

# 7

# Visual Resources

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## Acronyms/Abbreviations

ECL.....	Environmental Conservation Law
FHWA .....	Federal Highway Administration
NFTA .....	Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
NYSDEC .....	New York Department of Environmental Conservation

# 7 Visual Resources

This chapter identifies and characterizes the existing visual environment and considers the potential for the Proposed Action to affect visual resources. As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” the Proposed Action includes extending the Metro Rail from University Station in Buffalo to Amherst and Tonawanda. Ten stations are proposed—two with a park & ride facility—and a storage/light maintenance facility at the end of the line. This chapter identifies the visual elements associated with the Proposed Action, considers the potential impacts to the visual environment, and identifies potential mitigation measures related to visual quality.

## 7.1 REGULATORY CONTEXT

In 1987, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), jointly with the Federal Transit Administration, established Environmental Impact and Related Procedures (23 CFR §771) for the evaluation of transportation projects and the compliance of these projects with 23 U.S.C. § 109 (h), which focuses on design criteria relating to social, economic, and environmental effects. FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A (1987) identifies visual resources as an item to be included in environmental and Section 4(f) documents. FHWA’s Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (1981) and FHWA’s Environmental Impact Statement Visual Impact Discussion (1990) provide further guidance on assessing visual impacts. In accordance with these guidelines, the existing visual character and quality of the affected environment, as well as the viewer response to those resources, provide the framework for assessing the change in visual character that would occur as a result of the project.

In addition to the federal guidelines, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Program Policy – Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts (DEP-00-2) was references. In compliance with DEP-00-2, aesthetic resources were identified, and a visual assessment was conducted.

## 7.2 METHODOLOGY

The visual analysis study area is defined as the area within visual range of the Proposed Action. The potential viewshed is shaped by the study area’s topography, as well as its built (e.g., structures) and natural (e.g., primarily vegetation) environment. Given the presence of residential, commercial, and institutional buildings within the area surrounding the Proposed Action, the uniform topography, and the presence of mature trees lining many residential streets and within private property lot lines, views of the Proposed Action would be generally limited to locations immediately adjacent to the Proposed Action alignment or proposed stations. As such, the land uses adjacent to and within 400 feet on either side of the Proposed Action alignment define the existing visual character and quality of this study area. In areas where stations are proposed, the study area extends to 1,000 feet on either side of the alignment in order to examine impacts from a broader viewshed.

Visual quality is most frequently the result of the relationship of all the components of a landscape, rather than the presence of a single feature. Therefore, the landscape's visual features must be objectively identified and their character and quality assessed. In addition, the assessment must identify the importance to people ("viewer groups"), or sensitivity of views of visual resources in the landscape.

DEP-00-2 lists 15 categories of state aesthetic resources that should be evaluated in a visual analysis, constituting properties with the following designations:

1. State/National Register of Historic Places
2. New York State Parks
3. Heritage Areas
4. New York State Forest Preserves
5. National Wildlife Refuges, State Game Refuges, and State Wildlife Management Areas
6. National Natural Landmarks
7. National Park System Recreation Areas, Seashores, Forests
8. Rivers Designated as National or State Wild, Scenic, or Recreational
9. Sites, Areas, Lakes, Reservoirs, or Highways designated or eligible for designation as scenic
10. Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance
11. State or Federally Designated Trails
12. State Nature and Historic Preservation Areas
13. Adirondack Park Scenic Vistas
14. Palisades Park
15. Bond Act Properties Purchased Under Exceptional Scenic Beauty or Open Space Category

In addition, DEP-00-2 indicates that consideration should be given to resources of local significance. Therefore, locally designated resources considered include historic properties designated at the local (county/city/town) level, and locally operated, publicly accessible open spaces such as parks.

Having established the baseline of existing conditions, proposed changes to the landscape as a result the Proposed Action are then evaluated for their degree of impact. The degree of impact depends on both the magnitude of change to the visual resource (i.e., visual character and quality) and viewers' responses to and degree of concern for those changes.

Viewer groups are defined as viewers from the roadway (e.g., motorists and users of the proposed shared-use path) or viewers of the roadway (e.g., residents, users of recreational resources including parks, boaters, pedestrians and bicyclists on other trails, rail travelers, and motorist on local roadways). Viewers are considered in terms of their sensitivity and view duration, with residents considered among the most sensitive viewers because they may view the proposed visual change from a stationary viewpoint for the most prolonged periods of time. Travelers on the roadways, on the other hand, would be much less sensitive because they may only see the proposed visual change for only a short duration. Also considered in the analysis is the distance of the observer from the visual change; as the distance increases, the ability of the viewer to see the details of an object decreases.

