

# Appendix S. Visual Impact Assessment



RIVERSIDE  
COUNTY  
TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION

## Riverside-Downtown STATION IMPROVEMENTS

# Riverside-Downtown Station Improvements Project Visual Impact Assessment



June 2021

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Definition
<b>AC</b>	Arts and Culture
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act
<b>AI</b>	Action Item
<b>APN</b>	Assessor's Parcel Number
<b>AQ</b>	Air Quality
<b>AVE</b>	Area of Visual Effect
<b>BNSF</b>	Burlington Northern Santa Fe (Railway)
<b>C</b>	Circulation
<b>CCM</b>	Circulation and Construction Mobility
<b>CEQA</b>	California Environmental Quality Act
<b>ENP</b>	Eastside Neighborhood Plan
<b>FHWA</b>	Federal Highway Administration
<b>HC</b>	Healthy Communities
<b>I-</b>	Interstate
<b>LU</b>	Land Use
<b>MP</b>	Milepost
<b>N</b>	Noise
<b>NEPA</b>	National Environmental Policy Act
<b>PS</b>	Public Safety
<b>RCTC</b>	Riverside County Transportation Commission
<b>ROW</b>	right of way
<b>RTA</b>	Regional Transit Authority
<b>SR</b>	State Route
<b>USC</b>	United States Code
<b>USDOT</b>	United States Department of Transportation
<b>USGS</b>	United States Geological Survey
<b>VIA</b>	Visual Impact Assessment

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of Study and Assessment Method

The purpose of this visual impact assessment (VIA) is to document potential visual impacts caused by the proposed Project and propose measures to lessen any identified visual impacts. Visual impacts are assessed by identifying visual resources in the project area, measuring the amount of change that would occur as a result of the Project, and predicting how the affected public would respond to or perceive those changes.

### 1.2 Background

The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and Metrolink propose to improve the Riverside-Downtown Station on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway San Bernardino Subdivision, located just east of State Route (SR) 91 and a short distance from the SR 60 in the City and County of Riverside, California.

Proposed improvements include construction of an additional passenger loading platform, the extension of the existing pedestrian overcrossing and additional elevator and associated tracks, which would allow for two trains to service the station off the BNSF Railway mainline. The proposed track would be required to connect and integrate into the existing station layover tracks on the eastern side to improve train meet times without impacting BNSF Railway operations. The Project would also provide additional parking and improved vehicular traffic circulation on the eastern side of the station (Figure 1-1).

### 1.3 Project Location and Setting

The Riverside-Downtown Station Improvements Project (Project) is located at the existing Riverside-Downtown Station in the City of Riverside, in Riverside County, California from Milepost (MP) 9.9 (southern limits) to MP 10.2 (northern limits) on the BNSF Railway San Bernardino Subdivision. The landscape of Riverside County is characterized by mountain peaks, deserts, and fertile valleys. A wide array of habitat is found within the non-developed lands in Western Riverside County, including coastal sage scrub, vernal pools, montane coniferous forest, chaparral, foothill woodland, annual grassland, and desert. The project area is situated in the Eastside Neighborhood. The land use of the project area is industrial, and it is surrounded by commercial, industrial, and residential structures, and there is a small neighborhood park (Lincoln Park) close to the project area.



**Figure 1-1. Regional and Project Location Map**

Source: Google Earth, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Maps

The project footprint extends beyond the limits of the existing station and rail right of way (ROW) to the south; property acquisition is anticipated.

The project location and setting provide the context for determining the type and severity of changes to the existing visual environment. The terms visual character and visual quality are used to further describe the visual environment. Visual character is the description of the visible attributes of a scene or object typically using terms such as form, line color, and texture. Visual quality is what viewers like and dislike about visual resources that compose the visual character

of a setting. Different viewers may evaluate specific visual resources differently, based on their interests in natural harmony, cultural order, and project coherence. Neighbors and travelers may have different opinions on what they like or dislike about a setting. The project setting is referred to as the corridor or project corridor and is defined as the area of land that is visible from, adjacent to, and outside the railroad ROW. The area of land is determined by topography, vegetation, and viewing distance.

