



6.7 Mitigation of Visual Impacts and Aesthetics

This project will consider visual mitigation measures for associated visual impacts. Potential aesthetic enhancements for possible incorporation into the project would reflect input from the affected communities. The adjacent communities of Plymouth, LaPaz, Lakeville, and South Bend offer natural, cultural, historical, and scenic resources. The setting and character of the study area and the needs of the highway users are factors that must be considered within the US 31 corridor. Impacts would result primarily from road reconstruction for the upgrade of US 31 to a freeway which include such elements as cut and fill slopes, increased pavement surface, removal of vegetation, bridges, lighting standards, guardrails, and other roadway features.

The US 31 project would incorporate cost-effective design features for the purpose of mitigating adverse aesthetic impacts. Specific mitigation measures and aesthetic design features should be refined during the final design phase, coordinated with local communities. These communities will be granted the opportunity to underwrite enhanced design amenities and/or architectural elements and maintenance.

Interchanges and overpasses along US 31 could provide effective opportunities for incorporation of reasonable aesthetic enhancements. Whenever possible, opportunities for maintaining the views of existing landmarks within the visual corridor could also be included in the project. Supplemental gateway elements, including distinctive signage, lighting, and landscaping associated with entry features, if so desired by the communities, could be integrated into the final design where feasible based upon current safety standards and funding availability.

Walls, landscaping, and signage should not block the views of the corporate office buildings and commercial facilities within the visual corridor. Mitigation measures involving landscaping, bridge treatments, lighting, signing, and contour grading could be incorporated into the final design to minimize these potential impacts. Where practicable, design elements could match prominent architectural elements and styles within each of the adjacent communities. The design for these structures could be incorporated into the landscape and site context to lessen its visual impact upon the corridor.

Natural topography, stormwater detention ponds, trees, shrubs, and native Indiana prairie grasses would also provide continuity throughout the landscape and influence the view of the roadway. Landscape plantings within established safety guidelines and clear zone setbacks could be used to mitigate impacts and undesired views. The project should be designed to retain existing trees and vegetation to the extent possible to create a natural screen between the roadway and residential areas. Additional plantings could be introduced in areas where impacts are unavoidable, especially within areas where vegetation is limited. In areas where trees are being removed for additional right-of-way, irregular feather cut lines with selective tree removal should be considered.