Appendix H: Visual Impact Assessment Technical Memorandum

State Route 19 Environmental Assessment

From East of Eastland Avenue to East of SR-87

Lauderdale and Haywood Counties, Tennessee

PIN 102251.00

TN TDOT Department of Transportation

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1.0 Introduction

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is proposing improvements to approximately 15.2 miles of State Route (SR) 19 from east of Eastland Avenue in Lauderdale County to east of SR-87 in Haywood County, Tennessee (**Figure 1**). Since the proposed project would be funded in part with federal transportation funds, it is subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). An Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared in accordance with NEPA to identify and evaluate the environmental effects of the proposed project and to identify measures to minimize harm.

This technical memorandum assesses the existing visual conditions including the project setting, landscape units, and viewer sensitivity along the SR-19 project corridor, evaluates potential impacts to visual quality under the No-Build and Build Alternatives, and provides an estimated impact determination for both the No-Build and Build Alternatives.

1.1 Project Background

On February 1, 2018, the FHWA approved a D-List Categorical Exclusion for the proposed widening of SR-19 from east of Eastland Avenue to east of SR-87 under TDOT project identification number (PIN) 102251.00.

Since the approval of 2018 D-List CE, the proposed SR-19 project has been divided into three segments for funding purposes; PIN 102251.01, 102251.02, and PIN 102251.03. The current EA effort is analyzing entirety of the proposed SR-19 corridor from east of Eastland Avenue to east of SR-87 (PIN 102251.00) which is comprised of PIN 102251.01, PIN 102251.02, and PIN 102251.03 (**Figure 2**).

For more information on the project background, please refer to Chapter 1 in the EA.

Figure 1 Project Location

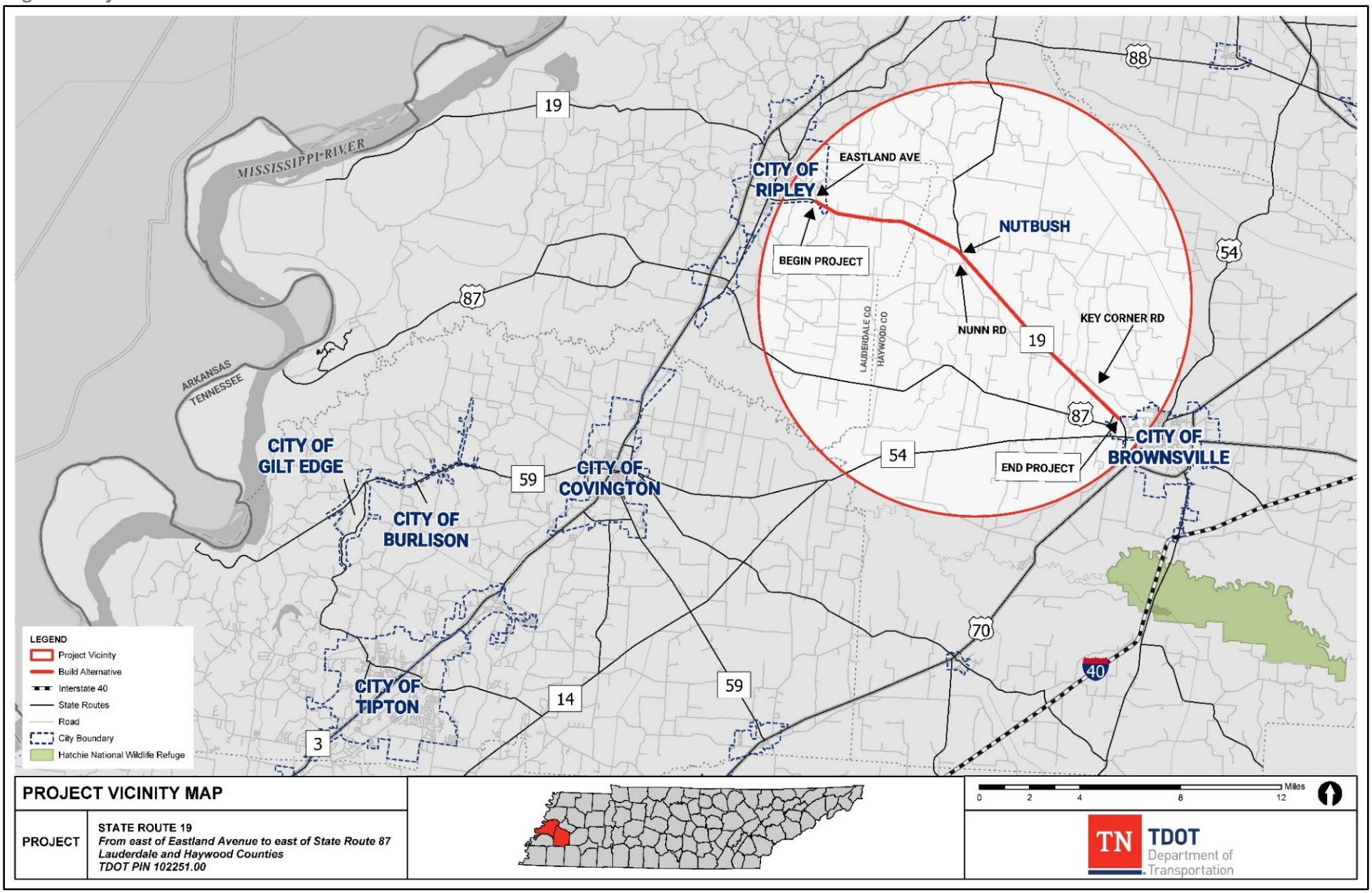
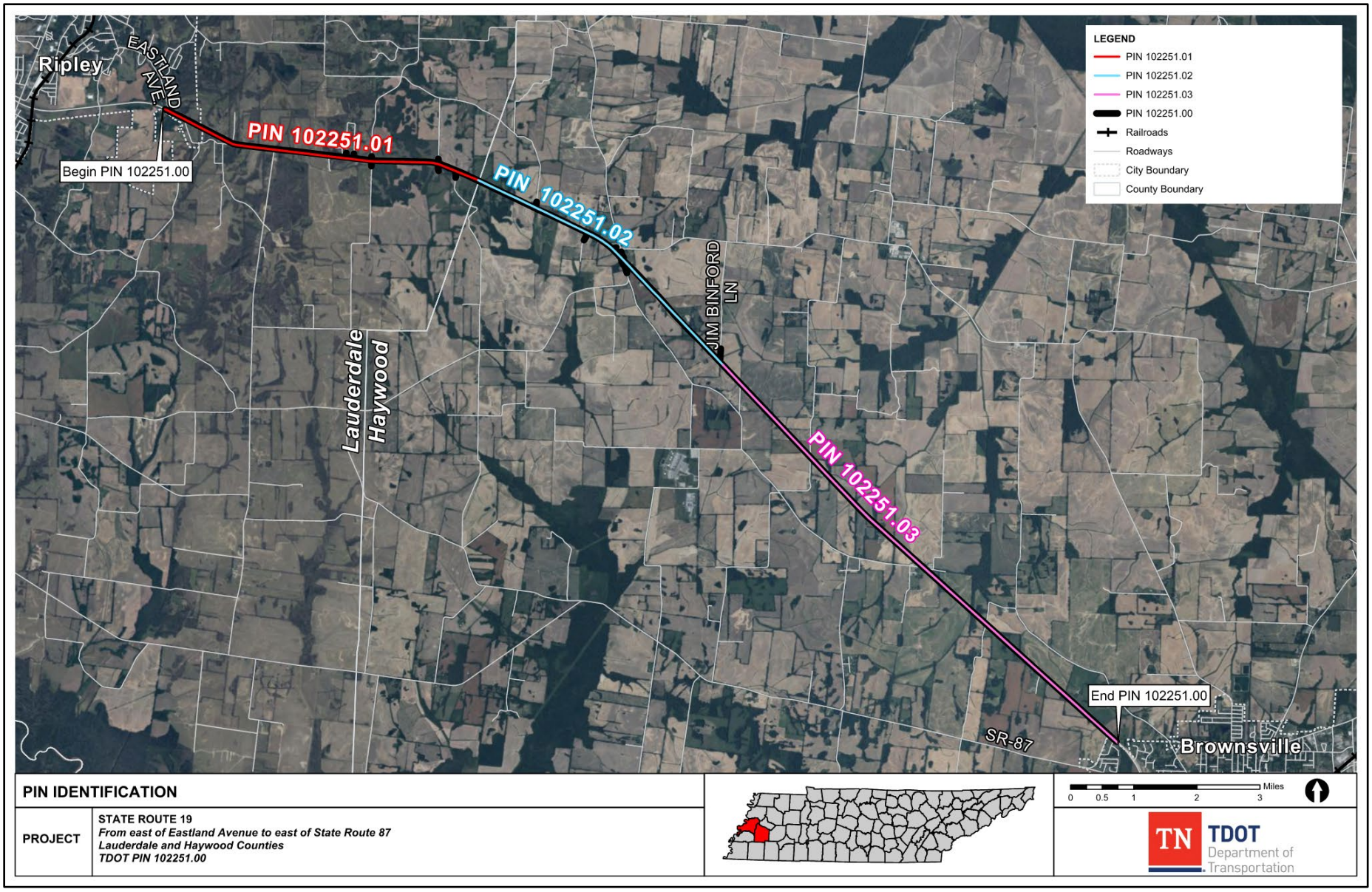