## 1.4 Project Objectives

The purpose of the proposed Project is to expand capacity, and improve operations and efficiency, connectivity, and the passenger experience at the Riverside-Downtown Station. The basic project objectives supporting the purpose of the Project are as follows:

- Expand platform capacity to meet passenger train storage needs
- Allow for train meets off the BNSF Railway mainline and minimize impacts to operations
- Improve train connectivity and passenger accessibility while minimizing impacts on improvement projects near the station that have already been designed or are in construction
- Facilitate more efficient passenger flow and reduce dwell times
- Enhance safety and access for station users
- Accommodate projected future demand

## 1.5 Alternatives Considered

### 1.5.1 No Project Alternative

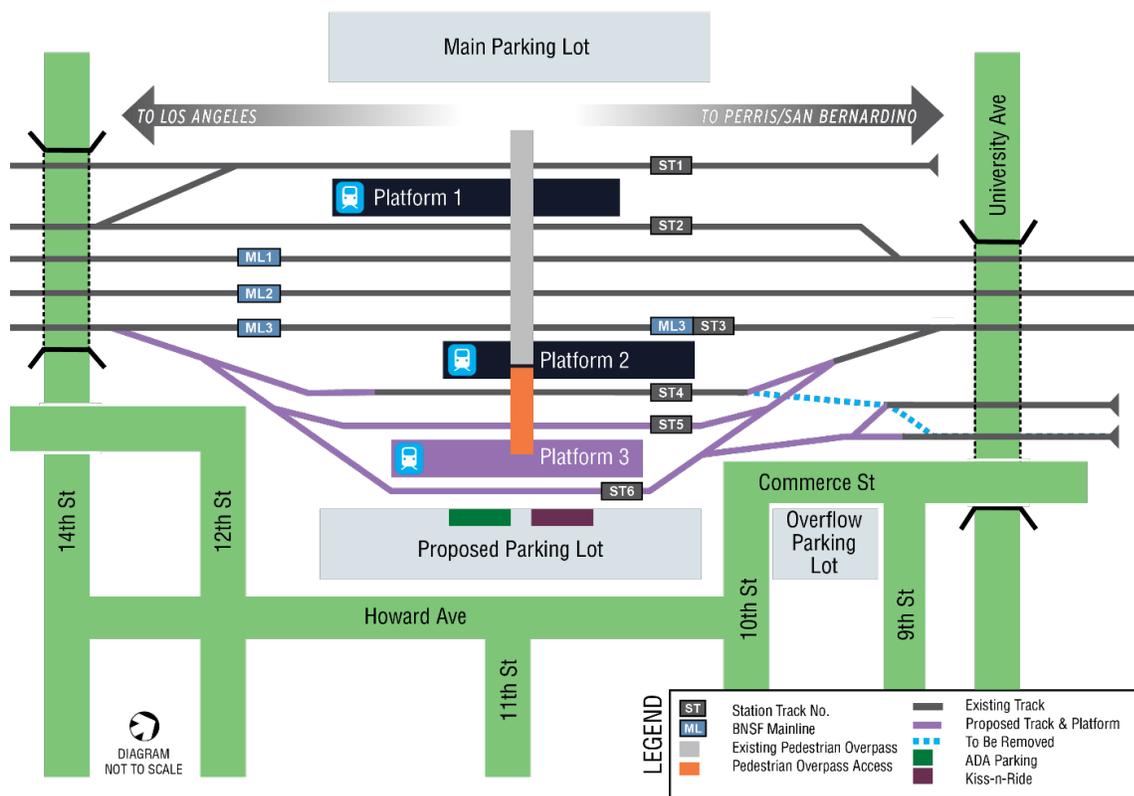
Under the No Project Alternative, implementation of improvements at the Riverside-Downtown Station would not be constructed, and the current configuration of the Riverside-Downtown Station would remain the same. Although there would be no project-related impacts to environmental resources, the No Project Alternative would not meet the project objectives or improve operations to accommodate the 91/Perris Valley Line and the Inland Empire Orange County Lines. Train capacity and storage would be limited to the existing platforms. The No Project Alternative does provide insight on future conditions with no improvements and serves as a baseline for comparison with the Build Alternative.

