used in landscaping adjacent to the substation do not substantially increase fire risk.
- At the substation, incorporate chain link fence slats using natural colors that are compatible with the surrounding area (i.e., green, light brown) in order to minimize visual contrast.
- For all Proposed Project and alternative components, use materials and paint colors that are compatible with the surrounding area (i.e., dull grey, light brown, or green colors) in order to minimize visual contrast. Avoid the use of large expanses of reflective glazing, aluminum panels, and other materials not normally found in the environment. Use a dulled finish on power line and transmission structures.
- With respect to power line and transmission structures, balance the need to minimize visual contrast with ensuring that structures are visible to aircraft pilots and birds.

Impact AES-4: Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area – *Less than Significant with Mitigation*

The Proposed Project could create some new light and glare during construction and operation. As described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, Proposed Project construction would primarily occur during daytime hours; however, occasional nighttime work may be needed whereby construction lighting could result in temporary adverse impacts to nighttime views. The activities that may occur during nighttime hours would generally be limited in intensity and would not normally generate noise; nevertheless, these activities require that the work area be illuminated and would thus add a new source of light to the area, which is mostly rural and very dark at night. Because construction of the power line route would be segmented, occurring at structure locations for short durations along the alignment, any potential light or glare effects at a given work location would be temporary and would last for a short duration. Additionally, implementation of APM AES-2, which requires that construction lighting be selectively placed and shielded to minimize nighttime glare, would further reduce construction-related light and glare impacts.

Over the long term, lighting at the Estrella Substation would add light to the area, which could affect nighttime views. Permanent lighting installed at Estrella Substation would consist of sodium vapor or light emitting device (LED) fixtures inside the facility and at the entry/exit gates. The lighting would be controlled by a photocell that automatically turns the lights on and off. In the vicinity of the Estrella Substation site, there is currently minimal roadway lighting and localized lighting is mostly associated with nearby rural residential uses. While the new substation would introduce a new permanent source of lighting, all on-site lighting would be oriented downward to minimize glare onto the surrounding property. The new lighting at the substation would be consistent with the Dark Sky rating recommendations (see Chapter 2) and would not shine onto Union Road. While the new lighting would likely be visible to motorists passing by the Estrella Substation as well as to the two nearby residences (approximately 1,000 feet away from the substation site), due to the shielding and downward orientation of the lights, operation of the Estrella Substation would not result in a substantial adverse effect on nighttime views.

The Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, or related operation and maintenance activities would not result in new, permanent sources of light or glare. As discussed above, the specular wires associated with the power line would be shiny initially, thereby potentially resulting in a new source of glare for daytime views; but wires are expected to dull over time such that these impacts would be considered temporary and less than significant. The metal transmission structures associated with the substation and the metal power line structures could similarly create substantial new sources of glare, which would be a significant impact. However, **Mitigation Measure AES-1** requires transmission structures have a dulled finish, thereby ensuring these structures would not create substantial glare to daytime viewers. While most operation and maintenance activities would occur during the daytime hours when no or minimal additional lighting would be needed, it is possible that nighttime maintenance may be needed on rare occasions (e.g., in the event of an emergency). In these instances, maintenance activities at the Estrella Substation and along the power line route may require extra nighttime lighting; however, use of nighttime lighting would be sporadic and limited in duration. Additionally, implementation of APM AES-2 would further reduce this impact. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Reasonably Foreseeable Distribution Components and Ultimate Substation Buildout

As described in Section 4.1.4, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would be installed primarily in rural, agricultural areas as well as within existing road rights-of-way. The reasonably foreseeable distribution components would consist of new distribution line segments (a northern and southern line segment), including poles up to 50 feet tall and associated electrical lines, as well as three additional 21/12 kV pad-mounted transformers. Like the Proposed Project, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not substantially affect any identified scenic vistas. The equipment and facilities associated with ultimate substation buildout would primarily be placed within the fence line of the already-constructed Estrella Substation and would not affect scenic vistas. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant**.