According to the NYSDEC guidance, a visual “impact” occurs when there is a detrimental effect on an aesthetic resource that interferes with or reduces the public’s enjoyment of a resource, and when the mitigating effects of perspective—such as vegetation, distance, and atmospheric perspective or other designed mitigation—do not reduce the visibility of a project to insignificant levels. Thus, while a project could be visible within a viewshed, mere visibility is not a threshold of significance. A determination of significance depends on several factors:

- Presence of designated historic or scenic resources within the viewshed of a project
- Distance between project and visual resource
- General characteristics of the surrounding landscape
- Extent to which the visibility of a project interferes with the public’s enjoyment or appreciation of the resource

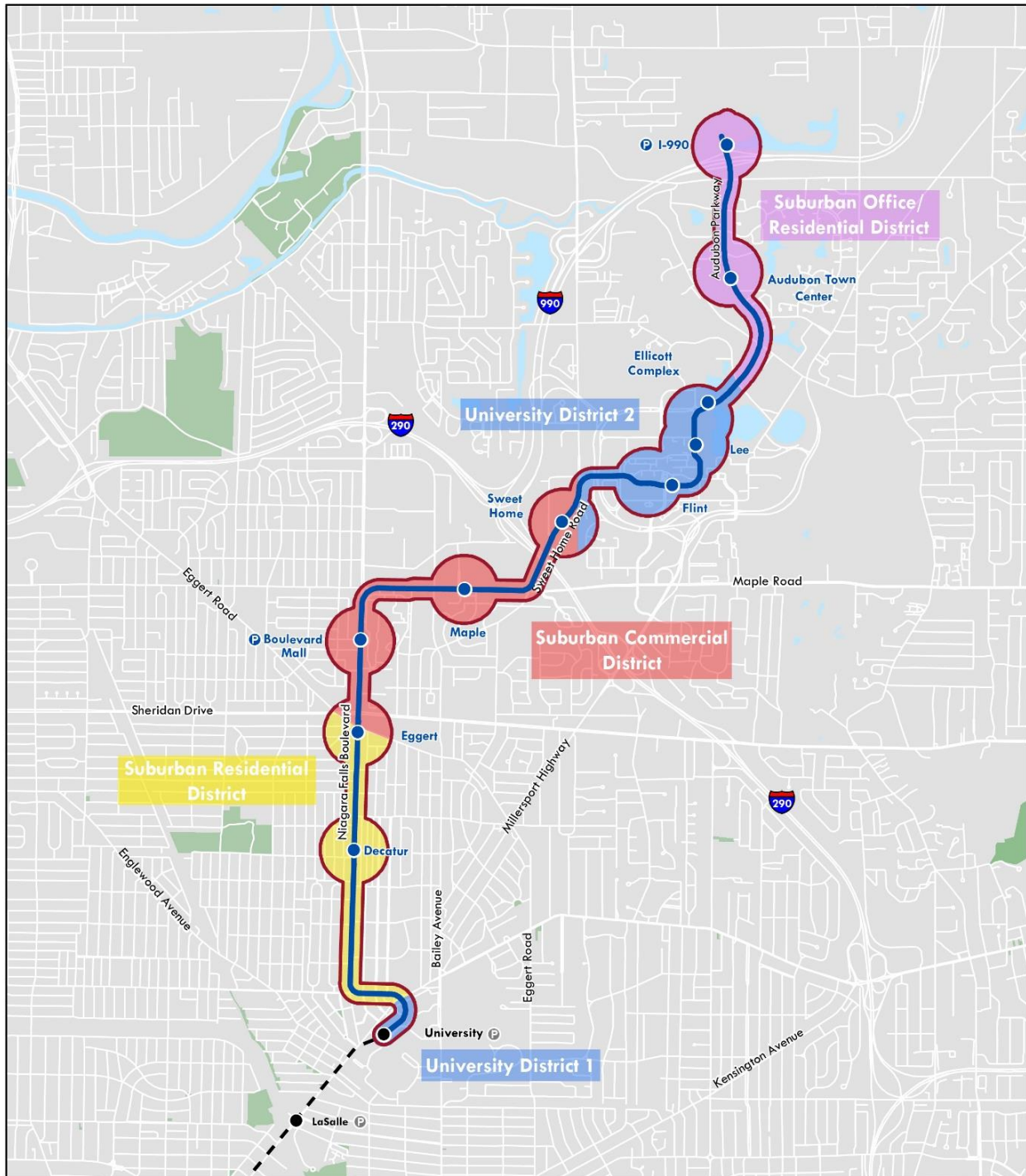
A significant adverse visual impact occurs when the effects of design, distance, and intervening topography and vegetation do not minimize the visibility of an object, and the visibility significantly detracts from or causes a diminishment of the public’s enjoyment of an inventoried resource.