### 1.5.2 Build Alternative

RCTC and Metrolink propose improvements to the following elements of the Station:

1. Station Platform and Tracks
2. Pedestrian Access
3. Parking, Circulation and Streetscape

The proposed improvements include building an additional passenger loading platform and tracks to the eastern side of existing station to improve Metrolink service and extending the existing pedestrian overpass to access the new proposed platform (Figure 1-2).



**Figure 1-2. Build Alternative**

The proposed track would also connect into the existing station layover tracks on the northern end of the station, provide additional parking, and improve traffic flow on the eastern side of the station. A summary of the proposed Build Alternative improvements is presented in Table 1-1.

**Table 1-1. Summary of Proposed Build Alternative Improvements**

Element	Description
Station Platform and Track Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add new center platform (platform 3)</li> <li>• Add new tracks (station tracks 5 and 6)</li> <li>• Modification of railroad signal system</li> </ul>
Pedestrian Access Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend pedestrian access to new platform 3</li> <li>• Emergency egress would be provided at three locations</li> </ul>
Parking, Circulation and Streetscape Improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relocate ADA-compliant parking</li> <li>• Modify bus drop-off area</li> <li>• Add sidewalks and trees</li> <li>• Add up to 560 additional parking spaces</li> </ul>

ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act

The proposed improvements would enhance Metrolink train connections without affecting BNSF Railway services. The improvements would be designed in accordance with the most recent applicable codes, Southern California Regional Rail Authority, BNSF Railway, ADA, American

Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association, Federal Rail Administration, and California Public Utilities Commission, standards and guidelines.

### 1.5.3 Common Features of Build Alternative

#### STATION PLATFORM AND TRACK IMPROVEMENTS

The Build Alternative, includes the following station platform and track improvements as part of the proposed Project (Figure 1-2):

- Add a new center platform (Platform 3) that is approximately 680 feet in length and 30 feet in width with direct access from the new parking area to the east and access from the west using the at-grade crossings from Platform 2.
- Add new tracks (Station Tracks 5 and 6) and other track improvements.
- Modify the railroad signal system.

Platform 3 would be located between Station Tracks 5 and 6. Platform 3 would be able to service seven 85-foot passenger cars. The centerline to centerline spacing of the parallel tracks at the platform would be approximately 40 feet. Demolition of existing structures and other ancillary improvements would be required to facilitate construction of the station platform and track improvements.

#### PEDESTRIAN ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

- The Build Alternative includes the following pedestrian access improvements as part of the proposed Project:
  - Extend the existing pedestrian overpass access (Figure 1-2).
  - Add pedestrian at-grade access from the proposed surface parking lot on the eastern side of proposed station improvements to Platforms 2 and 3 through an extension of the existing pedestrian at-grade crossing on the northern end of the platforms and a new pedestrian at-grade rail crossing on the southern end of the platforms. The pedestrian at-grade crossings would include safety enhancements such as proper channelization, automated gates and flashers.
- Emergency egress would be provided at three locations from Platform 3:
  - Northern end pedestrian at-grade crossing (existing at-grade crossing to be extended)
  - Pedestrian access
  - Southern end pedestrian at-grade crossing (new)

#### PARKING, CIRCULATION AND STREETSCAPE

The Build Alternative includes the following parking, circulation, and streetscape improvements, as part of the proposed Project:

- Relocate the ADA-compliant parking.
- Modify the bus drop-off area.
- Add sidewalks and trees.
- Add up to 560 additional parking spaces (proposed surface parking lot) with access to the eastern side of the station via at-grade pedestrian crossings.

### 1.5.4 Design Options

As part of the Build Alternative, there is a design option related to a longer extension of the pedestrian overpass access from the new proposed platform to the new surface parking lot. Another design option is associated with the new surface parking lot and combining this new parking lot with the existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station. This parking option includes traffic circulation improvements along Howard Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and Commerce Street. Table 1-2 summarizes the proposed design options.

