Appendix D5:
Visual Impact Assessment

Contents

Figures

Acronym

AVE ..... Area of Visual Effect
BRT ..... Bus Rapid Transit
CFR ..... Code of Federal Regulations
ECL ..... Environmental Conservation Law
FHWA ..... Federal Highway Administration
I ..... Interstate
LRT ..... Light-Rail Transit
NEPA ..... National Environmental Policy Act
NRHP ..... National Register of Historic Places
NYSDEC ..... New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
NYSDOT ..... New York State Department of Transportation
Metro ..... Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc.
Project ..... Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion
UB ..... University at Buffalo
U.S.C. ..... United States Code
VIA ..... Visual Impact Assessment

Appendix D. Visual Impact Assessment

D.1 INTRODUCTION

D.1.1 Description of the Project

The Niagara Frontier Transit Metro System, Inc. (Metro), a wholly owned subsidiary of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, is proposing to expand high-quality transit in the Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor, from University of Buffalo (UB) South Campus Station to Interstate 990 (I-990)/John James Audubon Parkway. The Buffalo-Amherst-Tonawanda Corridor Transit Expansion (Project) includes two build alternatives: a light rail transit (LRT) extension (LRT Build Alternative) and a bus rapid transit (BRT) line (BRT Build Alternative). Both alternatives would essentially follow the same alignment (the route or positioning of new transit service) and would be primarily at grade. Ten stations (two with park and ride facilities) and an overnight storage and light maintenance facility are proposed for both alternatives.

D.1.2 Purpose of the Visual Impact Assessment

This Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) was prepared as part of a review of the Project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The primary purpose of the VIA is to inform the public; State and Federal regulators, engineers, designers, decision-makers, and public officials; and other stakeholders about significant visual resources near the Project and the potential visual effects (or impacts) of the LRT Build Alternative and the BRT Build Alternative (relative to existing conditions).

This VIA was prepared in accordance with current New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) visual assessment policies, which are consistent with the policies, procedures, and guidelines contained in established methodologies. Section D.2 of this appendix further describes the purpose and methodology of the VIA.

In 1987, the FHWA, jointly with the Federal Transit Administration, established environmental impact and related procedures (23 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Section 771) for the evaluation of transportation projects and the compliance of these projects with 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 109 (h), which focuses on design criteria relating to social, economic, and environmental effects. These procedures require that final decisions on Project development are made in the best overall public interest, taking into consideration several socio-economic, engineering, and environmental factors, including aesthetic values. FHWA satisfies the requirements in 23 U.S.C. Section 109 (h) throughout the NEPA process described in 23 CFR Section 771. FHWA Technical Advisory T6640.8A (1987) also identifies visual resources as an item to be included in environmental 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.

The FHWA *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (FHWA-HEP-15-029 2015) identifies and summarizes current best practices in visual assessments. These guidelines also recognize that State laws and local laws and ordinances may be applicable to the Project. In addition to the Federal guidelines, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) 2000 Program Policy, *Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts* (NYSDEC DEP-00-2, 2000), was referenced. In compliance with DEP-00-2, aesthetic resources were identified, and a visual assessment was conducted.

The following sections provide the framework for assessing the change in visual character that would occur as a result of the Project in accordance with the guidelines summarized above, the existing visual character and quality of the study area environment, as well as the viewer response to visual resources.

D.1.3 Description of Alternatives

As part of the NEPA requirements, an LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative were identified to achieve the purpose and need for the Project (Figure D-1 and Figure D-2). Chapter 2, "Alternatives Considered" provides a detailed description of these alternatives.

This VIA evaluates the visual effect of the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative as compared to the No Build Alternative. The potential visual effect of each build alternative is evaluated relative to the existing character and quality of the visual environment. The LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative share some common elements; therefore, these elements would have a similar visual character.

Under the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, pedestrian and bicyclist improvements would be made throughout the Project area. Sidewalks, crosswalks, medians, bike lanes, streetscaping, and pedestrian amenities would enhance pedestrian activity and improve the overall visual character by introducing more human-scale and pedestrian-friendly features to the area. These linear improvements would be consistent with NYSDOT's Complete Street design requirements as described in Section D.1.2. The visual character of each build alternative is described throughout this appendix and illustrated in the photo simulations.

Descriptions and evaluation of impacts for these alternatives included in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement that are not relevant to the consideration of potential visual impacts are not included in this VIA, but instead are incorporated by reference. The following sections summarize the relevant descriptions of each alternative that would contribute to potential effects on the visual environment.

No Build Alternative

NEPA requires examination of a No Build Alternative. The No Build Alternative serves as the baseline against which the other LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative can be compared. The No Build Alternative includes all highway and transit facilities identified in the fiscally constrained 2018 regional transportation plan for the Buffalo-Niagara region, *Moving Forward 2050*, with the exception of the Project. The No Build Alternative would consist of a future scenario without the Project and would be implemented in the context of several unrelated future residential and mixed-use development projects along the corridor, which are expected to be developed regardless of the selected Project alternative.

The Project's visual character under the No Build Alternative would differ substantially from the build alternatives. Existing visual conditions within the vicinity of the Project Corridor would remain unchanged under the No Build Alternative, as described in Section D.3.1 of this appendix. For the purposes of the VIA, the existing conditions (with respect to the visual environment) are assumed to represent conditions under the No Build Alternative.

Build Alternatives

Two build alternatives, an LRT extension and a BRT line, have been identified for the Project.

LRT BUILD ALTERNATIVE

The LRT Build Alternative is an approximately 7-mile extension of Metro's existing light-rail transit (Metro Rail). The LRT Build Alternative would be primarily at grade, except for a 0.8-mile underground segment from the existing Metro Rail University Station to Niagara Falls Boulevard and at the intersection of Maple Road and Sweet Home Road. Ten stations are proposed, two with park and ride facilities, and an overnight storage and light maintenance facility located near the end of the line. The trackway would be configured with two tracks, one for northbound service and one for southbound service. The LRT Build Alternative would generally be within existing roadway right-of-way. Figure D-1 presents the LRT Build Alternative alignment, including the underground (tunnel) and at-grade alignment, portal locations, ten stations, two park and ride facilities, and the light maintenance/storage facility.

BRT BUILD ALTERNATIVE

The BRT Build Alternative would extend high-quality transit service north from the existing Metro Rail University Station for approximately 7 miles along the same at-grade alignment as the LRT Build Alternative with the same number of stations in the same locations. However, a transfer would be required between the existing Metro Rail operations at University Station to the BRT service (Figure D-2). A new BRT vehicle storage and light maintenance facility would also be required.