Figure 2 PIN Identification



1.2 Alternatives Under Consideration

A No-Build Alternative and one Build Alternative are being evaluated in the EA. Each alternative is described in the subsequent text below.

1.2.1 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would leave the segment of SR-19 from east of Eastland Avenue to east of SR-87 as it currently exists except for routine maintenance and safety upgrades, as needed, or modifications that have been programmed and approved for implementation through TDOT's 25-Year Long Range Transportation Policy Plan, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), or TDOT 10-Year Project Plan. The No-Build Alternative is required by federal regulations to be evaluated in the EA and provides a baseline for comparing other alternatives.

1.2.2 Build Alternative

The Build Alternative proposes various roadway improvements along SR-19, from east of Eastland Avenue to east of SR-87. Proposed improvements would include widening, resurfacing, realignment of select intersections, and slope improvements (**Figure 3**).

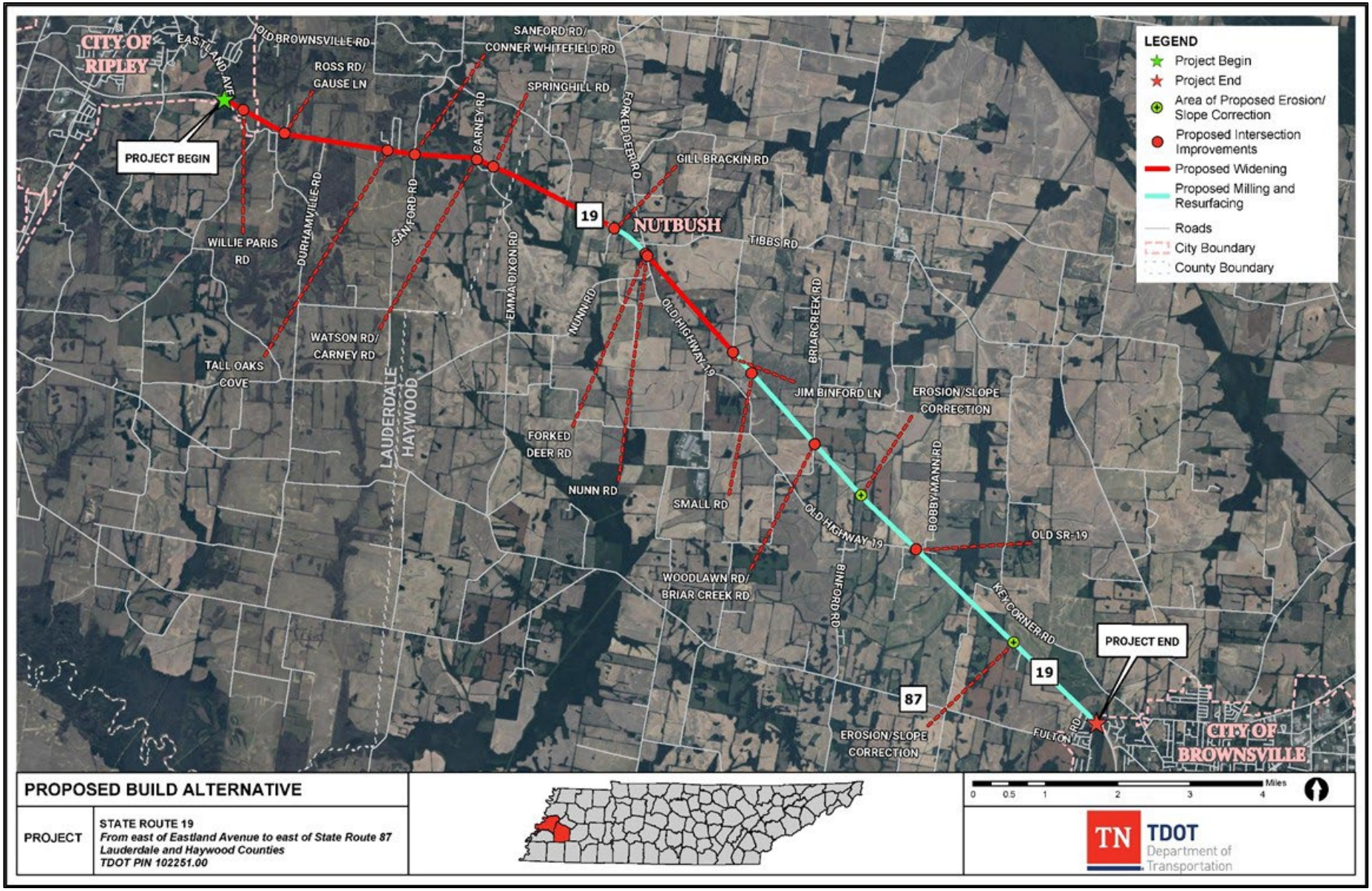
From east of Eastland Avenue in Lauderdale County to just west of Gill Brackin Road in Haywood County, the proposed project would widen the existing 11-foot travel lanes (one in each direction) to two 12-foot travel lanes with 2-foot to 10-foot shoulders (8-foot paved). Along this segment of the proposed project, the roadway would be widened primarily to the north side of the existing roadway in the Lauderdale County portion and to the south side in Haywood County. In this section, following intersections are proposed to be realigned:

- Willie Paris Road
- Ross Road/Gause Lane
- Tall Oaks Cove
- Sanford Road/Conner Whitefield Road
- Watson Road/Carney Road
- Springhill Road

From just west of Gill Brackin Road to Nunn Road, the proposed project would mill and resurface the existing 11-foot travel lanes and 2-foot shoulders. In this section, the following SR-19 intersections are proposed to be realigned:

- Forked Deer Road (SR-180)
- Nunn Road

Figure 3 SR-19 Improvement Locations



From Nunn Road to east of Jim Binford Lane, the proposed project would widen the two existing 11-foot travel lanes and 2-foot shoulders to two 12-foot travel lanes with 10-foot shoulders (8-foot paved). In this section, the following SR-19 intersection is proposed to be realigned:

- Jim Binford Lane

From east of Jim Binford Lane to the project terminus east of SR-87, the proposed project would mill and resurface the existing 11-foot travel lanes and 2-foot shoulders. Additional right-of-way would be needed to correct erosion/slope issues from approximately 4,351 feet east of Woodlawn Road to approximately 4,411 feet west of Old SR-19 (approximately 1,700 feet) and from approximately 3,417 feet east of Patton Road to approximately 279 feet east of Westpointe Road (approximately 1,800 feet). In this section, the following intersections are proposed to be realigned:

- Small Road at SR-19
- Woodlawn Road/Briar Creek Road at SR-19
- Old SR-19 at SR-19

2.0 FHWA Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire

During the initiation of the visual assessment, the FHWA Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire was used to determine the appropriate level of assessment. The questionnaire scores the answers to five questions concerning environmental compatibility and five questions concerning viewer sensitivity. The total score of the questions indicates the appropriate level of VIA to perform for the proposed project. Scores ranging from 10-30 require a VIA, scores below 10 do not require a VIA. There are four levels of VIA:

- Expanded VIA (Score 25-30)
- Standard VIA (Score 20-24)
- Abbreviated VIA (Score 15-19)
- VIA Memorandum (Score 10-14)

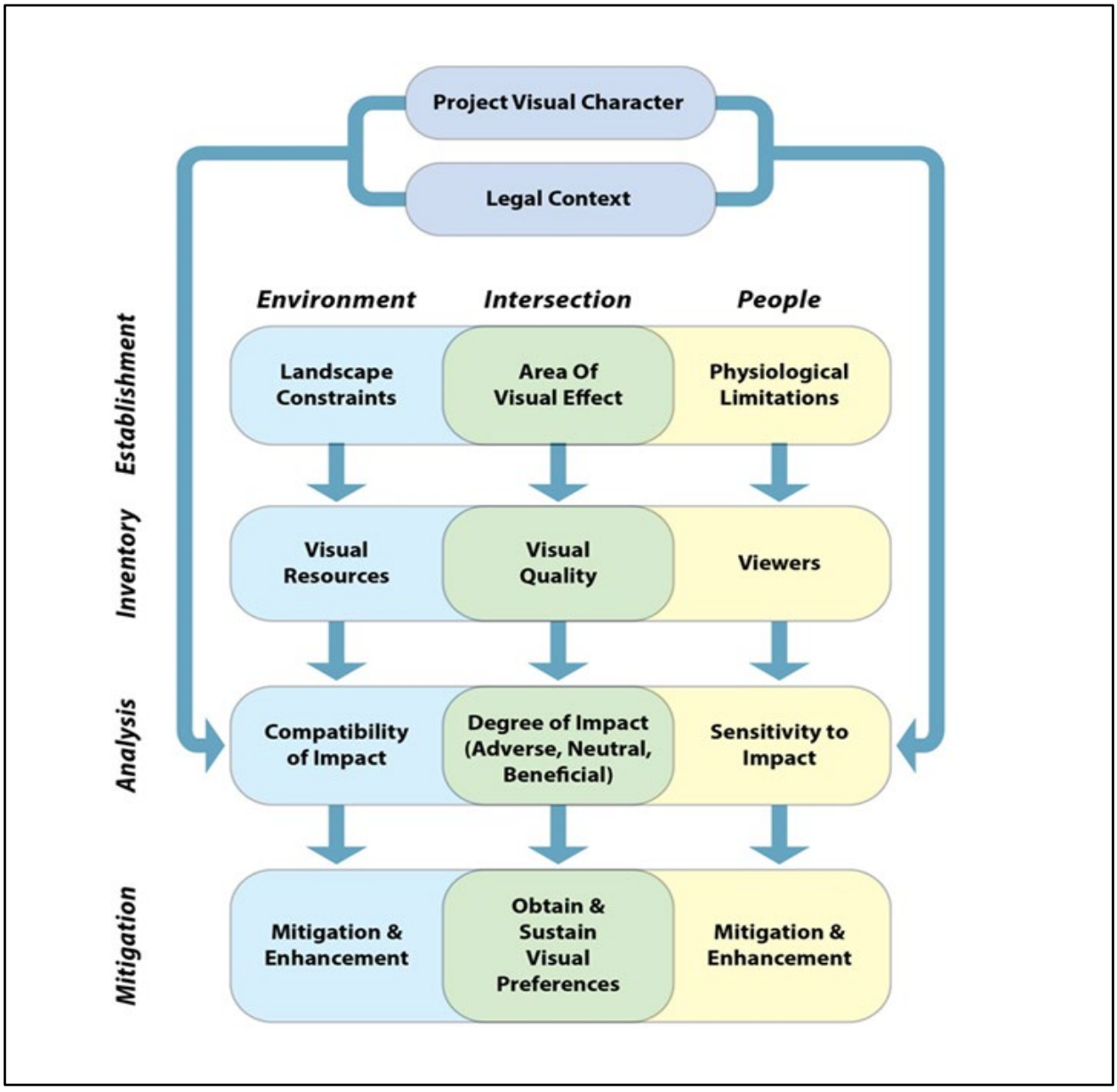
The SR-19 project questionnaire score was 11, which corresponds with a VIA Memorandum (**Attachment 1**). As described in *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*,[1] a VIA Memorandum addresses minor visual issues that indicate the nature of limited impacts.