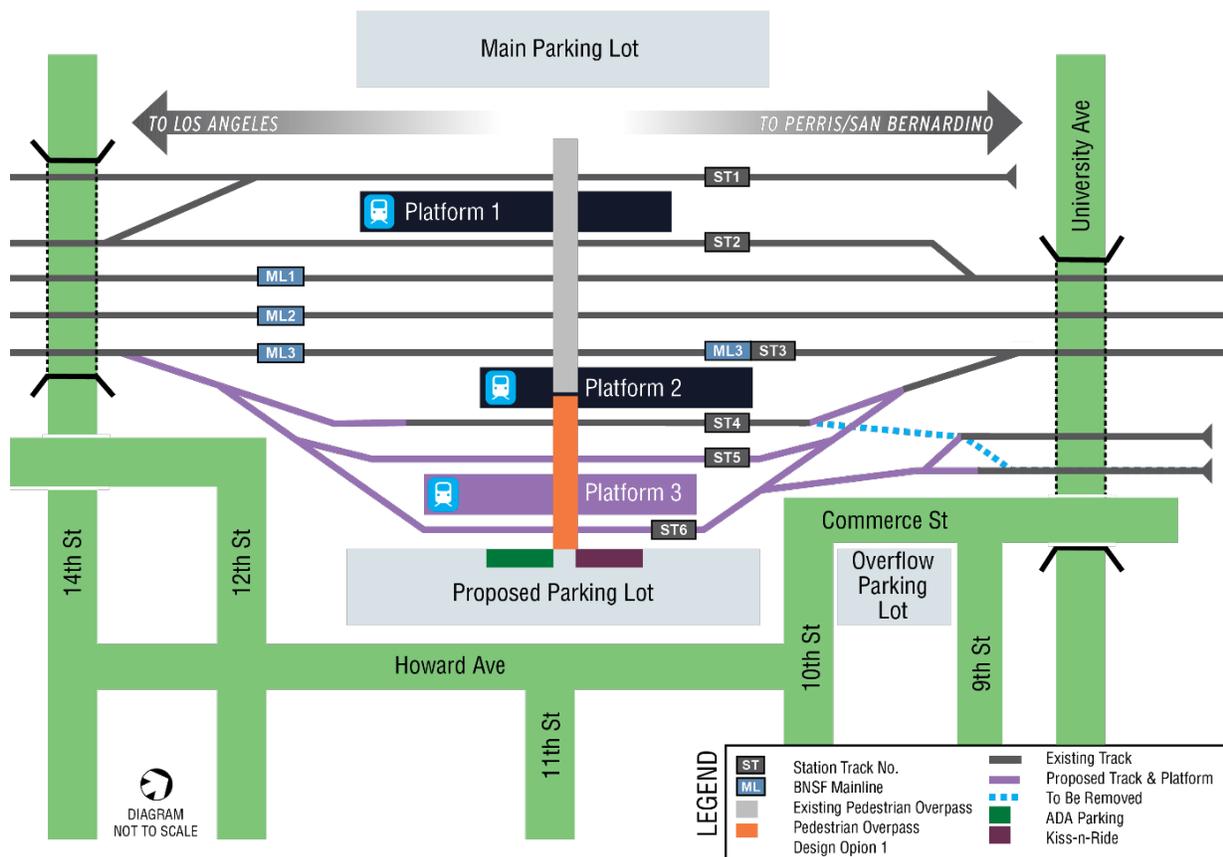
**Table 1-2. Summary of Proposed Build Alternative with Design Options**