Figure D-1. LRT Build Alternative

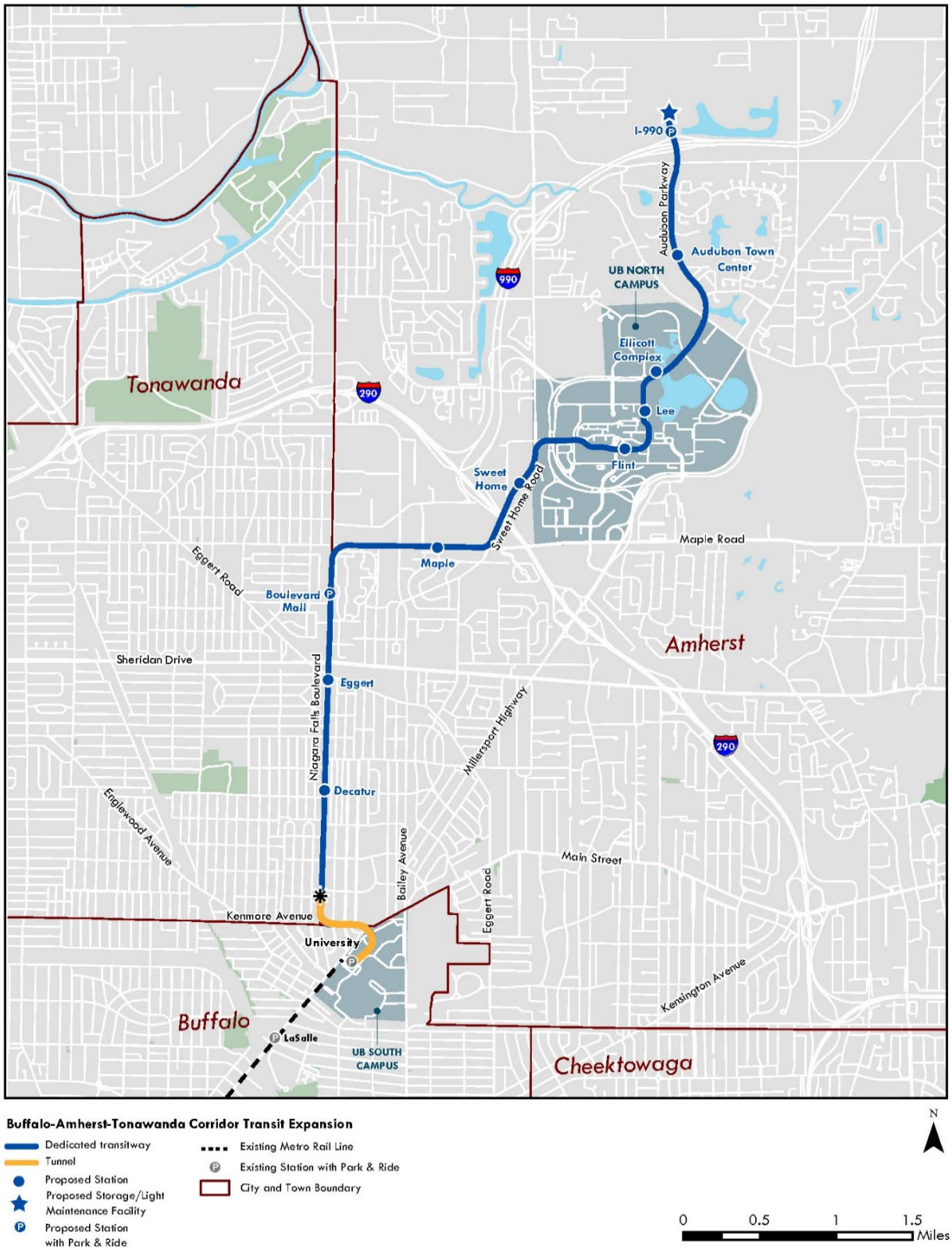
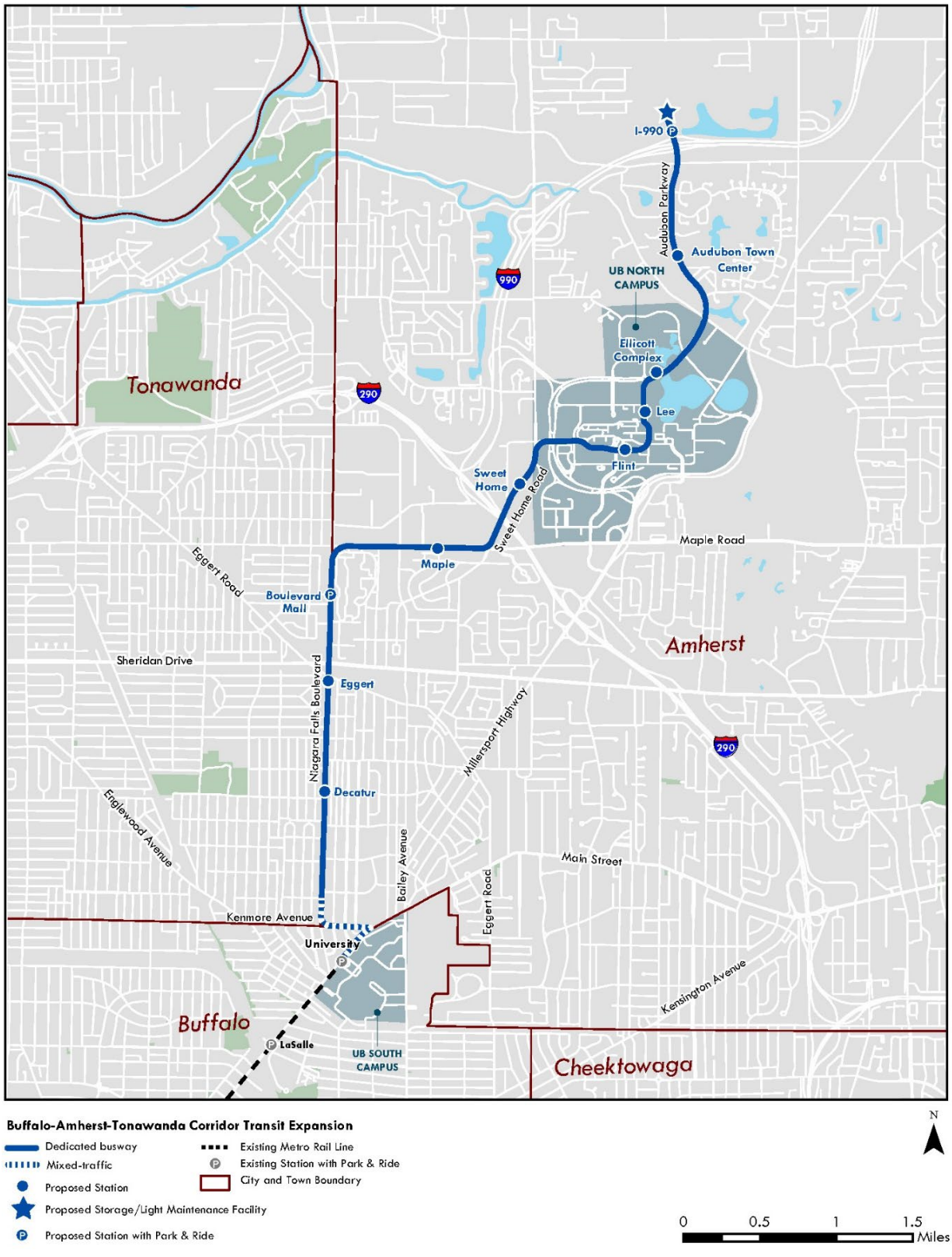