Although there are no state-designated scenic highways in the reasonably foreseeable distribution components area, SR 46 is eligible for listing as a scenic highway. The northern reasonably foreseeable distribution line segment would be installed within SR 46 right-of-way for an approximately 1.1-mile stretch near Hunter Ranch Golf Course, as shown in Figure 2-10 (Chapter 2). While the addition of wood distribution poles up to 50 feet tall in this area would marginally affect the views of motorists driving on SR 46, the distribution line would not be substantially out of character for the area. There are existing distribution lines along and across portions of SR 46 in proximity to the reasonably foreseeable distribution components and the new distribution line segment would complete a gap in the existing system. Thus, there would not be a substantial change from existing conditions. Additionally, construction and operation of the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not require or result in substantial damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings along SR 46. With respect to ultimate substation buildout, as described in Chapter 2, installation of additional transmission and distribution transformers and associated equipment within the 70 kV and 230 kV substations is assumed to not result in any additional permanent ground disturbance or increase the height of the substation. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant**.

As discussed above, the reasonably foreseeable distribution components, particularly the new distribution line segments, would degrade the existing visual character or quality to some degree since landscapes without electric distribution infrastructure are generally regarded more pleasing than those with such infrastructure. However, given that the reasonably foreseeable distribution components would complete gaps in the existing distribution network, which already contains these types of facilities, they would not substantially change existing conditions. Additionally, portions of the reasonably foreseeable distribution components, such as the distribution line segment north of the Estrella Substation site, which would pass through agricultural fields, would not be readily viewable from public locations. The ultimate buildout of the Estrella Substation would add further transmission and distribution equipment and structures to the substation, as shown in Figure 4.1-18, which would further impact public views along this portion of Union Road. However, the ultimate buildout of the substation would be only incrementally worse compared to the impact of the initial Estrella Substation buildout, which was evaluated as part of the Proposed Project. This incremental impact would not be considered significant. As a result, overall, public views would not be substantially impacted

from distribution component construction or operation. Impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant**.

Figure 4.1-18. Simulated View from Union Road Facing East of the Estrella Substation with Ultimate Buildout of its Transmission and Distribution Components



Source: NEET West and PG&E 2017b

The reasonably foreseeable distribution components would not create substantial new sources of light or glare. In the event construction activities would be required during nighttime hours, implementation of APM AES-1 would minimize adverse effects by requiring that construction lighting is selectively placed and shielded to prevent nighttime glare. The wood distribution poles and conductors would not create glare and no permanent lighting would be installed for the reasonably foreseeable distribution components. Similarly, ultimate substation buildout would not be expected to add substantial new sources of light or glare, as any additional lighting or glare associated with new/additional equipment at the substation would be incremental compared to the initial Estrella Substation development. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant**.

Alternatives

No Project Alternative

Under the No Project Alternative, the Estrella Substation and 70 kV power line would not be constructed. Existing electrical transmission facilities in the Paso Robles area would remain. Therefore, this alternative would avoid all adverse aesthetic impacts of the Proposed Project, including any impacts to scenic resources, degradation of the visual character and quality of public views, or creation of permanent sources of light or glare. **No impact** would occur under any of the significance criteria.

Alternative SS-1: Bonel Ranch Substation Site

Alternative SS-1 would be located on a vacant parcel along Estrella Road adjacent to the Estrella River in an agricultural area. The closest residence is approximately 0.5 mile west of the site on Estrella Road. Like the Proposed Project, construction and operation of the substation at this alternative location would not substantially affect scenic vistas. Additionally, the Bonel Ranch

site is located roughly 1.6 miles north of SR 46 and thus the substation facilities at this site would not be visible from SR 46, which is eligible for listing as a scenic highway. No other State-designated scenic highways are located in proximity to Alternative SS-1. Based on review of Google Earth aerial imagery, no major rock outcroppings or historic buildings are present on the site that could be impacted by the construction of Alternative SS-1. Several trees do exist on or close to the site that may require removal; however, as noted above, these trees would not be visible from SR 46 and would not affect this eligible State scenic highway. Therefore, impacts under significance criteria A and B would be **less than significant**.