Utilizing visual modeling techniques, the conditions that would be present with the Proposed Action were assessed as to their relative visual effects from specific viewpoints and distances on aesthetic resources of statewide concern and on local resources. Simulations were created by modeling proposed features using 3DS Max visual modeling software and overlaying the model onto existing imagery using Adobe Photoshop. This modeling was conducted to provide some indication as to whether any specific viewpoint might be associated with obvious positive or negative visual effects. The visualizations represent conceptual engineering. The final selection of site details would be refined during preliminary and final design.

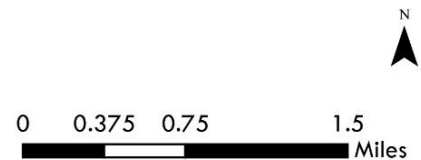
### **7.3 EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER**

This section describes the visual character of the Proposed Action alignment. The Proposed Action alignment runs through a mix of residential, commercial, office, retail, and educational/institutional land uses as described in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Community Character.” For the visual analysis, land uses were grouped into five visual districts that share similar environments (Figure 7-1). These districts are discussed in the subsequent sections to describe the existing visual character and quality of visual elements within the Proposed Action study area. Photographs of existing conditions along the Proposed Action alignment areas are presented as Figure 7-2 through Figure 7-15.

**Figure 7-1. Visual Assessment Study Area**



- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Metro Rail Expansion</b>                 |                          |
| Visual Study Area                           | Existing Station         |
| Proposed Alignment                          | Existing Metro Rail Line |
| Proposed Station                            | Existing Park & Ride     |
| Proposed Storage/Light Maintenance Facility |                          |
| Proposed Park & Ride                        |                          |



Source: Erie County, 2018

### 7.3.1 University District 1

University District 1 comprises the visual study area south of Main Street and includes the University at Buffalo (UB) South Campus and University Station park & ride facility. The UB South Campus is the main feature in this district. The campus, designed in the 1920s, contains the tallest buildings in the area, a large student population, and a major transportation hub at University Station. Low- to medium-density commercial, residential, and university facilities are concentrated around both the University Station park & ride facility and Main Street.

### 7.3.2 Suburban Residential District

North of University District 1, the Suburban Residential District includes both Kenmore Avenue and Niagara Falls Boulevard, extending to Eggert Road. Kenmore Avenue is an east-west arterial road that connects Main Street to Military Road. The stretch of Kenmore Avenue along the Proposed Action alignment is a two-lane (one lane in each direction) road with a center left-turn lane and bike lanes running along both shoulders. From Kenmore, the Proposed Action alignment runs north along Niagara Falls Boulevard, a north-south running roadway that divides the towns of Amherst (to the east) and Tonawanda (to the west). Niagara Falls Boulevard is a major thoroughfare surrounded by mainly residential neighborhoods south of Eggert Road. The Suburban Residential District is defined by one- to two-story, single-family residences that are setback from the street, as well as some garden-style multifamily buildings. A commercial area that exists near the intersection of Decatur Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard is unique to the immediate area compared to the surrounding blocks. The residential suburban character continues north along Niagara Falls Boulevard to Eggert Road with more frequent commercial areas mixed in.

**Figure 7-2. View north on Niagara Falls Boulevard at Kenilworth Avenue (Suburban Residential District)**





**Figure 7-3. View west on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenilworth Avenue and Princeton Avenue (Suburban Residential District)**



**Figure 7-4. View northwest on Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Cambridge Boulevard (Suburban Residential District)**



**Figure 7-5. View northwest on Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Oxford Avenue (Suburban Residential District)**



### **7.3.3 Suburban Commercial District**

The Suburban Commercial District begins at Eggert Road. It is at this point that Niagara Falls Boulevard becomes solely commercial without dispersed residential pockets. Retail and services, including big-box retailers, strip plazas, and chain restaurants, dominate the project corridor. North of Eggert Road, Niagara Falls Boulevard widens to a median-divided boulevard with three lanes going in each direction. At the intersection of Maple Road, the northbound approach widens to three lanes with a left- and right-turn lane and the southbound approach widens to three lanes with two left-turn lanes.

From Niagara Falls Boulevard, the Proposed Action alignment turns east on Maple Road. Maple Road is an east-west running arterial road. The Boulevard Mall anchors the retail character. North and east of the Boulevard Mall along Maple Road, mostly larger-scale commercial uses exist (e.g., grocery, retail, restaurants, and office). Sweet Home Middle School lies within this commercial area, providing surrounding green space.

From Maple Road, the Proposed Action alignment turns north on Sweet Home Road. Sweet Home Road is less developed than Niagara Falls Boulevard and Maple Road, but does contain commercial, office, academic, and multifamily residential uses. The major development on Sweet Home Road is a mixed-use center, which serves the UB North Campus. Attached two-story townhouses, used for student housing, are just south of Rensch Road along Sweet Home Road before the Proposed Action alignment turns into the UB North Campus. Additional development in the form of a new hotel and new student housing complex are under construction.