Figure D-2. BRT Build Alternative



D.2 METHODOLOGY

D.2.1 Visual Impact Assessment Process

This VIA was prepared for the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative as defined in Chapter 2, "Alternatives Considered," and is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* released by FHWA in 2015 (FHWA-HEP-15-029).[1] NYSDEC's *Assessing and Mitigating Visual Impacts* (NYSDEC DEP-00-2, 2019) was used as a reference in conjunction with the 2015 FHWA Guidelines for evaluating visual and aesthetic impacts. The VIA for the Project included the following phases and components, as defined in FHWA-HEP-15-029:

- Establishment Phase
  - Establish the Project's regulatory context with respect to visual impacts per Section 4.3 of the FHWA's *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*.
  - Identify the Project's Area of Visual Effect (AVE), which includes the visual range of proposed Project elements under the No Build, and LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative.
  - Define the visual character of the Project's AVE by landscape units, or areas that have the same or similar types of visual character and land use.

- Inventory Phase
  - Inventory and evaluate existing visual resources and viewer groups, and then consider the relationship between viewers and their environment.
  - Describe the appearance and compatibility of the visible components of the Project.
  - Select key views for visual assessment and determine visual quality.

- Analysis Phase
  - Evaluate potential visibility through visual simulation of proposed components, including design elements being considered for incorporation into the Project.
  - Assess changes to visual quality.

- Mitigation Phase
  - Describe measures to be implemented, if necessary, to mitigate adverse visual effects and identify opportunities for visual enhancements in the Project Area.

For this analysis, Metro assessed visual impacts by first analyzing existing visual resources within the Area of Visual Effect (AVE), including any sensitive views, and assessed existing

[1] FHWA. Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects. January 2015. *https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/guidebook/documents/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.asp*.

visual quality of the surrounding environment. The AVE for this project is limited to 400 feet on either side of the Project Corridor (Figure E-3). In areas where stations are proposed, the AVE extends to 1,000 feet on either side of the alignment to examine potential station impacts from a broader viewshed. Sensitive views were determined from research and field observations. For this Draft EIS, a Project would be adverse if it resulted in one of the following:

- **Visual Character:** Design elements of the Project's Build Alternatives that are incompatible with the surrounding environment due to Project scale, form, materials, or character.

- **Viewer Sensitivity:** Impacts associated with the Project's Build Alternatives that are incompatible by a viewer's exposure to (proximity) or a viewer's awareness of the Project.

- **Visual Compatibility:** Design elements of the Project's Build Alternatives that are incompatible with the environment's natural harmony, cultural order, Project coherence, or visual quality.

Metro categorizes visual and aesthetic changes to the environment, as part of the VIA, as negligible, minor, moderate, or significant based on the following characteristics:

- Negligible visual changes generally occur when the Project Build Alternative results in little to no changes to the Landscape Unit (described below) with no noticeable change in view. Negligible visual changes are not considered adverse.

- Minor visual changes generally occur when the Project Build Alternative results in minor changes to the Landscape Unit (described below) and do not create a noticeable change in view. Minor visual changes are not considered adverse.

- Moderate visual changes generally occur when the Project Build Alternative results in changes to the existing view and are noticeably different but not substantially different. Removal of vegetation or displacement of properties are examples of a moderate visual change. Depending on the context, moderate visual changes may or may not be adverse.

- Significant visual changes generally occur when the Project Build Alternative results in substantial changes to the existing view within a Landscape Unit, especially in the presence of visually sensitive resources. Depending on the context, significant visual changes may or may not be adverse.

D.2.2 Area of Visual Effect

The visual setting for the Project is primarily an urban environment that is visually dominated by built forms. These forms include residential, commercial, and institutional buildings with

varying height, architectural style, scale, and massing. There are vertical and horizontal structures, including public utilities (poles and wires) and signage. Surface streets, parking lots, pedestrian areas, and sidewalks constitute the remainder of the visually dominant built forms. There are limited natural visual resources within the AVE, given its predominately urban/suburban built environment. Topography in the Project vicinity is relatively uniform, and mature trees line many residential streets along the project corridor and within property lot lines.