Development of the substation at the Bonel Ranch site would substantially alter the visual character of this immediate area and its agricultural setting due to the large scale and industrial nature of the substation facilities. Construction activities would also result in temporary adverse effects on public views in the area. However, because viewer concern and exposure is lower in this area (see Table 4.1-1; KOPs 11 and 12), this alternative would have a less severe effect on the area's visual character and visual quality when compared to the Proposed Project. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would help reduce the visual impact of Alternative SS-1 to a less-than-significant level. As a result, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative SS-1 would involve the same construction activities and include the same operational components (e.g., permanent lighting) as the proposed Estrella Substation, described in Impact AES-4. As such, construction activities could temporarily create new sources of light affecting nighttime views due to the need to conduct some activities at night and illuminate work areas. Like the Proposed Project, this substation would include permanent lighting inside the facility and at the entry/exit gates, which would comply with Dark Sky rating recommendations. The transmission structures associated with the substation at the Alternative SS-1 site could potentially create substantial sources of glare, which would be a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce this impact to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-1A: Estrella Route to Estrella Substation

As discussed in Section 4.1.4, the Alternative PLR-1A route traverses land uses primarily consisting of agricultural areas dominated by vineyards and rural residential and urban developments. Public views of the Alternative PLR-1A alignment (existing conditions) are shown in KOPs 10, 14, 15, 16, and 17. Like the Proposed Project, this alternative would not substantially impact scenic vistas, such as the oak-covered hillsides in the greater Paso Robles area. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant**.

Alternative PLR-1A would be visible from SR 46 (eligible for listing as a state scenic highway), as the alignment would cross SR 46 near Branch Road. The reconductoring segment of Alternative PLR-1A would cross SR 46 at the same location as the Proposed Project's 70 kV reconductoring segment. However, because Alternative PLR-1A would follow the existing 230/500 kV transmission corridor across SR 46 at Branch Road, the new 70 kV power line would have an incremental visual impact on views from this highway. The reconductoring segment would not substantially alter existing views for motorists traveling on SR 46 because construction would replace already existing poles and reconductor existing lines. Additionally, neither the new 70 kV power line nor the reconductoring segment of Alternative PLR-1A would require or result in

substantial damage to scenic resources within or near the SR 46 corridor. Based on review of Google Earth aerial imagery, there are no significant trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings at the Branch Road crossing that could be affected by Alternative PLR-1A construction. Refer to the discussion under Impact AES-2 for why the reconductoring segment would not substantially affect scenic resources near SR 46. Overall, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant**.

The new power line under Alternative PLR-1A would change the visual character and quality of views of the rural landscape and would be noticeable to motorists and residences in the surrounding area. Additionally, construction activities would result in temporary adverse effects on public views, such as from the presence of construction equipment and establishment of staging and work areas. In comparison to the Proposed Project, Alternative PLR-1A would traverse areas with lower viewer exposure and visual sensitivity where distribution lines currently exist. More specifically, it would avoid significant adverse effects on the existing visual character and quality of the area along Golden Hill Road in the city of Paso Robles that would result from the Proposed Project's 70 kV route. Nevertheless, the new power line under Alternative PLR-1A would result in adverse effects to the visual character and quality of views of the rural landscape and the surrounding area, which would be a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce adverse effects on public views from Alternative PLR-1A by reducing the visual contrast created by the power line structures. As a result, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-1A would involve the same construction activities as the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, described in Impact AES-4. As such, construction activities could temporarily create new sources of light affecting nighttime views due to the need to conduct some activities at night and illuminate work areas. Given the longer construction schedule of Alternative PLR-1A, this would result in extended construction-related impacts. Potential adverse impacts, however, would be limited to specific locations because the power line would be constructed in a manner that is segmented. Similar to the Proposed Project, the presence of power line structures could result in glare, creating significant adverse impacts for day and nighttime views. With implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1**, the power line structures would have a dulled finish and therefore would not create substantial glare. Further, light impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels through implementation of APM AES-2. Alternative PLR-1A would not include any permanent lighting and the initially shiny specular wires would dull over time. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-1C: Estrella Route to Bonel Ranch, Option 1

Alternative PLR-1C would be similar to Alternative PLR-1A, but would have a different starting point at the Bonel Ranch site rather than the Estrella Substation. The Alternative PLR-1C route traverses land uses primarily consisting of agricultural areas dominated by vineyards and rural residential and urban developments. Public views of the Alternative PLR-1C alignment (existing conditions) are shown in KOPs 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. Like the Proposed Project, this alternative would not substantially affect scenic vistas, including the oak-covered hillsides that occur throughout the greater Paso Robles area. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant**.