**Figure 7-6. View north on Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Sheridan Drive (Suburban Commercial District)**



**Figure 7-7. View west on Maple Road between Hillcrest Drive and Sweet Home Road (Suburban Commercial District)**



**Figure 7-8. View northeast on Sweet Home Road south of I-290 (Suburban Commercial District)**



**Figure 7-9. View southeast on Sweet Home Road north of I-290 (Suburban Commercial District)**



**Figure 7-10. View east on Rensch Road entering University at Buffalo campus (Suburban Commercial District)**



#### **7.3.4 University District 2**

University District 2 includes the UB North Campus, which was designed and built in the 1960s and 1970s as a part of a master-planned community geared toward vehicular access. This district includes Rensch Road, Putnam Way, Lee Road, and a portion of John James Audubon Parkway (Audubon Parkway).

Rensch Road is an entrance to the west side of the UB North Campus. The road is a short, east-west running road that terminates in a loop at the eastern end. The loop contains parking and acts as a pick-up and drop-off location for university busses. Rensch Road contains two lanes in each direction with a grassy median and left-hand turn lanes at signalized intersections.

Putnam Way is a one-way road that loops around the center of the UB North Campus. Putnam Way consists of a lane dedicated to curbside parking throughout the loop and one travel lane.

Lee Road is a north-south road in the northeastern section of the UB North Campus with one car lane and one bicycle lane in each direction. The road's south end is a loop that serves multiple bus pick-ups and drop-offs, and the road's north end terminates in a traffic circle at Audubon Parkway. The road serves as access to multiple parking lots including the University Book Store lot.

**Figure 7-11. View northwest on Putnam Way adjacent to UB Student Union (University District 2)**



**Figure 7-12. View north on Lee Road south of Audubon Parkway (University District 2)**



### 7.3.5 Suburban Office/Residential District

The portion of the Proposed Action alignment north of UB North Campus is part of the same master-planned community theme, consisting of campus-style office parks and residential neighborhoods. The town of Amherst Town Complex consists of a library, senior center, police/ court building, and a public park.

This northernmost visual district is the Suburban Office/Residential District and includes Audubon Parkway, which is a two-lane parkway with a wide, grassy median and left-hand turn lanes at major intersections. The road serves the UB North Campus, as well as multiple office parks and suburban style residential in the northern portion of the road, and provides access to I-990 at the northern terminus. As the alignment travels along Audubon Parkway north of UB North Campus, campus-style office, community facilities, and commercial uses front the corridor with residential development to the east, including the Audubon Homeowners Association. The northernmost portion of the alignment north of Dodge Road is vacant and wooded, but was proposed to be part of the master-planned community.

**Figure 7-13. View of office park on Audubon Parkway south of I-990 (Suburban Office/Residential District)**



**Figure 7-14. View west on Partridge Run at Audubon Parkway (Suburban Office/Residential District)**



**Figure 7-15. View north on Audubon Parkway south of I-990 (Suburban Office/Residential District)**





## **7.4 VISUAL RESOURCES**

As described previously, the NYSDEC policy memorandum lists 15 categories of state aesthetic resources that should be evaluated. In addition, the memorandum discusses evaluation of local resources, and, therefore, resources of local significance have also been identified. Following the NYSDEC guidance, an inventory of sensitive aesthetic and visual resources was prepared, and the following aesthetic and visual resources have been identified and analyzed to determine the potential effects of the Proposed Action.

### **7.4.1 State/National Registers of Historic Places**

Chapter 8, “Historic and Cultural Resources” identifies the historic and cultural resources. The study area (Project Impact Area) for the historic and cultural resources analysis is 300 feet on each side of the Proposed Action alignment. Based on field investigations, research, and evaluation, the only historic properties located within the Project Impact Area are the NRHP-eligible UB South Campus, the NRHP-listed University Park Historic District, and the Capen Boulevard Historic District, which was a recommended historic district following the results of an Amherst-wide survey in 2011 and will be treated as an eligible historic property for purposes of the Proposed Action. District boundaries provided by CRIS were verified using existing documentation; both the University Park Historic District and Capen Boulevard Historic District required corrections.

### **7.4.2 New York State Parks**

No state parks (as defined by New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law §3.09) are within the study area.

### **7.4.3 Heritage Areas**

No heritage areas (as defined by Article 35, New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law) are within the study area. The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and Buffalo Theatre District are both south of the study area and the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area is northwest of the study area and includes the entirety of the municipal limits of the City of Niagara Falls.

### **7.4.4 New York State Forest Preserve**

Lands within the state forest preserve (New York State Constitution Article XIV) are within the boundaries of the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Thus, there are no state forest preserve lands within the study area.