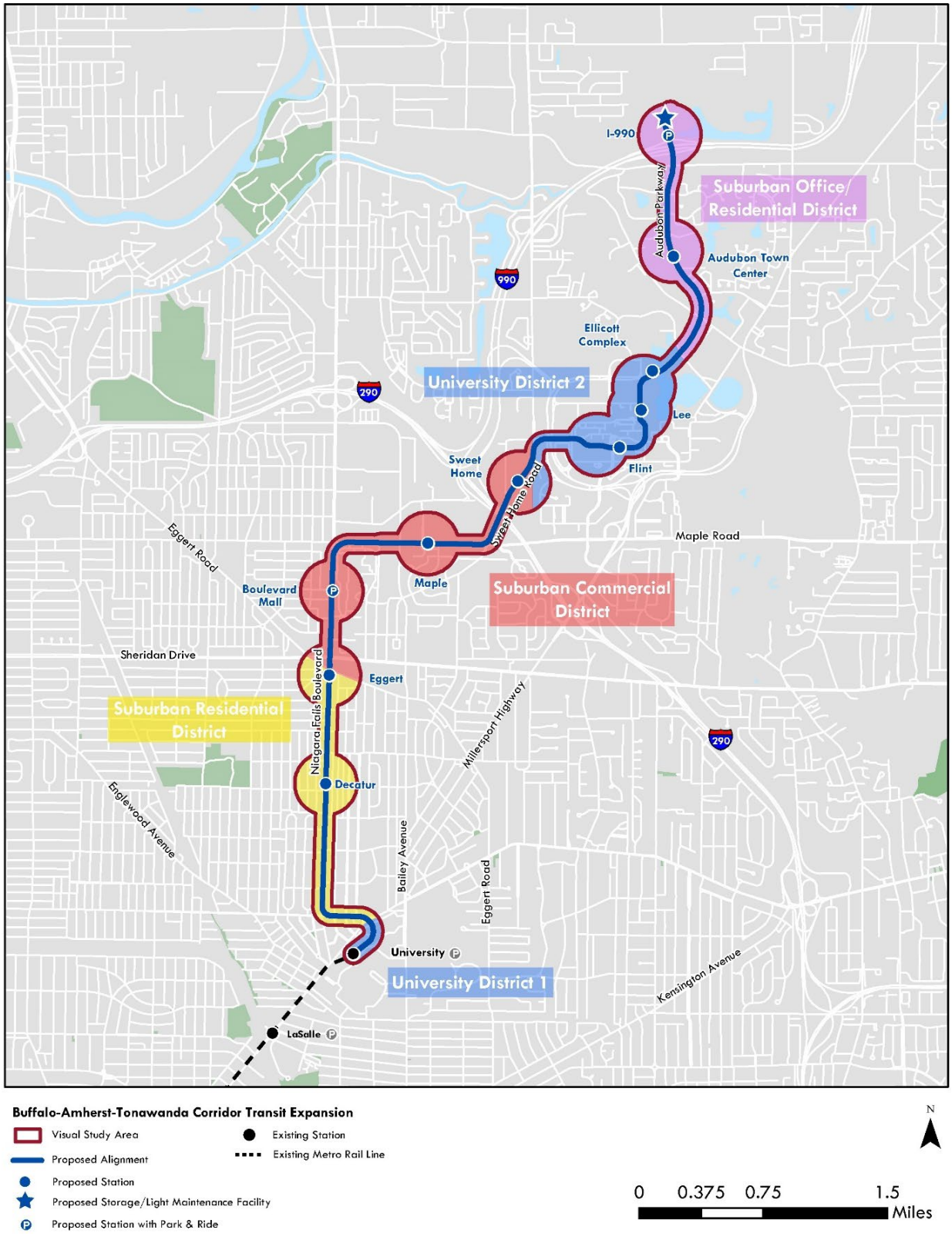
The 2015 FHWA Guidelines specify that visual impacts should be assessed within a given project's AVE, which is defined as the area in which views of the Project would be visible as influenced by the presence or absence of intervening topography, vegetation, and structures. Given the presence of buildings within the area surrounding the Project Corridor, the uniform topography, and the presence of mature trees, views of the Project would be generally limited to locations immediately adjacent to the Build Alternative alignments or proposed stations. Therefore, the AVE for the Project is limited to the area within 400 feet on either side of the Project Corridor (Figure D-3). In areas where stations are proposed, the AVE extends to 1,000 feet on either side of the alignment in order to examine impacts from a broader viewshed.

D.2.3 Identification of Landscape Units

The 2015 FHWA Guidelines emphasize the use of defined 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 landform) and cultural environment (including the density, scale, and style of predominant architecture). Landscape units often correspond to land use types, not only identifying visual character of the affected environment but also the neighbors who would be affected. Landscape units within the AVE were identified based on review of planning and land use documents and maps, oblique aerial photography, and site visits. For the visual analysis, the following five landscape units that share similar environments were identified (Figure D-3):

- University District 1 – includes UB South Campus
- Suburban Residential District
- Suburban Commercial District
- University District 2 – includes the UB North Campus
- Suburban Office/Residential District

Figure D-3. Area of Visual Effect and Landscape Units



D.2.4 Viewer Groups and Viewpoints

Once the AVE was determined, information was collected through field visits to identify viewer groups and locations where a potential visual impact may occur. Viewer groups, populations that could be potentially impacted in different ways by Project-related changes, are defined in Section 5.3 of the 2015 FHWA Guidelines 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 motorists 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 would be much less sensitive because they may only see the proposed visual change for 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.

To help determine visual impacts and to understand the visual character of the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, computer-generated photo simulations of key locations were developed using 3DS Max visual modeling software and by overlaying the model onto existing imagery using Adobe Photoshop. These simulations are referred to as viewpoints and indicate some of the change in the visual environment as a result of the Project. The visualizations represent a conceptual level of engineering; the final selection of site details will be refined during preliminary and final design. The location of the viewpoints, distance from the Project, significance of view selection, and potential effects of the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative were considered as they relate to both the visual resources and the viewer groups.

D.2.5 Identification of Visually Sensitive Resources

Visually sensitive resources of statewide and local significance (as defined by NYSDEC Program Policy DEP-00-2) were identified within the AVE. NYSDEC Program Policy DEP-00-2 lists the following categories of State aesthetic resources that should be evaluated in a visual analysis:

- Landmark landscapes
- Wild, scenic, or recreational rivers (administered by NYSDEC pursuant to Environmental Conservation Law [ECL] Article 15 or Department of Interior pursuant to 16 U.S.C. Section 1271)
- Forest preserve lands
- Scenic vistas (specifically identified in the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan)
- Conservation easement lands

- Scenic byways (designated by the Federal or State governments), scenic districts, and scenic roads (designated by the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation pursuant to ECL Article 49)
- Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance
- State parks
- Historic sites, including sites listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places
- Areas covered by scenic easements
- Public parks or recreation areas
- Locally designated historic or scenic districts
- Scenic overlooks
- High-use public areas

These types of resources were identified based on review of publicly available geographic information system data, as well as review of local planning documents. Section D.3.3 of this appendix discusses aesthetic resources of statewide significance.

D.3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The visual environment of a given project area often consists of that area's natural environment (landform or topography) and cultural environment, i.e., buildings, infrastructure (roads, etc.), public utilities (poles and wires) and signage. The Project's AVE primarily includes an urban landscape with a mix of residential, commercial, office, retail, and educational/institutional buildings. There are vertical and horizontal structures, including public utilities and signage. Surface streets, parking lots, pedestrian areas, and sidewalks constitute the remainder of the visually dominant built forms. There are limited natural visual resources within the AVE, given its predominately urban/suburban built environment. Topography in the Project vicinity is relatively uniform and mature trees line many residential streets along the Project corridor and within property lot lines.

D.3.1 Area of Visual Effect and Landscape Units

The AVE was determined by a number of factors, including the location of the Visually Sensitive Resources, views from a range of perspectives, the various viewer groups passing through or stopping in each area, and the natural or built objects that interfere with views in the foreground, middle ground and background visual distances. Limits to view and viewsheds were also used to determine the AVE.

Limits to view are defined by the elements that partially obscure or completely block what can be seen from various locations or perspectives, including topography and the presence of vegetation and built objects. The ground in the Project vicinity is relatively flat. Mature trees line most residential streets and are present along property lines. As such, views of the Project

Corridor would be generally limited to locations immediately adjacent to the proposed alignment or proposed stations.