The new power line segment of Alternative PLR-1C would not cross, or pass in close proximity to, SR 46 (eligible for listing as a state scenic highway) and the new power line components would all be over 1.6 miles away from this highway. The reconductoring segment of Alternative PLR-1C would cross SR 46 at the same location as the Proposed Project's 70 kV reconductoring segment. Since Alternative PLR-1C would not place new facilities in areas that could be viewed by motorists on SR 46, it would not impact public views. The reconductoring segment would not substantially alter existing views for motorists traveling on SR 46 because construction would replace already existing poles and reconductor existing lines. Additionally, neither the new 70 kV power line nor reconductoring segments of Alternative PLR-1A would require or result in substantial damage to scenic resources within or near the SR 46 corridor. See discussion under Impact AES-2 for why the reconductoring segment would not substantially affect rocks or buildings (limited tree impacts may occur) at the location where it would cross SR 46. Overall, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant**.

The new power line under Alternative PLR-1C would change the visual character and quality of views of the rural landscape and would be noticeable to motorists and residents in the surrounding area. Minor Route Variation 1, as compared to the proposed Alternative PLR-1C, would have a somewhat greater visual effect on motorists and residents along Estrella Road. Additionally, construction activities would result in temporary adverse effects on the visual character and quality of public views, such as from the presence of construction equipment and establishment of staging and work areas. In comparison to the Proposed Project, Alternative PLR-1C would traverse areas with lower viewer exposure and visual sensitivity where distribution lines currently exist. More specifically, it would avoid significant adverse effects on the existing visual character and quality of the area along Golden Hill Road in the city of Paso Robles that would result from the Proposed Project's 70 kV route. Nevertheless, the impacts described above for Alternative PLR-1C would be significant. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce adverse effects on public views from Alternative PLR-1C by reducing the visual contrast created by the power line structures. As a result, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-1C would involve the same construction activities as the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, described in Impact AES-4. As such, Alternative PLR-1C requires some nighttime construction necessitating temporary new sources of light for the illumination of work areas. Given the longer construction schedule of Alternative PLR-1C, this would result in extended construction-related impacts, but impacts would still be limited to specific locations because the power line would be constructed in a segmented fashion, thereby rendering these impacts less than significant. Light impacts would also be reduced through implementation of APM AES-2. Alternative PLR-1C would not include any permanent lighting and the specular wires would dull over time. The power line structures would have the potential to result in substantial glare, which would be a significant impact. However, Mitigation Measure AES-1 would ensure power line structures would have a dulled finish and therefore would not create substantial glare. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative PLR-3: Strategic Undergrounding (Both Options)

Alternative PLR-3 involves undergrounding the portion of the Proposed Project's new 70 kV power line that passes through the Golden Hill Road area north of SR 46. As described above for the Proposed Project, the Golden Hill Road area includes a combination of commercial,

industrial and single-family residential uses as well as the Cava Robles RV Park, although this area of Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo County would be considered a non-urbanized area. No identified scenic vistas occur in this area, other than areas of blue oak woodland along the northern portion of the Alternative PLR-3 alignment, which may be considered oak-covered hillsides (as identified in the City of Paso Robles General Plan). Although temporary impacts to scenic views in this area would occur during construction, the underground power line and relatively small (150 foot by 150 foot) transition station would not substantially affect the oak-covered areas over the long term. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion A would be **less than significant**.

As discussed above, there are no State-designated scenic highways in the Paso Robles area; however, SR 46 is eligible for listing as a scenic highway. The southern end of Alternative PLR-3 (both options) would begin approximately 0.25-mile north of SR 46 and continue north-northwest from there. While the 70 kV power line segment under Alternative PLR-3 would be underground, an above-ground transition station would be constructed at this southern terminus of the Alternative PLR-3 alignment including two riser poles. These above-ground structures would constitute a modest change to visual conditions that may be noticeable to motorists traveling on SR 46, but this nominal change (two riser poles) would not be considered substantial because this area is already characterized by existing industrial uses and structures. Construction activities for the transition station and underground line could create some adverse aesthetic effects since such activities would be visible to those passing by the site. However, construction activities would not be substantial because they would be temporary, lasting for a short duration (e.g., 6 months). Neither construction nor operation of Alternative PLR-3 would require or result in substantial damage to scenic resources (e.g., trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings) within or near the SR 46 corridor. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant**.