### **7.4.5 National Wildlife Refuges, State Game Refuges and State Wildlife Management Areas**

No National wildlife refuges (as defined by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act 16 USC 668dd-668ee and amended by P.L. 105-57) are within the study area.

No state game refuges and state wildlife management areas (as defined by Environmental Conservation Law (ECL) §11-2105) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.6 National Natural Landmarks**

No national natural landmarks (as defined by 36 CFR Part 62) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.7 National Park System Recreation Areas, Seashores, Forests**

No national parks (as defined by 16 USC §1c) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.8 Rivers Designated as National or State Wild, Scenic, or Recreational**

No national wild, scenic, or recreational (as defined by 16 USC Chapter 28, ECL 15-2701 et seq) rivers are within the study area. No state-designated wild, scenic, or recreational rivers (as defined by ECL §§ 15-2713 through 15-2715) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.9 Sites, Areas, Lakes, Reservoirs, or Highways Designated or Eligible for Designation as Scenic**

Resources (as defined in Article 42 of Executive Law) include scenic byways (under the purview of New York State Department of Transportation), parkways (designated by the New York Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation), and other areas designated by NYSDEC. No sites, areas, lakes, reservoirs, or highways designated or eligible for designation as scenic are within the study area.

#### **7.4.10 Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance**

In July 1993, the New York State Department of State designated six scenic areas of statewide significance as part of its implementation of the State of New York's Coastal Management Program. These areas include Catskill-Olana, Columbia-Greene North, Esopus-Lloyd, Estates District, Hudson Highlands, and Ulster North. All six designations are outside of the study area.

#### **7.4.11 State or Federally Designated Trails**

No state or federally designated trails (as defined by 16 USC Chapter 27) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.12 State Nature and Historic Preservation Areas**

No state nature or historic preservation areas (as designated by Section 4 of Article XIV of the New York State Constitution) are within the study area.

#### **7.4.13 Adirondack Park Scenic Vistas**

Adirondack Park is located in northeastern New York and not within the study area.

#### **7.4.14 Palisades Park**

The Palisades Interstate Park is located on the Hudson River shorefront, uplands, and cliffs in New York and New Jersey and is not within the study area.

#### **7.4.15 Bond Act Properties Purchased Under Exceptional Scenic Beauty or Open Space Category**

No Bond Act properties purchased under the exceptional scenic beauty or open space category were identified in the study area.

#### **7.4.16 Locally Significant Resources**

As described previously, locally designated resources include historic properties designated at the local level and locally operated, publicly accessible open spaces such as parks. The following resources within the study area have been identified as locally significant:

- Letchworth Woods
- Walton Woods Park
- Skinnerville Cemetery

### **7.5 VIEWER GROUPS**

In accordance with the FHWA guidelines on aesthetics and visual quality, two viewer groups were considered in this visual assessment:

- Travelers (those who would have views from the Proposed Action corridor)
- Neighbors (those who would have views of the Proposed Action corridor).

Categories were then subdivided into the mode of a traveler or the specific land use of a neighbor to further define the different preferences represented within the visual study area.

#### **7.5.1 Travelers**

Three types of travelers were identified within the visual study area: motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, and commercial trucks.

##### **7.5.1.1 Motorists**

Motorists are the largest viewer group within the visual study area. This viewer group consists of motorists traveling the Proposed Action corridor or using it to access or egress destinations within the study area. Motorists views are typically in a dynamic mode while moving. Viewer exposure is moderate due to speeds and the number of users and trips. Viewer activity consists of either driving or being a passenger in a vehicle. For drivers, viewer awareness may be moderate, while for passengers, viewer awareness may be high. Motorists traveling in and along the Proposed Action corridor through residential or commercial areas would have low exposure to visual changes in the environment due to limited visibility and short viewer duration. Therefore, overall, motorists have relatively moderate sensitivity to detailed visual changes within the corridor.

### **7.5.1.2 Pedestrians and Bicyclists**

Pedestrians and bicyclists are more aware of changes in the visual environment than motorists, because they travel at much slower speeds and are not constrained by a vehicle. However, this group is smaller in number than vehicular travelers. Pedestrians move at a slower rate than all other travelers and have a slight preference for cultural order over natural harmony and project coherence. Bicyclists travel at greater speeds than pedestrians, but still slower than motorized travel. Bicyclists have a slight preference for project coherence over cultural order and natural harmony. Like motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists overall have relatively moderate sensitivity to detailed visual changes within the corridor.

### **7.5.1.3 Commercial Trucks**

Commercial travelers use the roadway primarily to move goods. The type of vehicle and the distance traveled vary. Most commercial travel is routine and commercial travelers' primary interests lie in project coherence, cultural order, and natural harmony to help them arrive at destinations for delivery and pick-up purposes. This viewer group has a low sensitivity to visual change.