A viewshed is the area or a sequence of areas visible from one location. Viewsheds were identified via walking and driving surveys of all areas of the AVE, and photos were taken in 2018 and 2021 to capture a sense of the quality and content of what can be seen from each viewshed. Viewshed analysis included identifying the locations of sensitive resources and current and future Project elements and reviewing Project plans for potential visual presence and interference. A set of overall viewsheds was established, and specific key viewpoints were selected within each landscape unit.

The AVE for the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative was divided into five landscape units (Figure D-3). These five landscape units capture the existing visual character and quality of visual elements within the AVE. Figure D-4 through Figure D-17 present photographs of existing conditions along the Project Corridor.

Landscape Unit 1: University District 1

University District 1 comprises the AVE south of Main Street and includes the UB South Campus and the University Station park and ride facility. The UB South Campus is the main feature in this landscape unit, including the tallest buildings in the area, a large student population, and a major transportation hub at University Station. The campus, designed in the 1920s, contains one National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-listed property, Edmund B. Hayes Hall. A portion of UB South Campus was previously determined to be a NRHP-eligible historic district in 2018. Low- to medium-density commercial, residential, and university facilities are concentrated around University Station park and ride facility and Main Street.

Viewer groups in University District 1 include motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists on the existing street network, and institutional neighbors (university students and staff). As a viewer group, travelers in vehicles, mainly commuters, make frequent trips through the area and would generally have short durations of exposure and a low sensitivity to visual resources. Pedestrian and bicycle travelers experience foreground views and would have a high awareness and sensitivity to visual resources. It is anticipated that pedestrian and cyclist viewers are largely composed of local residents and student population with a relatively high viewer sensitivity.

Landscape Unit 2: Suburban Residential District

The Suburban Residential District is north of University District 1 and 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 Project alignment is a two-lane road (one lane in each direction) with a center left-turn lane and bike lanes running along both shoulders. From Kenmore Avenue, the Project alignment runs north along Niagara Falls Boulevard, a north-south roadway that divides the towns of Amherst (to the east) and Tonawanda (to the west). Niagara Falls Boulevard is a major

thoroughfare mainly surrounded by residential neighborhoods and commercial uses south of Eggert Road. The Suburban Residential District is defined by one- to two-story single-family residences that are set back from the street, as well as some garden-style multifamily buildings. A commercial area near the intersection of Decatur Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard is unique to the immediate area compared to the surrounding blocks. The residential character continues north along Niagara Falls Boulevard to Eggert Road with more frequent commercial areas mixed in.

Viewer groups in the Suburban Residential District include motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists on the existing street network, and residential neighbors. As a viewer group, travelers in vehicles, mainly commuters, make frequent trips through the area and would generally have short durations of exposure and a low sensitivity to visual resources. Pedestrian and bicycle travelers experience foreground views and would have a high awareness and sensitivity to visual resources. It is anticipated that pedestrian and cyclist viewers are largely composed of residents and student population with a relatively high viewer sensitivity. Further, the residential neighbors would experience primarily foreground views in this portion of the landscape unit and would have a high sensitivity to the area's visual resources.

Figure D-4. View north on Niagara Falls Boulevard at Kenilworth Avenue (Suburban Residential District)

Figure D-5. View west on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenilworth Avenue and Princeton Avenue (Suburban Residential District)

Figure D-6. View northwest on Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Cambridge Boulevard (Suburban Residential District)

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

Landscape Unit 3: Suburban Commercial District

The Suburban Commercial District begins at Eggert Road. At this point Niagara Falls Boulevard becomes primarily commercial, with dispersed residential pockets. Retail and services, including big-box retailers, strip plazas, and chain restaurants, dominate this segment of the Project Corridor. North of Eggert Road, Niagara Falls Boulevard widens to a median-divided boulevard with three lanes 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 Project alignment turns east on Maple Road. Maple Road is an east-west arterial road. The Boulevard Mall anchors the retail character of this portion of the Project alignment. 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, with surrounding green space.

From Maple Road, the Project alignment turns north adjacent to 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 properties. 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 south of Rensch Road along Sweet Home Road

before the Project alignment turns into the UB North Campus. A new student housing complex was recently constructed on Sweet Home Road.

Viewer groups in the Suburban Commercial District mainly include motorists on the existing street network, and commercial/retail neighbors. As a viewer group, travelers in vehicles, mainly commuters and shoppers, make frequent trips through the area and would generally have short durations of exposure and a low sensitivity to visual resources. Commercial and retail neighbors would experience primarily foreground views; however, most commercial and retail uses are set back from the streets and include surface parking along the main streets; therefore, these uses would have a low sensitivity to the area's visual resources.

Figure D-8. View north on Niagara Falls Boulevard north of Sheridan Drive (Suburban Commercial District)

Figure D-9. View west on Maple Road between Hillcrest Drive and Sweet Home Road (Suburban Commercial District)

Figure D-10. View northeast on Sweet Home Road south of I-290 (Suburban Commercial District)

Figure D-11. View southeast on Sweet Home Road north of I-290 (Suburban Commercial District)

Figure D-12. View east on Rensch Road entering University at Buffalo North Campus (Suburban Commercial District)

Landscape Unit 4: University District 2

University District 2 includes the UB North Campus, which was designed and built in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of UB master plan. This district includes Rensch Road, Mary Talbert Way, Lee Road, and a portion of John James Audubon Parkway.

- Rensch Road is an entrance to the west side of the UB North Campus, and 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 circulator buses. Rensch Road is a two lane road (one lane in each direction) with a grassy median and left-hand turn lanes at signalized intersections.

- Mary Talbert Way is a one-way road that loops around the center of the UB North Campus. Mary Talbert Way includes 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 John James Audubon Parkway. The road provides access to multiple parking lots, including the University Book Store lot.

Most roadways within the UB North Campus have either landscaped vegetation, tree-lined streets, or both.

Viewer groups in University District 2 include motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists on the existing street network, and institutional neighbors (university students and staff). As a viewer group, travelers in vehicles, mainly commuters, make frequent trips through the area and would generally have short durations of exposure and a low sensitivity to visual resources. Pedestrian and bicycle travelers experience foreground views and would have a high awareness and sensitivity to visual resources. It is anticipated that pedestrian and cyclist viewers are largely composed of residents and student population with a relatively high viewer sensitivity.

Figure D-13. View northwest on Mary Talbert Way adjacent to UB Student Union (University District 2)

Figure D-14. View north on Lee Road south of John James Audubon Parkway (University District 2)

Landscape Unit 5: Suburban Office/Residential District

The portion of the Project 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 includes a library, senior center, police/court building, and a public park.