No overhead power lines currently occur in the Golden Hill Industrial Park and along Golden Hill Road to the north. Alternative PLR-3 was specifically proposed to avoid the significant adverse aesthetic effects of the overhead Proposed Project 70 kV power line in this area. As such, this underground power line segment would completely avoid the permanent adverse effects on the visual character and quality of the Golden Hill Road area from the Proposed Project, described in Impact AES-3. Alternative PLR-3 would include small (150-foot by 150-foot) transition stations at either end of the alignment with two riser poles at each station, which would have minor, less than significant impacts on existing visual character and quality. Construction activities for Alternative PLR-3, including trenching within public roadways (Engine Way, Wisteria Lane, and Golden Hill Road), would adversely affect public views for the duration of the construction period; however, these effects would be temporary and therefore less than significant. Construction and operation of Alternative PLR-3 also would not conflict with existing zoning (Planned Industrial; which allows transmission structures). Overall, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant**.

Construction activities for Alternative PLR-3 could create new temporary light sources, as some work activities may need to occur at night. While these light sources could affect nighttime views, they would be temporary and would be minimized through implementation of APM AES-2. The relatively minor aboveground electrical facilities at the transition stations would not create substantial glare. While the transition stations may require some permanent lighting (e.g., for security purposes), these lights would comply with Dark Sky recommendations and

would not substantially affect nighttime views. As a result, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant**.

Alternative SE-1A: Templeton Substation Expansion – 230/70 kV Substation

Alternative SE-1A would be located along El Pomar Drive adjacent to the existing Templeton Substation. The site is currently used for agricultural purposes and has several oak trees and structures on the site. Like the Proposed Project, construction and operation of the substation at this alternative location would not substantially affect scenic vistas. The substation expansion area is also not located within an area subject to scenic protection standards by the County of San Luis Obispo (NEET West and PG&E 2018). The Templeton Substation Expansion site is located roughly 1.5 miles east of Highway 101, which is eligible for listing as a scenic highway; however, due to distance and intervening topography, the substation facilities at this site would not be visible from Highway 101. Therefore, impacts under significance criteria A or B would be **less than significant**.

Alternative SE-1A would add additional electrical infrastructure where no development currently exists on the site and would be noticeable to motorists along El Pomar Drive (e.g. from KOPs 18 and 19) and likely visible from the residence near KOP 20. Construction activities would also result in temporary adverse effects on public views in the area. This alternative site would result in less adverse effects on visual character and visual quality than the Proposed Project because the new substation would be sited adjacent to an existing substation and the area is already characterized by electrical infrastructure. Nevertheless, the substation under Alternative SE-1A would degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and surrounding area, which would be a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce these impacts on visual character and quality to a level that is less than significant. As a result, impacts under significance criterion C would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative SE-1A would involve the same construction activities and include the same operational components (e.g., permanent lighting) as the proposed Estrella Substation, described in Impact AES-4. As such, construction activities could temporarily create new sources of light affecting nighttime views due to the need to conduct some activities at night and illuminate work areas. While the substation would include permanent lighting inside the facility and at the entry/exit gates, these would comply with Dark Sky rating recommendations. The transmission structures associated with the substation under Alternative SE-1A could potentially create substantial sources of glare, which would be a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce this impact to a level that is less than significant. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative SE-PLR-2: Templeton-Paso South River Road Route

Alternative SE-PLR-2 is the 70 kV power line route that would be used to connect the expanded Templeton Substation under Alternative SE-1A to Paso Robles Substation. As discussed in Section 4.1.4, the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment passes through agricultural lands, follows the existing 500/230 kV transmission corridor, then passes through scenic rural residential areas along South River Road, and finally traverses urban areas of Paso Robles. Much of the length of Alternative SE-PLR-2 passes through what may be considered oak-covered hillsides, as identified in the City of Paso Robles General Plan, which are considered scenic resources or vistas. The

addition of the power line to these areas under Alternative SE-PLR-2 would adversely affect these open space viewsheds, which would be a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would help to alleviate these affects, but nevertheless this impact would remain. As a result, impacts under significance criterion A would be **significant and unavoidable**.

No State-designated scenic highways are located in close proximity to Alternative SE-PLR-2. The nearest eligible State scenic highway is the segment of Highway 101, but this highway is on the other side of the Salinas River and views of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 power line structures from Highway 101 would likely not be available. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion B would be **less than significant**.