[1] https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx

3.0 Methodology

The Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) for the SR-19 project followed the methodology and terminology outlined in *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*.[2] The VIA process is carried out in four phases: establishment, inventory, analysis, and mitigation (**Figure 4**). Each of these phases is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Figure 4 Visual Impact Assessment Process[3]



[2] https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx

[3] https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx

4.0 Establishment Phase

The establishment phase is the first phase of the FWHA VIA process. The purpose of this phase is to answer three basic questions:

1. What is the visual character of the proposed project (defining the proposed project's visual character)?
2. Are there any legal directives or social constraints that dictate the visual quality of what can be constructed (determining the regulatory context)?
3. To what extent is the proposed project visible (defining the Area of Visual Effect (AVE)).

4.1 Visual Character of the Proposed Project

Defining the project's visual character focuses on describing the physical attributes of the proposed roadway's constructed elements and establishing what is known about the visual character of the proposed project at the initial stage of project development.

The proposed project is 15.2 miles in length. As described in Section 1.1.2, the typical section for the proposed Build Alternative from east of Eastland Avenue to just west of Gill Brackin Road and from Nunn Road to east of Jim Binford Lane would consist of two 12-foot travel lanes (one lane in each direction) with 10-foot shoulders (eight feet paved). The proposed Build Alternative in these sections would basically follow the alignment of existing SR-19, with the exception of occasional minor shifts to straighten curves, correct sight distances, or for construction purposes. Guardrail would be installed as necessary in these sections.

For the sections of the proposed Build Alternative from just west of Gill Bracken Road to Nunn Road and from east of Jim Binford Lane to east of SR-87 the existing typical section (11-foot lanes and 2-foot shoulders) would not change. The existing lanes and shoulders would be milled and resurfaced.

The Build Alternative proposes to realign 12 intersections (**Figure 3**) to improve sight distance. All proposed intersections would be at-grade. No additional lanes are proposed at any of these intersections; therefore, they would retain their existing typical sections, which range from two 9-foot lanes with 2-foot shoulders to two 10-foot lanes with 2 to 4-foot shoulders.

The proposed Build Alternative would not include the addition of any major structures such as bridges, large retaining walls, or noise walls that would command the attention of viewers. The proposed Build Alternative would install roadway signage that is typical for a minor collector

and is similar to the existing signage. No pedestrian signals or crosswalk striping are currently proposed.

4.2 Regulatory Context

Determining the regulatory context focuses identifying Federal, Tribal, State, regional, and local, plans, policies, and regulations related to visual resources, views, or visual quality that apply to the area affected by the proposed project.

The following federal laws and programs deal with areas throughout the county that have been recognized for their scenic values:

- Federal-aid Highway Act of 1970[4]
- National Scenic Byways Program[5]
- National Scenic Areas[6]
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act[7]
- National Trails System Act[8]
- National Monuments[9]
- National Historic Preservation Act[10]
- Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Act of 1966[11]
- Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965[12]

Three properties protected under Section 4(f) of the U.S. DOT Act of 1966 are located within the vicinity of the proposed project. See **Section 5.1.2** of this document and the SR-19 Cultural Resources Technical Memorandum in **Appendix F** of the EA for more information on these properties.

Existing future land use plans, county growth plans, zoning ordinances, regional transportation plans, and economic development plans, programs, and policies for Lauderdale and Haywood Counties were reviewed for policies and regulations related to visual resources, views or visual quality. Visual resources and visual quality are addressed in Haywood County's Future Land Use

[4] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-84/pdf/STATUTE-84-Pg1713.pdf
[5] https://fhwaapps.fhwa.dot.gov/bywaysp
[6] https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title16/chapter2/subchapter2&edition=prelim
[7] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-1758/pdf/COMPS-1758.pdf
[8] https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/upload/National-Trails-System-Act-Amended-2019.pdf
[9] https://www.nps.gov/subjects/archeology/national-monument-facts-and-figures.htm
[10] https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/nhpa.pdf
[11] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-80/pdf/STATUTE-80-Pg931.pdf
[12] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg897.pdf

Plan, NEXT[13], adopted in March 2024. Growth principles stated in the plan include "accommodating growth and change while ensuring the scale and nature of investment does not erode or degrade the rural character, iconic landscapes, productive farmland, environmentally sensitive areas that should be protected for future generations" and guiding growth and focusing "investment to occur in and around existing communities, thereby preserving the County's rural character, agricultural lands, and natural environment."

No reference to visual resources, views, or visual quality was found in any of the Lauderdale County plans.

For more detailed information on state, regional and local plans, policies and regulations for Lauderdale and Haywood counties see the SR-19 Land Use, Farmland, and Transportation Infrastructure Technical Memorandum in **Appendix C** of the EA.

4.3 Area of Visual Effect

The *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA, 2015) specify that visual impacts should be assessed within a given project's area of visual effect (AVE), which is defined as the area of project visibility. Based on topography, field review, and data availability, the AVE was defined as the area within 0.5 mile of the Build Alternative (**Figure 5**).