## **7.5.2 Neighbors**

As defined in the FHWA's guidelines, the term "neighbor" does not always mean that a person is adjacent to the roadway. Rather, the guidelines refer to people who are not traveling on the roadway but may see it from their geographic location in the visual study area. Neighbors were further subdivided into residential neighbors (those who live adjacent to the project area), institutional neighbors (e.g., UB students and faculty), retail/commercial neighbors, and recreational neighbors.

### **7.5.2.1 Residential Neighbors**

Residential users tend to be permanent and have a desire to maintain their surrounding landscape as is. Residential users are interested in cultural order and natural harmony with less emphasis on project coherence. Residents may view the Proposed Action from their front and back yards, and local roads. Several residential neighborhoods are within and adjacent to the study area. Neighborhood residents in and around the Proposed Action alignment have a prolonged view of the roadway and the surrounding landscape, and therefore, have a high sensitivity to visual changes. Their exposure level is high because residents have frequent and repeated visual exposure.

### **7.5.2.2 Institutional Neighbors**

Institutional neighbors provide or receive services from a variety of institutions such as schools, hospitals, or social/public service facilities. As described in Chapter 5, "Community Facilities and Utilities," seven schools (Pre-K through Grade 12) are within the study area, defined as 1/4 mile on either side of the Proposed Action alignment and a 1/2-mile radius around each station location. Of these, two are within the visual study area. In addition, approximately 15 places of worship are within the study area for the community facilities study area, of which nine are within the visual study area. Institutions often want to express a public face to travelers adjacent to their facilities for a variety of reasons. The presentation of their buildings and grounds is critical to the impression they are trying to convey, and they often prefer to maintain or improve these impressions or to extend the duration of the views of their buildings and grounds to travelers. Orientation and wayfinding are also critical issues, requiring coordination between transportation and institutional officials. Institutional neighbors' primary interest is in cultural order, but depending on location,

they may have equal interest in natural harmony. Project coherence can be critical. Overall, institutional neighbors have a high sensitivity to visual change.

### **7.5.2.3 Retail Neighbors**

Retail neighbors include merchants and shoppers. Merchants are more permanent than shoppers, while shoppers may frequent the same locations. Merchants prefer heighten visibility, free of competing visual intrusions, whereas shoppers tend to prefer visual clarity to guide them to their destination so they can concentrate on their shopping experience with minimal distractions. This viewer group has a moderate sensitivity to visual change. Retail neighbors are concentrated in the Suburban Commercial District.

### **7.5.2.4 Commercial Neighbors**

Commercial neighbors include people who occupy or use office buildings, warehouses, and other commercial structures. In general, commercial users have similar visual preferences to those of industrial neighbors; however, because their public presentation is of more importance, they have a stronger preference for project coherence and cultural order. Like retail neighbors, this viewer group has a moderate sensitivity to visual change. Commercial neighbors are concentrated in the Suburban Commercial District, as well as the Suburban Office/Residential District.

### **7.5.2.5 Recreational Neighbors**

Recreational neighbors provide or participate in recreation within the visual study area. Those who supply a recreational service for others are sometimes permanent while visitors are consumers of the recreational service and are more transitory. The visual preferences of recreational neighbors tend to be more focused on and associated with their recreational activity. Neighbors prefer the status quo and are cautious of visual encroachments that may cause adverse effects on the setting of their activity. However, they may show willingness to entertain improvements to visual resources that enhance their recreational experience. Dependent on the type of recreation, recreational neighbors are interested in cultural order and natural order with some emphasis on project coherence because it can affect their experience traveling to their recreational activity. Recreational neighbors have a high sensitivity to visual change. This viewer group consists of visitors to Skinnersville Cemetery, as well as the 12 other public parks and open spaces within the study area, defined as 1/4 mile on either side of the Proposed Action alignment and a 1/2-mile radius around each station location. Of these public parks and open spaces, three are within the visual study area.

## **7.6 FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION**

No significant changes to existing visual conditions would occur as a result of the No Action condition. Therefore, there would be no impact to visual resources.

## **7.7 PROPOSED ACTION**

The following sections describe the visual elements of the Proposed Action. These elements would result in a change in the existing view of a visual resource, a change in the viewer's perspective of a visual resource, or that would obstruct views to or from a visual resource.

### 7.7.1 Visual Elements

The Proposed Action would introduce new visual elements into the study area. These new elements would include the Metro Rail vehicles and trackway; stations and park & ride facilities; the overhead catenary system that powers the Metro Rail vehicles; substations, and a light maintenance/storage facility. These elements would be similar in design to those of the existing Metro Rail, as presented in Figure 7-16.