The new power line under Alternative SE-PLR-2 would change the visual character and quality of views of the landscape and would be noticeable to motorists and residences in the surrounding area. In particular, the segment along South River Road to Santa Ysabel Avenue would adversely affect the existing visual character and quality of views in this area, as no electrical power lines currently exist in this non-urbanized rural-residential area, which is characterized by mature trees that line the road and rolling hillsides (as seen in KOP 22, Figure 4.1-17). This segment of the power line route would be visible to motorists with fleeting view durations and at varying degrees by nearby residences, which would have longer view durations. The northern portion of Alternative SE-PLR-2 would parallel the existing Templeton-Paso single-circuit 70 kV power line and would be visible to residences and motorists using South River Road. Electric transmission infrastructure already exists along this segment and nearby residents and motorists are accustomed to viewing power lines, thereby reducing the severity of the impact. Additionally, placement of power lines would not conflict with the zoning regulations in this more urbanized portion of the alignment within Paso Robles (power transmission lines are conditionally allowed in the Residential Single Family [R1] zoning district and permitted in the Regional Commercial [RC] district, through which Alternative SE-PLR-2 would pass).

Construction activities also would adversely affect the visual character and quality of views along the length of the Alternative SE-PLR-2 alignment, although these effects would be temporary. Overall, this alternative would substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of public views of the site and its surroundings, resulting in a significant impact. Implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would reduce adverse effects on public views from Alternative SE-PLR-2 by reducing the visual contrast created by the power line structures. Nevertheless, the impacts associated with introducing a new power line along a portion of South River Road with moderate-to-high visual quality and where no electric transmission currently exists would still be significant. Therefore, impacts under significance criterion C would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Alternative SE-PLR-2 would involve largely the same construction activities as the Proposed Project's 70 kV power line, described in Impact AES-4. As such, construction activities could temporarily create new sources of light affecting nighttime views due to the need to conduct some activities at night and illuminate work areas. Given the shorter construction schedule of Alternative SE-PLR-2, this would result in somewhat reduced construction-related impacts, and impacts would be limited to specific locations because the power line would be constructed in a linear fashion. Additionally, light impacts would be reduced through implementation of APM AES-2. While new metal overhead power lines could result in substantial glare, which would be a significant impact, implementation of **Mitigation Measure AES-1** would minimize these effects

by ensuring that power line structures have a dulled finish. Further, the shiny specular wires associated with the new power lines would dull over time. Overall, impacts under significance criterion D would be **less than significant with mitigation**.

Alternative BS-2: Battery Storage to Address the Distribution Objective

As described in Chapter 3, *Alternatives Description*, example FTM battery storage sites are identified under Alternative BS-2 for illustrative purposes for this DEIR. FTM battery storage facilities could be constructed at the example FTM sites (1 through 8) or at other sites identified in the future. The aesthetic effects of FTM BESSs sited at the example sites are discussed here for illustrative purposes.

As described in Table 4.1-2, several of the example FTM BESS sites would be visible from public roads where motorists would have fleeting views of the facilities or would be sited in areas surrounded by existing commercial and/or residential uses (e.g., FTM Sites 1, 2, and 3). Views of the potential FTM Site 4 would be primarily limited to faculty and students at Paso Robles High School, while FTM Site 5 would be primarily visible to workers and patrons at industrial businesses near the Paso Robles Municipal Airport. The example FTM Sites 6, 7 and 8 would be sited immediately adjacent to existing substations. As shown in Table 4.1-2, the visual quality and visual sensitivity of these sites varies between low to low-to-moderate. Like the Proposed Project, BESSs sited at the example FTM sites would not be anticipated to adversely affect scenic vistas or scenic resources. Additionally, none of the example FTM sites are located within viewing distance from SR 46 or Highway 101, which are the two eligible state scenic highways in the area.