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

This Landscape Unit contains the Project alignment's primary concentration of natural viewsheds, including Ellicott Creek, pockets of forested land, and natural forested watershed just north of the Project's alignment terminus. Trees and landscaping also line this portion of the alignment.

Viewer groups in the Suburban Office/Residential District include motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists on the existing street network, and commercial/residential neighbors. As a viewer group, travelers in vehicles, mainly commuters, make frequent trips through the area and would generally have short durations of exposure and a low sensitivity to visual resources. Pedestrian and bicycle travelers experience foreground views and would have a high awareness and sensitivity to visual resources. It is anticipated that pedestrian and cyclist viewers are largely composed of local residents with a relatively high viewer sensitivity. Further, the residential neighbors would experience primarily foreground views in this portion of the landscape unit and would have a high sensitivity to the area's visual resources.

Figure D-15. View of office park on John James Audubon Parkway south of I-990 (Suburban Office/Residential District)

Figure D-16. View west on Partridge Run at John James Audubon Parkway (Suburban Office/Residential District)

Figure D-17. View north on John James Audubon Parkway south of I-990 (Suburban Office/Residential District)

D.3.2 Viewer Groups

Per the 2015 FHWA Guidelines on aesthetics and visual quality, two viewer groups were considered in this visual assessment:

- Travelers (those who would have views from the Project Corridor)
- Neighbors (those who would have views of the Project Corridor)

To further define the different preferences represented within the visual study area (400-foot radius from the Project Corridor) these categories were then subdivided by the modes used by travelers or the specific land use of a neighbor.

The visual quality of a particular AVE is determined by viewer groups' visual perceptions, which FHWA guidelines categorize into three types:

- Natural harmony (viewer preferences for the composition of the natural environment)
- Cultural order (viewer preferences for the visual resources of the cultural environment)
- Project coherence (viewer preferences for the visual resources of the project environment)

Travelers

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

MOTORISTS

Motorists are the largest viewer group within the visual study area and can be either drivers or passengers in a vehicle. This group consists of motorists traveling the Project Corridor or using it to reach or depart from destinations within the study area. Motorists' views are continually changing while moving, with moderate exposure due to speeds and the number of users and trips. For drivers, viewer awareness may be moderate, while for passengers, viewer awareness may be high. Motorists traveling in and along the Project 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, motorists have relatively moderate sensitivity to detailed visual changes within the Project Corridor.

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 Project Corridor.

COMMERCIAL TRAVELERS

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. This viewer group has a low sensitivity to visual change.

Neighbors

As defined in the 2015 FHWA Guidelines, the term "neighbor" does not always mean that a person is adjacent to the roadway. Rather, the term refers to people who are not traveling on the roadway but may see it from their 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.

RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORS

Residential neighbors tend to be permanent and have a desire to maintain their surrounding landscape as is. Residential neighbors are interested in cultural order and natural harmony, with less emphasis on project coherence. Residents may view the Project Corridor 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 Project Corridor 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.

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 Section 4.4, "Neighborhoods and Community Facilities," seven schools (Pre-K through Grade 12) are within the study area, which extends 0.25 miles on either side of the Project Corridor and a 0.5-mile radius around each proposed station. Of these, two (Sweet Home Middle School and Jewish Heritage Day School) are within the visual study area. In addition, approximately 15 places of worship are within the study area used for the community facilities assessment, of which nine are within the visual study area. The public image institutions convey to passing travelers is important for a variety of reasons. The appearance of buildings and grounds contributes to their public impression, and institutions will maintain or improve buildings and grounds as part of their public image efforts. Orientation and wayfinding are also priorities, 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.

RETAIL NEIGHBORS

Retail neighbors include merchants and shoppers. Merchants are more permanent than shoppers and prefer heightened visibility, free of competing visual intrusions. Shoppers may frequent the same locations and tend to prefer visual clarity that directs them to their destination so they can shop with minimal distractions. This viewer group has a moderate sensitivity to visual change. Retail neighbors are concentrated in the Suburban Commercial District.

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 image is more important, 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.

RECREATIONAL NEIGHBORS

Recreational neighbors provide or participate in recreation within the visual study area. Businesses that supply a recreational service 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 their recreational activity. Recreational neighbors prefer the status quo and are cautious of visual encroachments that may adversely impact their activity. However, they may be agreeable to improvements to visual resources that enhance that recreation. 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 impact their experience traveling to their recreational activity. Recreational neighbors have a high sensitivity to visual change. This viewer group consists of visitors to 12 public parks and open spaces within the study area, defined as 0.25 miles on either side of the Project Corridor and a 0.5-mile radius around each station location, and Skinnersville Cemetery. Of these public parks and open spaces, three are within the visual study area.

D.3.3 Visually Sensitive 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; 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 Project.

State/National Registers of Historic Places

Section 4.6, "Historic and Cultural Resources" (of Chapter 4, "Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences") identifies the local historic and cultural resources within the study area. Based on field investigations, research, and evaluation, the only historic properties

located within 400 feet of the Project Corridor are the National Register of Historic Places (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 is treated as an eligible historic property for the purposes of the Project. Existing documentation verified the district boundaries that the New York State Historic Preservation Office's Cultural Resource Information System provided. The boundaries of both the University Park Historic District and Capen Boulevard Historic District required corrections.

New York State Parks

No State parks (as defined by New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law Section 3.09) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

Heritage Areas

The Project Corridor is within the Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor, a New York State-designated Heritage Area (as defined by Article 35, New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law). The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor and Buffalo Theatre District are both south of the Project Corridor and the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area is northwest of the Project Corridor and includes the entirety of the municipal limits of the City of Niagara Falls.

New York State Forest Preserve

Lands within the State Forest preserve (New York State Constitution Article XIV) are within the boundaries of Adirondack Park and Catskill Park. Therefore, there are no State Forest preserve lands within the study area.

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 U.S.C. 668dd-668ee, and amended by Public Law 105-57) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

No State game refuges or State wildlife management areas (as defined by ECL Section 11-2105) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

National Natural Landmarks

No national natural landmarks (as defined by 36 CFR Part 62) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

National Park System Recreation Areas, Seashores, Forests

No national parks (as defined by 16 U.S.C. Section 1c) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

Rivers Designated as National or State Wild, Scenic, or Recreational

No national or State-designated wild, scenic, or recreational rivers (as defined by 16 U.S.C. Chapter 28, ECL 15-2701 et seq. and ECL Sections 15-2713 through 15-2715, respectively) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 NYSDOT), parkways (designated by the New York State 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 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 400 feet radius of the Project Corridor.