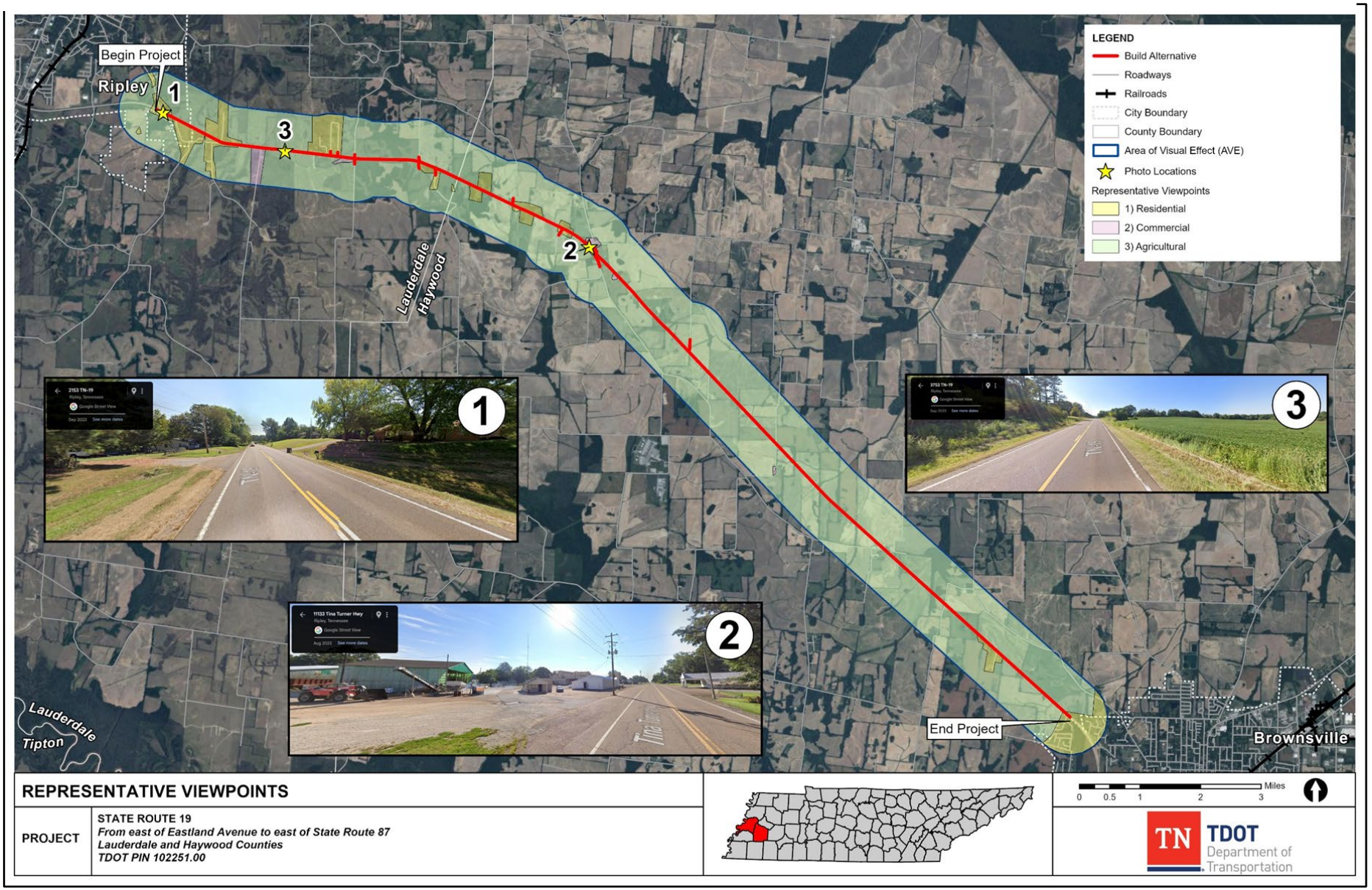
4.4 Landscape Units

The *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA, 2015) emphasize the definition of landscape units, which are geographic areas within which impacts to visual character, viewer response, and visual quality are assessed. Each landscape unit has a distinct visual character, which is influenced by the predominant land use as well as the natural environment (including topography and vegetation) and the cultural environment (including the density, scale, and style of predominant architecture).

Landscape units within the AVE were identified based on review of planning and land use documents and maps, aerial photography, and a site visit. For more information on the review of land use information, see the SR-19 Land Use, Farmland, and Transportation Infrastructure Technical Memorandum included in **Appendix C** of the EA.

[13] https://haywoodtn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/23005-HaywoodFutureLandUsePlan_Report-240312-sm.pdf

Figure 5 VIA Area of Effect (AVE)



The proposed project area consists of one landscape unit as the landscape within the project AVE is consistently rural in nature and not comprised of areas with noticeably different distinct visual characteristics. The proposed project is located in the Gulf coastal plain physiographic region, which in the project area is characterized by uplands with low rolling hills. The land ranges from well drained to poorly drained[14], [15].

The landscape consists of gently rolling farmland dominated by farm fields, with the primary crops being row crops such as soybeans, wheat, cotton, grain, and corn. Forested areas are scarce. The majority of trees are hardwood species. Residences are mostly scattered throughout the project landscape with the exception of the termini of the proposed project near Ripley and Brownsville, where there are some small subdivisions. See the SR-19 Community Impact Assessment Technical Memorandum (**Appendix D** of the EA) and the SR-19 Land Use, Farmland, and Transportation Infrastructure Technical Memorandum (**Appendix C** of the EA) for more information on land use and social patterns.

5.0 Inventory Phase

The purpose of the inventory phase is to define the existing status of the affected environment and the affected population and the existing or preferred condition of visual quality. The purpose of this phase is to answer the following questions:

- What is the existing visual character of the AVE?
- Whose views in the AVE would be affected by the proposed project?
- What do people like and dislike about the existing visual character of the AVE?

Information from this phase and the Establishment Phase generate the baseline conditions from which visual impacts will be assessed.

5.1 Affected Environment

The first task of the Inventory Phase is to determine the existing visual character of the AVE. The existing visual character of the AVE is determined by its visual resources. Those resources are described in the following sections.

[14] https://archive.org/details/lauderdaleTN1990/mode/2up
[15] https://archive.org/details/haywoodTN1995/mode/2up

5.1.1 Visual Character of the Natural Environment

The visual character of the natural environment is comprised of land, water, vegetation, animals, and atmospheric conditions.

The visual character of the natural environment in the vicinity of the proposed project consists of gently rolling hills covered with a patchwork of farm fields. Hardwood hedgerows define the edges of many of the fields. Small hardwood forests are scattered throughout the area. The character of the natural environment changes with the seasons: the first blush of color in the spring; the lush greens of the trees and crops in the summer; the reds, yellows, and oranges of the changing leaves in the fall; and the starkness of the leafless trees and the earthtones of the fields in the winter. Farm ponds dot the landscape. Small flowing streams, many lined with hardwood trees and shrubs, dissect the area. There don't currently appear to be any pastures in the vicinity of the proposed project, so livestock is not commonly seen. Deer and birds are present. The area is often hot and humid in the summer. See **Figure 6** for examples of the visual character of the SR-19 natural environment.

5.1.2 Visual Character of the Cultural Environment

The visual character of the cultural environment is comprised of buildings, infrastructure, structures (e.g. walls, towers, fences, etc.), and artifacts and art.

As mentioned previously, most residences in the project area are scattered throughout the landscape, except for the western end near the town of Ripley and the eastern end near the town of Brownsville where they can be found in a few small subdivisions. Most of the residences are ranch houses clad in vinyl siding or brick veneer. Most are in close proximity to the existing roadway. Barns, grain silos, irrigation systems and other agricultural buildings and structures dot the rural landscape. Power lines strung on telephone poles follow SR-19. Cell towers are also scattered throughout the landscape. See **Figure 7** for examples of the visual character of the SR-19 cultural environment.