**Figure 7-16. Visual Elements: Existing Metro Rail**



Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

#### 7.7.1.1 Vehicles and Trackway

New visual elements that would be introduced by the Proposed Action include the addition of the light rail vehicles and the trackway in which the vehicles would operate. It is assumed that Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority will have acquired a new vehicle fleet prior to operation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would require the addition of two sets of steel rail tracks placed on concrete cross ties with standard rock ballast, also similar to the existing Metro Rail.

#### 7.7.1.2 Stations and Park & Ride Facilities

To accommodate passenger boarding and alighting, typical station platforms would be approximately 300 feet long with canopies that would be approximately 15 feet in height. The parking provided at each proposed station would vary depending on the forecasted ridership and land availability. However, every station would be complemented with landscaping and public art to ensure visual

compatibility with the surrounding area. Station renderings are presented as Figure 7-17 through Figure 7-23.

**Figure 7-17. Visual Elements: Decatur Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-18. Visual Elements: Eggert Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-19. Visual Elements: Boulevard Mall Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-20. Visual Elements: Maple Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects



**Figure 7-21. Visual Elements: Sweet Home Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-22. Visual Elements: Flint Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-23. Visual Elements: Lee Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-24. Visual Elements: Ellicott Complex Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

**Figure 7-25. Visual Elements: Audubon Station**



Source: Sowinski Sullivan Architects

### **7.7.1.3 Overhead Catenary**

The Metro Rail vehicles would be electrically powered by an overhead catenary system that would require construction of poles to support overhead wires. The presence of these wires would have minimal visual impact, particularly on the portions of the alignment that are already characterized by the presence of overhead wires. The pole design for the Proposed Action generally would be similar to that used for the existing Metro Rail, as shown in Figure 7-26.

**Figure 7-26. Visual Elements: Existing Metro Rail Catenary**



Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

#### **7.7.1.4 Substations**

Substations are essential to providing the necessary power to operate the Proposed Action. These substations would need to be located within the Metro Rail right-of-way or at proposed station locations. The existing Metro Rail has underground substations. The Proposed Action substations would be above ground, similar to the substation shown in Figure 7-27. Dimensions of the proposed one-story, metal substations would be approximately 50 feet by 100 feet. The substation could be easily hid behind decorative fences or even enclosed in a building to better fit within neighborhood aesthetics.

**Figure 7-27. Visual Elements: Typical Substation**



#### **7.7.1.5 Light Maintenance/Storage Facility**

The Proposed Action would include a storage facility at the end of the line (north of the I 990 and Audubon Parkway interchange) to store Metro Rail vehicles overnight and perform light maintenance and cleaning. The storage facility would be fully enclosed and would have staff facilities to account for offices, restrooms, and lockers.

#### **7.7.1.6 Right-of-Way Modifications**

Construction of the Proposed Action would require street widening and modifications to existing right-of-way in some areas. See Chapter 4, “Property Acquisitions and Displacement” for details on the acquisition of property related to the Proposed Action. Construction of the Proposed Action would also require removal of vegetation along the Proposed Action alignment. The changes could either expand or block a particular viewshed or change the context of visual resources.

## 7.7.2 Visual Resource Impacts

The Proposed Action would result in varying degrees of visual impact based on the permanence and extent of construction. Visual effects and impacts of the Proposed Action on visual resources are described in the following sections. As described in Section 7.1, the simulations referenced in this section were created by modeling proposed features using 3DS Max visual modeling software and overlaying the model onto existing imagery using Adobe Photoshop. The visualizations represent conceptual engineering. The final selection of site details would be refined during preliminary and final design.

To evaluate the level of visual impact under the Proposed Action, the changes to the environment (measured by the compatibility of the impact and change in visual quality) and to viewers (measured by sensitivity) were analyzed. Visual compatibility is defined as compatible or incompatible by analyzing any proposed contrasts to the existing scale, form, materials, and visual character. The sensitivity of viewers is defined by analyzing the viewer's exposure (proximity, extent, and duration) and awareness (attention, focus, and protection) of any changes in the visual character of visual resources. Visual quality is the interaction between the visible landscape and the viewers.

### 7.7.2.1 Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents near Portal Location

Figure 7-28 was taken on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenmore Avenue and Princeton Avenue looking north. This is an important view because the Metro Rail would emerge from underground through a portal and continue at-grade. The view is in the Suburban Residential District (Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). The Niagara Falls Boulevard vehicular travel lanes and sidewalks are visible, along with residential homes and mature trees. The viewpoint is compatible and existing visual quality is moderate, due to the mature trees that provide screening to the residential homes. Viewer groups include motorists, pedestrian, and bicycling traveler groups and residential, retail, and commercial neighbor groups. Existing viewer sensitivity is high due to the proximity of neighbors/viewers and the duration of time neighbor groups perceive this view.