State- or Federally Designated Trails

No State- or Federally designated trails (as defined by 16 U.S.C. Chapter 27) are within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

Adirondack Park Scenic Vistas

Adirondack Park is located in northeastern New York and not within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 within 400 feet of the Project Corridor.

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 400 feet of the Project Corridor have been identified as locally significant:

- Letchworth Woods
- Walton Woods Park
- Skinnersville Cemetery

D.3.4 Viewpoints

Three viewpoints were selected to assess the change in visual quality that would result from the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative. These views, shown in Figure D-23 through Figure D-28 in Section D.6 on Potential Impacts, are representative of the range of viewpoints that the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative would impact. The process of selecting viewpoints accounted for effects to visually sensitive resources, considered the impacted population's sensitivity to the proposed visual changes of the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, and considered locations with the potential for the most visual contrast between existing conditions/No Build Alternative and the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative. Visual quality was assessed to evaluate the effects of the build alternatives. These locations and selection of views are described below:

- **Viewpoint 1:** View looking north on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenmore Avenue and Princeton Avenue. This viewpoint, located in landscape unit 2 (Suburban Residential District), was selected to show the potential visual impact of the Project alignment emerging above ground through a portal to continue at grade.
- **Viewpoint 2:** View looking north along John James Audubon Parkway adjacent to the Skinnersville Cemetery. This viewpoint, located in landscape unit 4 (University District 2), was selected to show the potential visual impact of the Project alignment on a locally significant resource.
- **Viewpoint 3:** View looking north on John James Audubon Parkway at the corner of Partridge Run, near Walton Woods. This viewpoint, location in landscape unit 5 (Suburban Office Residential District), was selected to show the potential visual impact of the Project alignment on John James Audubon Parkway, which would be visible.

D.4 NO BUILD ALTERNATIVE

Absent the Project, in the No Build Alternative, no significant changes to existing visual conditions are expected to occur. Therefore, there would be no impact to visual resources.

D.5 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE BUILD ALTERNATIVES

The following sections describe the visual elements of the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative. 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.

D.5.1 Visual Elements

The LRT Build Alternative would introduce new visual elements into the study area. These new elements would include the Metro Rail vehicles and trackway; stations and park and ride facilities; the overhead catenary system that powers the Metro Rail vehicles; electric substations, and a light maintenance/storage facility. These elements would be similar in design to those of the existing Metro Rail (Figure D-18).

Figure D-18. LRT Build Alternative – Existing Metro Rail

Source: Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

The BRT Build Alternative would introduce new visual elements into the study area. These new elements would include stations, park and ride facilities, and a BRT vehicle storage and maintenance facility.

D.5.2 Vehicles and Trackway

New visual elements that would be introduced by the LRT Build Alternative include the addition of the light rail vehicles and the trackway in which the vehicles would operate. The LRT Build

Alternative would require the addition of two sets of steel rail tracks either placed on concrete cross ties with standard rock ballast or embedded within the roadway surface, which is similar to the existing Metro Rail.

The BRT Build Alternative would not require a trackway. The BRT buses would operate in dedicated bus only lanes.

D.5.3 Stations and Park and Ride Facilities

Typical station platforms proposed for both the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative would have level boarding to be compliant with the American Disabilities Act. For the LRT Build Alternative, platforms are planned to be approximately 300 feet long with canopies standing approximately 15 feet in height. LRT canopies may not cover the entire platform, but instead focus on providing coverage for riders boarding or leaving the vehicles. For the BRT Build Alternative, platforms would be at grade and approximately 150 feet long to accommodate up to two articulated BRT vehicles. BRT platforms, consistent with LRT, may include canopies to provide coverage for riders.

Under the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, park and ride facilities would be constructed at two station locations: Boulevard Mall Station (approximately 300 parking spaces) and I-990 Station (approximately 50 parking spaces). In the case of the Boulevard Mall Station, parking is expected to be surface level parking, reusing or converting existing surface parking. All ten proposed stations would be complemented with landscaping and public art to ensure visual compatibility with the surrounding area. Station renderings for the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative are presented in Figure D-19 and Figure D-20.

Figure D-19. LRT Build Alternative – Decatur Station

Source. Sowinski Sullivan Architects

Figure D-20. BRT Build Alternative – Decatur Station

Source. Sowinski Sullivan Architects

D.5.4 Overhead Catenary

The BRT Build Alternative would not introduce an overhead catenary visual element.

The LRT Build Alternative would introduce Metro Rail vehicles that would be electrically powered by an overhead catenary system requiring construction of poles to support overhead wires. These wires would have minimal visual impact, particularly on the portions of the alignment that already have overhead wires. The pole design for the LRT Build Alternative generally would be similar to that used for the existing Metro Rail (Figure D-21).

Figure D-21. LRT Build Alternative – Existing Metro Rail Catenary

Source. Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

D.5.5 Substations

The BRT Build Alternative would not introduce a substation visual element. Substations are part of the electrical system to transform the local power supply to the appropriate voltage for light-rail operations.

Substations are essential to providing the necessary power to operate the LRT Build Alternative. 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 LRT Build Alternative substations would be above ground, similar to the substation shown in Figure D-22. Dimensions of the proposed one-story metal substations would be approximately 50 feet by 100 feet. The substation could be easily hidden behind decorative fences or even enclosed in a building to better align with neighborhood aesthetics.

Figure D-22. Visual Elements. Typical Substation

D.5.6 Light Maintenance/Storage Facility

Both the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative would include a vehicle storage facility at the end of the line (north of the I-990 and John James Audubon Parkway interchange) for storing Metro Rail vehicles or buses overnight and performing light maintenance and cleaning. The storage facility would be fully enclosed and would have staff facilities to account for offices, restrooms, and lockers.

D.5.7 Right-of-Way Modifications

Construction of both the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative would require street widening and modifications to the existing right-of-way in some areas. See Section 4.1, "Property Acquisitions and Displacement," for details on the acquisition of property related to the Project. Construction of these alternatives would also require removal of vegetation along the Project alignment. The changes could either expand or block a particular viewshed or change the context of visual resources.

D.6 POTENTIAL IMPACTS

To evaluate the level of visual impact under the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, the changes to the environment (measured by the compatibility of the impact and change in visual quality) and sensitivity of the viewers to these changes were analyzed. The

following section provides a visual representation of the existing conditions/No Build Alternative as compared to the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative using photo simulations to evaluate visual impact. The visualizations represent conceptual engineering; the final selection of Project design elements would be refined during preliminary and final design.

Visual compatibility is defined as either 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 (i.e., proximity, extent, and duration) and awareness (i.e., attention, focus, and protection) of any changes in the visual character of visual resources.