Depending on the individual facility design and whether the facilities are enclosed or exposed on concrete slabs, Alternative BS-2 could degrade the visual character or quality of public views of some of the potential FTM sites and surroundings. The example FTM sites are located on lands designated Agriculture and Residential Suburban, or zoned Residential Single Family, Regional Commercial, or Airport. As public utility facilities (similar in nature to small substations), the BESSs would be allowable or permitted uses on these land use designations and zoning districts and would not be anticipated to conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. BESSs at FTM sites adjacent to existing substations or industrial development (i.e., example FTM Sites 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8) would not be anticipated to substantially degrade the visual character or visual quality because the new facilities would be compatible with nearby existing electrical infrastructure. However, constructing exposed FTM facilities at FTM Sites 2, 3, and 4 would be more likely to be visually inconsistent with surrounding commercial, residential and school uses. As shown in Figure 3-25 of Chapter 3, *Alternatives Description*, BESSs can be tastefully incorporated into new or existing buildings.

Due to the substantially smaller scale of the individual FTM facilities compared to the proposed Estrella Substation, overall light and glare effects of FTM facilities would likely be less than those for the Proposed Project. Additionally, while nighttime construction work could create light sources with temporary adverse effects, these impacts would be reduced through implementation of standard measures to require downward-facing and shielded construction lighting. FTM BESS facilities would likely have some permanent lighting (e.g., for security), but this would not be expected to substantially affect nighttime views.

Overall, because FTM BESS sites were selected for illustrative purposes only, BESS installations have not been designed and technologies have not been selected, and the specifics of Alternative BS-2 are unknown, project-level determinations cannot be made as impacts are speculative. Therefore, consistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15145, no significance conclusion is provided for any of the significance criteria.

Alternative BS-3: Third-Party, Behind-the-Meter Solar and Battery Storage

Alternative BS-3 involves installing behind-the-meter (BTM) solar and battery storage facilities that would largely be installed either on or within existing commercial, industrial, and residential buildings. At some locations, facilities may be installed on previously undeveloped portions of a property. The specific locations of BTM facilities are unknown because it is unknown which specific customers will opt into the BTM Resources Program and install BTM resources on their property. Nevertheless, the BTM facilities under Alternative BS-3 would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas because they would be installed on or within existing buildings (or in adjacent areas) and due to their small individual size. For the same reasons, BTM resources would not substantially affect views from State-designated scenic highway (even if sited in close proximity). Minimal ground disturbance would be required for BTM solar and storage facilities as facilities would be installed primarily on and within existing buildings. In those cases where the BTM facilities are built on previously undeveloped property, minimal vegetation clearing, light grading, and minor excavation is possible; a concrete slab may be installed to support the BTM solar and/or storage facilities or a small enclosed building with a foundation may be constructed to house the storage facilities.

Depending on where BTM facilities are installed, the solar facilities could incrementally alter the visual character or visual quality of a site and its surroundings. It is anticipated that the solar facilities would not be substantially different from those commonly seen on residential and commercial developments. It is possible that BTM facilities could be built within urbanized and non-urbanized areas. In cases where the areas are urbanized, as public utility facilities, the BESSs would be allowable or permitted uses on these land use designations and zoning districts and would not be anticipated to conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality. In cases where the surrounding areas are non-urbanized, because the BTM sites are unknown, and it is unknown whether the facilities would be enclosed or exposed on a concrete slab; it is not possible to determine whether the BTM facilities could substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the site. Construction of individual BTM facilities could potentially result in adverse visual effects (e.g., vegetation clearing, light grading, and minor excavation), although these would be temporary. The third-party distributed energy resources (DER) provider selected via the Distribution Infrastructures Deferral Framework (DIDF)¹ would be required to follow all local design, siting, and permitting requirements.

Due to the substantially smaller scale of individual BTM facilities compared to the proposed Estrella Substation, overall light and glare effects would be anticipated to be less severe. Solar panels are widely deployed in Paso Robles and elsewhere in California and modern designs do not create substantial glare. Because most BTM storage facilities would be installed within existing buildings, facilities are not likely to create substantial glare or result in additional light

¹ See Chapter 3, *Alternatives Description*, Section 3.3.8, for further details about the DIDF.

sources that could affect nighttime views. In the event that facilities are built outside of or adjacent to an existing building, there is potential for these facilities to result in minimal glare or require installation of additional light (e.g., for security purposes). However, given compliance with local land use and zoning laws, there is no reason to believe these potential impacts would be significant.

Overall, due to the fact that specific locations and characteristics of BTM resources procured under Alternative BS-3 are unknown at this time, project-level impact determinations are not possible as the impacts are speculative. Therefore, consistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15145, no significance conclusion is reached under any of the significance criteria.