With the Proposed Action, there would be new visual elements for viewers in the resource. The portal location would be in the median of Niagara Falls Boulevard, along with the trackwork and overhead catenary. For both traveler and neighborhood viewer groups on Niagara Falls Boulevard, the Proposed Action elements would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. Therefore, although a potential impact would result, the impact is not considered to be significant. These changes would have a neutral impact on visual quality because the degree of change would be moderate and the Proposed Action would be compatible with its surroundings. In addition, the inclusion of Art in Transit elements would help soften the view of the portal.

**Figure 7-28. Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents – Existing Conditions (No Action Condition)**



View north on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenmore Avenue and Princeton Avenue

**Figure 7-29. Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents – Visual Simulation of Proposed Action**



Note: This visualization represents the conceptual design. Final selection of site details would be refined during preliminary and final design.

### **7.7.2.2 Sweet Home Middle School near Portal Location**

Sweet Home Middle School is located on the Proposed Action alignment near a portal where the alignment would transition from at-grade to underground, through the intersection of Maple Road and Sweet Home Road, and emerge on the west side of Sweet Home prior to the I-290 bridge. This visual resource is in the Suburban Commercial District (Section 7.3.3). Viewer groups include motorists, pedestrian, and bicycling traveler groups and institutional, retail, and commercial neighbor groups. Existing viewer sensitivity is moderate due to the proximity of neighbors/viewers and the duration of time neighbor groups perceive this view.

Similar to the portal on Niagara Falls Boulevard, the Proposed Action elements would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. These visual changes would have a neutral impact on visual quality because the degree of change would be moderate and the Proposed Action would be compatible with its surroundings. In addition, the inclusion of Art in Transit elements would help soften the view of the portal.

### **7.7.2.3 Skinersville Cemetery**

This resource is on the Proposed Action alignment, north of UB North Campus. The Proposed Action alignment would be in the existing northbound lanes of John James Audubon Parkway, adjacent to the cemetery. The cemetery has mature trees that would provide screening of the Proposed Action trackwork and overhead catenary, as shown in Figure 7-30. Therefore, a visual impact is not anticipated.

**Figure 7-30. Skinersville Cemetery**



#### **7.7.2.4 Walton Woods**

The existing conditions photograph (Figure 7-31) was taken on John James Audubon Parkway at the corner of Partridge Run looking north. This view is in the Suburban Office Residential District (Section 7.3.5). The John James Audubon Parkway vehicular travel lanes are visible, along with vegetation and mature trees. The viewpoint is compatible and existing visual quality is moderate, due to the mature trees that provide screening to the residential homes. Viewer groups include motorist, pedestrian, and bicycling traveler groups and residential and recreational neighbor groups. The view is compatible and existing viewer sensitivity is high primarily because of the number of residential and recreational users. In addition, residential and recreational neighbors tend to be more sensitive to changes in visual quality than other types of viewers.

With the Proposed Action (Figure 7-32), there would be new visual elements for viewers in the resource. The northbound lanes of John James Audubon Parkway would be replaced with the Metro Rail trackwork and overhead catenary. For traveler viewer groups on John James Audubon Parkway, the Proposed Action elements would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. Therefore, although a potential impact would result, the impact is not considered significant. The existing mature trees and vegetation would provide screening of the Proposed Action elements for residential and recreational neighbor groups. Additional landscaping could be incorporated to provide further screening. The Proposed Action would have a neutral impact on visual quality because the degree of change would be moderate and the Proposed Action would be compatible with its surroundings.



**Figure 7-31. Walton Woods – Existing Conditions (No Action Condition)**



View north at the corner of John James Audubon Parkway and Partridge Run

**Figure 7-32. Walton Woods – Visual Simulation of Proposed Action**



Note: This visualization is representative of conceptual design. Final selection of site details will be refined during preliminary and final design.

## 7.8 MITIGATION

As has been described above, the Proposed Action would be visible from certain aesthetic resources or sensitive viewer locations along the alignment. However, the Proposed Action would not result in a significant adverse visual impact because the Proposed Action would not obstruct views to visual resources or otherwise significantly detract from, or cause a diminishment of the public's enjoyment of a resource.

In accordance with Federal Transit Administration's policy Circular 9400.1A, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) will incorporate the Art in Transit Program and designate a percentage of the Proposed Action design and construction costs to integrating art into the design. The NFTA Art in Transit Program would help minimize adverse visual impacts and add unique character to the stations and portals. In addition to adding a human dimension to transit, art projects reinforce the spirit and identity of areas immediately surrounding station locations.

Moreover, the Proposed Action's lighting strategy at stations would incorporate best-practices principles related to duration and usage, brightness, orientation, directionality, form, and fixtures that would minimize light pollution. Therefore, the Proposed Actions would not result in a significant adverse impact to visual resources and no visual resources mitigation measures are necessary.