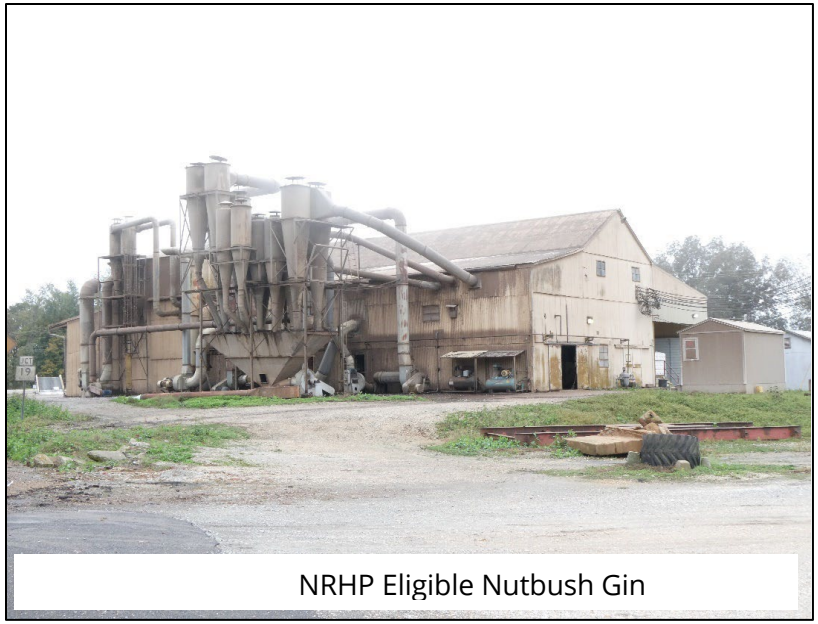
One National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) listed property (Woodlawn Baptist Church) and two NRHP eligible properties (Nutbush Gin and Nutbush Grocery Store) are located within the proposed project's AVE (**Figure 8**). The Woodlawn Baptist Church is located within 0.5 mile of the proposed project. The Nutbush Gin and Nutbush Grocery Store are located immediately adjacent to SR-19. See the SR-19 Cultural Resources Technical Memorandum in **Appendix F** of the EA for more information on these properties.

No parks, trails, or recreational areas are within the AVE of the proposed project.

Figure 6 Representative Views of the SR-19 Natural Environment

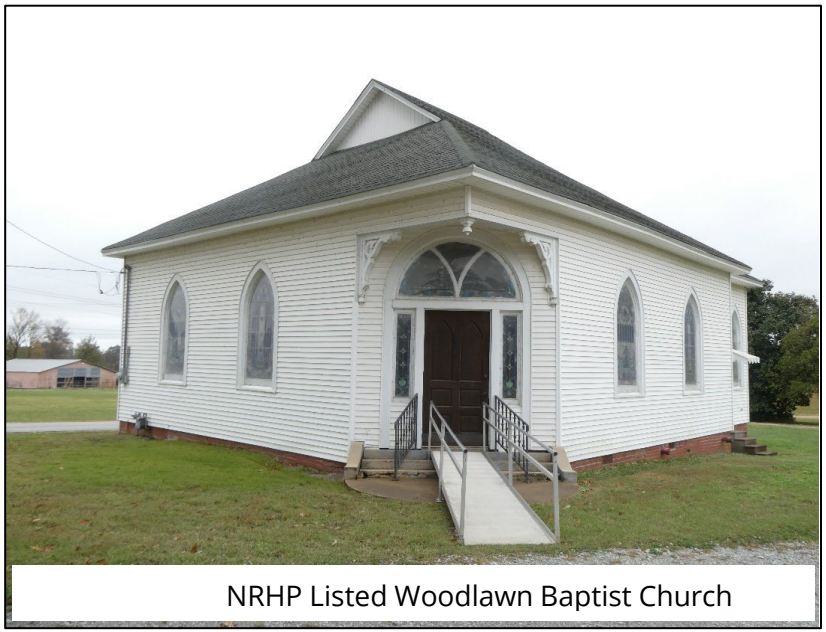
Figure 9 Representative Views of the SR-19 Cultural Environment

Figure 10 NRHP Listed and Eligible Properties in the SR-19 AVE



NRHP Eligible Nutbush Gin

NRHP Eligible Nutbush Grocery Store



NRHP Listed Woodlawn Baptist Church

5.1.3 Visual Character of the Project Environment

The visual character of the project environment is comprised of highway geometrics, grading, constructed elements, vegetative cover, and other ancillary visual elements typically found in the corridor of a modern highway.

As described previously, existing SR-19 consists of two travel lanes (one in each direction) and narrow shoulders. There are long stretches where the roadway is straight with long site distances. Shallow grassed ditches line the roadway in most areas. Hardwood trees line both sides of the road in a few areas but for the most part, farm fields abut the road right-of-way. While SR-19 does have some curves, none of them would be considered sharp curves. Some sections of the road have vertical curves due to the rolling terrain. See **Figure 9** for representative view of the SR-19 project environment and **Figure 10** for examples of SR-19 horizontal and vertical curves.

5.2 Affected Population

The second task of the Inventory Phase is to answer the question, "Whose views in the AVE does the proposed project affect?" The population affected by the proposed project is referred to as viewers. There are two distinct groups of viewers: neighbors and travelers. Neighbors are people who are adjacent to the roadway and have views of the road. Travelers are people who use the roadway and have views from the road.

5.2.1 Neighbors (Views of the Road)

The term neighbor does not always mean that a person is adjacent to the roadway. Rather, it refers to people who are not travelling on the roadway but may see it from their geographic location in the AVE.

The topography in the SR-19 AVE is gently rolling with very little change in elevation. For the proposed SR-19 project, neighbors include people who live and work adjacent to SR-19 and have views of the road. Those who work adjacent to SR-19 include those who work the farm fields as well as those who work at the Nutbush Gin and other commercial enterprises along the road.

Figure 13 Representative Views of the SR-19 Project Environment

Figure 16 Examples of SR-19 Horizontal and Vertical Curves

5.2.2 Travelers (Views from the Road)

Travelers have views from the road. Travelers are users of the existing roadway or future users of the improved roadway. For the proposed SR-19 project, travelers are those using the roadway and have views from the road. Most travelers travel the road in motorized vehicles (cars, trucks, tractors, etc.). Few, if any travel currently SR-19 on foot or by bicycle. However, it should be noted that SR-19 within the AVE has been identified as a proposed state highway bicycle route[16].