D.6.1 Viewpoint 1: Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents near Portal Location

This viewpoint was selected to show the location where the LRT Build Alternative would emerge above ground through a portal and continue at grade. The LRT Build Alternative will operate below grade for a short distance to connect with the existing underground Metro Rail terminus at the Metro Rail terminus at the Metro Rail University Station. Figure D-23 shows the view looking north on Niagara Falls Boulevard between Kenmore Avenue and Princeton Avenue in the Suburban Residential District, landscape unit 2 (Section D.3.1). An artist's conceptual illustration can be seen in the median of Niagara Falls Boulevard.

The Build Alternatives are conceptual in nature and would be further defined as the Project completes design and engineering.

Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

As shown in Figure D-23, 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 that neighbor groups perceive this view.

Build Alternatives

Under the LRT Build Alternative, there would be new visual elements for viewers. As shown in Figure D-24, 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 visual elements would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. Therefore, a minor visual change would occur and the impact is not considered adverse. These changes would have a neutral impact on visual quality because the degree of change would be minor, and the Project would be compatible with its surroundings. In addition, the inclusion of architectural design elements would help soften the view of the portal.

Under the BRT Build Alternative, there would be a dedicated busway (Figure D-25). There would be no new visual elements for viewers. Therefore, the BRT Build Alternative would be compatible with its surroundings and have a negligible visual change.

Figure D-23. Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents – Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

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

Figure D-24. Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents – Visual Simulation of LRT Build Alternative

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

Figure D-25. Niagara Falls Boulevard Residents – Visual Simulation of BRT Build Alternative

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

D.6.2 Viewpoint 2: Skinnersville Cemetery

This viewpoint was selected to show the potential visual impact of the LRT Build Alternative alignment on the Skinnersville Cemetery, a locally significant resource. Figure D-26 shows the

view looking north along John James Audubon Parkway adjacent to the Skinnersville Cemetery in the University District 2, landscape unit 4 (Section D.3.1).

Figure D-26. Skinnersville Cemetery – Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

As shown in Figure D-26, the northbound lanes of John James Audubon Parkway are adjacent to the cemetery and are visible from the cemetery. However, mature trees along the edge of the cemetery screen the roadway.

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 and viewers and the duration of time neighbor groups perceive this view.

Build Alternatives

Under the LRT Build Alternative, there would be new visual elements for viewers in the resource. The trackwork and overhead catenary of the proposed alignment in the existing northbound lanes of John James Audubon Parkway would be visible from the cemetery. For both traveler and neighborhood viewer groups, the proposed visual elements would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. However, as the cemetery has mature trees that would provide screening from the proposed visual elements, the visual change would be minor and a visual impact is not anticipated as compared with the No Build Alternative.

Under the BRT Build Alternative, there would be no new visual elements for viewers in the resource. Therefore, the Project would be compatible with its surroundings and consistent with

the No Build Alternative. The visual change would be negligible and not result in an adverse impact.

D.6.3 Viewpoint 3: Audubon New Community Near Walton Woods

This viewpoint was selected to show the potential visual impact of the LRT Build Alternative alignment located on John James Audubon Parkway near Walton Woods. Figure D-27 shows the view looking north on John James Audubon Parkway at the corner of Partridge Run in the Suburban Office Residential District, landscape unit 5 (Section D.3.1).

Figure D-27. Audubon New Community Near Walton Woods – Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

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

Existing Conditions/No Build Alternative

As shown in Figure D-27, the vehicular lanes of John James Audubon Parkway 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.

Build Alternatives

Under the LRT Build Alternative, there would be new visual elements for viewers in the resource. As shown in Figure D-28, the trackwork and overhead catenary of the proposed alignment in the existing northbound lanes of John James Audubon Parkway would be visible. For traveler viewer groups, including pedestrians and bicyclists using the new bike lane, the LRT

Build Alternative elements on John James Audubon Parkway would not be out of character with existing transportation uses. Therefore, a moderate visual change would occur and the impact is not considered significant. The existing mature trees and vegetation would provide screening of the LRT Build Alternative visual elements for residential and recreational neighbor groups. However, there may still be some impact to the existing character with the introduction of above ground equipment (e.g., overhead catenary, gate, and signal crossing). Mitigation efforts such as increased landscaping to offer further screening would be considered during the design phase. The LRT Build Alternative would have a neutral impact on visual quality because the degree of change would be moderate, and the Project would be compatible with its surroundings.

Figure D-28. Audubon New Community Near Walton Woods – Visual Simulation of the LRT Build Alternative

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

Under the BRT Build Alternative, there would be no new visual elements for viewers in the resource, as shown in Figure D-29. Therefore, the Project would be compatible with its surroundings.

Figure D-29. Audubon New Community Near Walton Woods – Visual Simulation of the BRT Build Alternative

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

D.7 MITIGATION

The visual elements associated with LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternatives are conceptual and will be further defined as the project completes design and engineering. The Project would be visible from certain aesthetic resources or sensitive viewer locations along the Project alignment. However, the Project would not result in a significant adverse visual impact because the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative would not obstruct views to visual resources or otherwise significantly detract from or cause a diminishment of the public's enjoyment of a resource. Therefore, no mitigation strategies are necessary.

Given the findings of the VIA, future Project design will consider the users and neighbors present within each unique Land scape Unit. As described, a context sensitive design approach will further ensure that moderate visual changes are addressed. Such a design approach will also foster community acceptance and visual integration with the Project alignment.

Metro will incorporate the aesthetic Project design features to help minimize visual changes and add unique character to the stations and portals. These aesthetic design features will reinforce the spirit and identity of areas immediately surrounding station locations.

Moreover, the lighting strategy at proposed stations would incorporate best practices related to duration and usage, brightness, orientation, directionality, form, as well as fixtures that would minimize light pollution. Therefore, the Project would not result in a significant adverse impact to visual resources and no visual resources mitigation measures are necessary.

In cases where the re-siting of above ground equipment is not possible, visual buffers could be used to reduce or obstruct views to the proposed Project elements. Buffers include, but are not limited to, berms, fences, walls, or other above ground obstructions. Specific measures for re-siting, concealment, buffers, and other mitigation will be incorporated into a subsequent design phase.

The proposed stations for the LRT Build Alternative and BRT Build Alternative, as well as the LRT Build Alternative substations and catenary poles, will be designed to minimize visual changes. Specific measures for re-siting, concealment, buffers, increased landscaping, and other design approaches will be incorporated during a later design phase. In cases where the re-siting of above ground equipment is not possible, visual buffers could be used to reduce or obstruct views to the proposed project elements. Buffers include, but are not limited to, berms, fences, walls, or other above ground obstructions.