5.3 Visual Quality

The third task of the Inventory Phase is to define visual quality. Visual quality is defined in *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA, 2015) as the experience of having pleasing visual perceptions. *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA, 2015) recognizes three types of visual perception, corresponding to each of the three types of visual resources:

- When viewing the components of a scene's ***natural environment***, viewers inherently evaluate the ***natural harmony*** of the existing scene, determining if the composition is harmonious or inharmonious.
- When viewing the components of the ***cultural environment***, viewers evaluate the scene's ***cultural order***, determining if the composition is orderly or disorderly.
- When viewing the ***project environment***, viewers evaluate the ***coherence*** of the project components, determining if the project's composition is coherent or incoherent.

Table 1 lists the existing visual quality for each of the three types of visual resources in the SR-19 AVE.

Table 1 SR-19 Visual Quality Baseline

Type of Visual Resource	Composition
Natural Environment	Harmonious
Cultural Environment	Orderly
Project Environment	Coherent

[16] https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/public-trans/bicyclerouteRegion4.pdf

6.0 Analysis Phase

As detailed in Chapter 6 of the *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA, 2015), the analysis phase assesses the viewer's experience of the visual environment with the visual impacts of the proposed project in order to determine the degree of impact to the visual quality. Visual impacts are evaluated in terms of their *compatibility* with the environment and the viewer's *sensitivity* to the proposed impacts.

- **Compatibility of the Impact**: Evaluates the ability of environment's visual character to absorb the visual character of the project. Visual compatibility is evaluated in terms of the project's *scale*, *form*, *materials*, and *visual character* compared with those of the AVE.
- **Sensitivity to the Impact**: Reflects how viewers are likely to see and care about visual changes from a project. Viewer sensitivity combines:
  - Viewer exposure – how visible the project is, based on *proximity*, *extent*, and *duration* of views.
  - Viewer awareness – the level of *attention*, interest, or concern viewers have for the visual setting.

  Viewer sensitivity is considered high when both exposure and awareness are high and are typically associated with close-range views, views seen by many viewers, long-duration views, views with prominent landmarks or focal points, and areas known for their visual or scenic values.
- **Degree of the Impact**: Categorized as beneficial, adverse, or neutral, based on how a project affects visual quality. A *beneficial* impact enhances visual resources or improves the views and viewer's experience. An *adverse* impact degrades visual quality by degrading visual resources or obstructs or alters desired views. If the project neither enhances nor degrades visual resources, the impact is considered *neutral*.

6.1 No-Build Alternative

Since the No-Build Alternative would leave the segment of SR-19 from east of Eastland Avenue to east of SR-87 as it currently exists except for routine maintenance and safety upgrades, as needed, or modifications that have been programmed and approved for implementation through TDOT's 25-Year Long Range Transportation Policy Plan, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), or TDOT 10-Year Project Plan, the No-Build Alternative is not likely to result in any visual impacts.

6.2 Build Alternative

From just west of Gill Brackin Road to Nunn Road, and from east of Jim Binford Lane to east of SR-87, the scale of the proposed Build Alternative would remain unchanged, as improvements would be limited to milling and resurfacing of the existing roadway. Where the proposed widening improvements would be implemented, the change in scale would be negligible.

The proposed Build Alternative's form, materials, and visual character would closely match the existing roadway and remain compatible with the surrounding natural, cultural, and project environments. Potential changes to the natural harmony, cultural order, or project coherence within the AVE would be neutral.

The most notable visible changes would occur between Eastland Avenue and Gill Brackin Road, where proposed improvements would result in multiple relocations and impact small patches of hardwood trees near the right-of-way. Viewer exposure to the natural and project environments in this section is anticipated to be low, while exposure to changes in the cultural environment – due to relocation – is expected to be moderate.

Viewer awareness throughout the AVE would be low for both neighbors and travelers, given the routine landscape, absence of focal points, and proposed project's avoidance of adverse effects to historic resources.

Overall, the proposed Build Alternative would neither enhance nor degrade the visual quality for viewers along the project route; therefore, the anticipated visual impact would be neutral.

Table 2 summarizes viewer exposure, awareness and sensitivity. **Table 3** summarizes the visual impacts of the proposed Build Alternative.

Table 2 Build Alternative Viewer Sensitivity

	Natural Environment		Cultural Environment		Project Environment	
	Neighbors	Travelers	Neighbors	Travelers	Neighbors	Travelers
Viewer Exposure	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
Viewer Awareness	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Viewer Sensitivity[17]	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

[17] Viewer sensitivity was considered low when exposure was considered moderate but awareness was low given the routine nature of the scene, lack of focal points, and lack of visually sensitive areas.

Table 3 Build Alternative Visual Quality Impacts

	Natural Environment	Cultural Environment	Project Environment
Visual Compatibility	Compatible	Compatible	Compatible
Viewer Sensitivity	Low	Low	Low
Degree of Impact	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

7.0 Mitigation Phase

The proposed Build Alternative would not result in adverse impacts to visual quality; therefore, no mitigation is proposed.

8.0 Summary of Visual Impacts and Minimization/Mitigation Measures to Address Impacts

Table 4 summarizes potential visual impacts for the No-Build and Build Alternatives.

Table 4 Summary of Visual Impacts, Minimization Measures, and Mitigation Measures to Adress Impacts

	No-Build Alternative	Build Alternative	
Impact Category	**Effect Determination**	**Effect Determination**	**Minimization/ Mitigation Measures to Address Impacts**
Visual Impacts	No Effect	The overall viewer sensitivity and project compatibility ratings within the visual environment were determined to be “low” and “compatible”, respectively. Therefore, the proposed Build Alternative is anticipated to have a neutral effect on the neighbors’ and travelers’ experience of overall visual quality within the area of visual effect (AVE).	Not Applicable

ATTACHMENT A

VISUAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING QUESTIONNAIRE

GUIDELINES FOR THE VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF HIGHWAY PROJECTS - APPENDICES

Appendix C
VIA Scoping Questionnaire

The following ten questions can be used to determine the appropriate level of effort for assessing the impacts on visual quality that may result from a proposed highway project. The first set of five questions is concerned with environmental compatibility impacts on the visual resources of the affected environment. The second set of five questions deals with the sensitivity of the affected population of viewers to those impacts.

Consider each of the ten questions on the questionnaire and select the response that most closely applies to the project in question. Each response has a corresponding point value. After the questionnaire is completed the total score will represent the type of VIA document suitable for the project.

It is important that this scoring system be used as a preliminary guide only. Although these questions provide some guidelines for determining if a VIA is necessary, it should not, by itself, be considered definitive. If there is any hint that visual issues may be a factor in assessing impacts, it is recommended that a VIA be conducted. Although the total score will direct the user toward a particular level of VIA documentation, circumstances may necessitate selecting a different level of analysis and documentation based on previous experience, local concerns, or professional judgment. This checklist is meant to assist the writer of the VIA to understand the degree and breadth of the possible visual issues. The goal is to develop an analysis and document strategy that is appropriately thorough, efficient, and defensible.

Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire

Project Name: State Route 19 (PIN 102251.00)	Site Visit Date: Day, Jan 17th, 2025
Location: Haywood and Lauderdale County	Time: 1 PM
Special Conditions/Notes:	Conducted By: Braxton Eden

Environmental Compatibility

1. *Will the project result in a noticeable change in the physical characteristics of the existing environment?* (Consider all project components and construction impacts - both permanent and temporary, including landform changes, structures, noise barriers, vegetation removal, railing, signage, and contractor activities.)

- ☐ High level of permanent change (3)
- ☐ Moderate level of permanent change (2)
- ■ Low level of permanent or temporary change (1)
- ☐ No Noticeable Change (0)

2. *Will the project complement or contrast with the visual character desired by the community?* (Evaluate the scale and extent of the project features compared to the surrounding scale of the community. Is the project likely to give an urban appearance to an existing rural or suburban community? Do you anticipate that the change will be viewed by the public as positive or negative? Research planning documents, or talk with local planners and community representatives to understand the type of visual environment local residents envision for their community.)

- ☐ Low Compatibility (3)
- ☐ Moderate Compatibility (2)
- ■ High compatibility (1)

3. *What level of local concern is there for the types of project features (e.g., bridge structures, large excavations, sound barriers, or median planting removal) and construction impacts that are proposed?* (Certain project improvements can be of special interest to local citizens, causing a heightened level of public concern, and requiring a more focused visual analysis.)

- ☐ High concern (3)
- ☐ Moderate concern (2)
- ■ Low concern (1)
- ☐ Negligible Project Features (0)

4. *Is it anticipated that to mitigate visual impacts, it may be necessary to develop extensive or novel mitigation strategies to avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse impacts or will using conventional mitigation strategies, such as landscape or architectural treatment adequately mitigate adverse visual impacts?*

☐ Extensive Non-Conventional Mitigation Likely (3)
☐ Some non-conventional Mitigation Likely (2)
☐ Only Conventional Mitigation Likely (1)
■ No Mitigation Likely (0)

5. Will this project, when seen collectively with other projects, result in an aggregate adverse change (cumulative impacts) in overall visual quality or character? (Identify any projects [both state and local] in the area that have been constructed in recent years and those currently planned for future construction. The window of time and the extent of area applicable to possible cumulative impacts should be based on a reasonable anticipation of the viewing public's perception.)

☐ Cumulative Impacts likely: 0-5 years (3)
☐ Cumulative Impacts likely: 6-10 years (2)
■ Cumulative Impacts unlikely (1)

Viewer Sensitivity

1. *What is the potential that the project proposal may be controversial within the community, or opposed by any organized group?* (This can be researched initially by talking with the state DOT and local agency management and staff familiar with the affected community's sentiments as evidenced by past projects and/or current information.)

☐ High Potential (3)
☐ Moderate Potential (2)
■ Low Potential (1)
☐ No Potential (0)

2. *How sensitive are potential viewer-groups likely to be regarding visible changes proposed by the project?* (Consider among other factors the number of viewers within the group, probable viewer expectations, activities, viewing duration, and orientation. The expected viewer sensitivity level may be scoped by applying professional judgment, and by soliciting information from other DOT staff, local agencies and community representatives familiar with the affected community's sentiments and demonstrated concerns.)

☐ High Sensitivity (3)
☐ Moderate Sensitivity (2)
■ Low Sensitivity (1)

3. *To what degree does the project's aesthetic approach appear to be consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, policies or standards?*

☐ Low Compatibility (3)
☐ Moderate Compatibility (2)
■ High compatibility (1)

4. *Are permits going to be required by outside regulatory agencies (i.e., Federal, State, or local)?* (Permit requirements can have an unintended consequence on the visual environment. Anticipated permits, as well as specific permit requirements - which are defined by the permitter, may be determined by talking with the project environmental planner and project engineer. Note: coordinate with the state DOT representative responsible for obtaining the permit prior to communicating directly with any permitting agency. Permits that may benefit from additional analysis include permits that may result in visible built features, such as infiltration basins or devices under a storm water permit or a retaining wall for wetland avoidance or permits for work in sensitive areas such as coastal development permits or on Federal lands, such as impacts to Wild and Scenic Rivers.)

■ Yes (3)
☐ Maybe (2)
☐ No (1)

5. *Will the project sponsor or public benefit from a more detailed visual analysis in order to help reach consensus on a course of action to address potential visual impacts?* (Consider the proposed project features, possible visual impacts, and probable mitigation recommendations.)

☐ Yes (3)
☐ Maybe (2)
■ No (1)

Determining the Level of Visual Impact Assessment

Total the scores of the answers to all ten questions on the Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire. Use the total score from the questionnaire as an indicator of the appropriate level of VIA to perform for the project. Confirm that the level suggested by the checklist is consistent with the project teams' professional judgments. If there remains doubt about whether a VIA needs to be completed, it may be prudent to conduct an Abbreviated VIA. If there remains doubt about the level of the VIA, begin with the simpler VIA process. If visual impacts emerge as a more substantial concern than anticipated, the level of VIA documentation can always be increased.

The level of the VIA can initially be based on the following ranges of total scores:

☐ ***Score 25-30***

An *Expanded VIA* is probably necessary. It is recommended that it should be proceeded by a formal visual scoping study prior to beginning the VIA to alert the project team to potential highly adverse impacts and to develop new project alternatives to avoid those impacts. These technical studies will likely receive state-wide, even national, public review. Extensive use of visual simulations and a comprehensive public involvement program would be typical.

☐ ***Score 20-24***

A *Standard VIA* is recommended. This technical study will likely receive extensive local, perhaps state-wide, public review. It would typically include several visual simulations. It would also include a thorough examination of public planning and policy documents supplemented with a direct public engagement processes to determine visual preferences.

☐ ***Score 15-19***

An *Abbreviated VIA* would briefly describe project features, impacts and mitigation requirements. Visual simulations would be optional. An Abbreviated VIA would receive little direct public interest beyond a summary of its findings in the project's environmental documents. Visual preferences would be based on observation and review of planning and policy documents by local jurisdictions.

■ ***Score 10-14***

A *VIA Memorandum* addressing minor visual issues that indicates the nature of the limited impacts and any necessary mitigation strategies that should be implemented would likely be sufficient along with an explanation of why no formal analysis is required.

☐ ***Score 6-9***

No noticeable physical changes to the environment are proposed and no further analysis is required. Print out a copy of this completed questionnaire for your project file to document that there is no effect. A *VIA Memorandum* may be used to document that there is no effect and to explain the approach used for the determination.