<b>Build + Design Option</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b><i>Pedestrian Overpass Access Improvements</i></b>	
Pedestrian Overpass Access Design Option 1	Extend pedestrian overpass access to the new platform 3 and to the new surface parking lot.
<b><i>Parking, Circulation and Streetscape Improvements</i></b>	
Parking Design Option 1A	New surface parking lot east of the station: <i>Requires acquisition and demolition of existing structures and other ancillary structures and residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue to facilitate construction of the proposed improvements.</i>
Parking Design Option 1B	Same as Parking Design Option 1A <i>Avoids relocation impacts to residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue.</i>
Parking Design Option 2A	New surface parking lot east of the station combined with existing overflow parking lot with the extension of Howard Avenue through to 9 <sup>th</sup> Street: <i>Requires acquisition and demolition of existing structures and other ancillary structures and residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard and requires acquisition of additional parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot.</i>
Parking Design Option 2B	Same as Parking Design Option 2A. <i>Avoids relocation impacts to residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue.</i>
Parking Design Option 3A	Same as Parking Design Option 1A and 2A. <i>Avoids impacts to additional parcels east of the existing overflow parking lot by routing Howard Avenue around the parcels.</i>
Parking Design Option 3B	Same as Parking Design Option 1B and 2B. <i>Avoids relocation impacts to residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue and avoids impacts to additional parcels east of the existing overflow parking lot.</i>

#### **PEDESTRIAN OVERPASS ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS**

Access from the existing station area would be provided by the proposed extension of the pedestrian overpass (Figure 1-3). The Build Alternative with Pedestrian Overpass Access Design Option 1 includes a longer extension of the pedestrian overpass to Platform 3 and new surface parking lot (two spans, two towers/elevators).

The new pedestrian overpass elevator tower would be located 14 feet clear of both Tracks 5 and 6 on Platform 3. Access from the proposed surface parking lot would be provided by two 10-foot-wide at-grade pedestrian crossings at the northern and southern ends of Platform 3.



**Figure 1-3. Build Alternative with Pedestrian Overpass Access Design Option 1**

### PARKING, CIRCULATION AND STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

All parking design options would require the acquisition of parcels directly east of the station and demolition of existing structures and other ancillary structures to facilitate construction of the proposed Build Alternative improvements:

- Parking Design Option 1A would require the acquisition of residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. Parking Option 1B would avoid the residential properties.
- Parking Design Option 1A and 1B adds a new surface parking lot and maintains separation from the existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station. Parking Design Option 2A and 2B would have similar ROW impacts as Options 1A and 1B but would require acquisition of additional parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot.
- Parking Design Option 3A and 3B would have similar ROW impacts as Options 2A and 2B but would avoid parcel acquisitions directly east of the overflow parking lot.

## 1.6 Regulatory Framework

Table 1-3 identifies and summarizes applicable laws, regulations, and plans relative to visual quality and aesthetics conditions.

**Table 1-3. Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Plans for Aesthetics**

Law, Regulation, or Plan	Description
<b>Local – City of Riverside General Plan (2025)</b>	
The City of Riverside General Plan includes the following policies that may be applicable to visual impacts:	
<i>Land Use and Urban Design Element</i>	Objective LU-27: Enhance, maintain, and grow the City of Riverside's inventory of street trees.
<i>Circulation and Construction Mobility Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective CCM-2: Build and maintain a transportation system that combines a mix of transportation modes and transportation system management techniques designed to meet the needs of the City of Riverside's residents and businesses, while minimizing the transportation system's impacts on the air quality, the environment, and the adjacent development.</li> <li>• Policy CCM-2.8: Design street character, livability of residential neighborhoods, and traffic engineering criteria.</li> <li>• Policy CCM-2.9: Design all street improvement projects comprehensively considering street trees, pedestrian walkways, bicycle lanes, equestrian pathways, signing, lighting, noise, and air quality wherever any of these factors are applicable.</li> <li>• Policy CCM-9.6: Enhance and encourage the provision of attractive and appropriate transit amenities, including shaded bus stops, to facilitate use of public transportation through the development process by incorporating the necessary design.</li> <li>• Policy CCM-9.7: Ensure adequate connections among all alternative modes.</li> </ul>
<i>Arts and Culture Element</i>	Policy AC-4.20: Use art in public places in coordination with landscaping, lighting, paving, and signage at the city's regional and local gateways, freeway corridors, and Metrolink stations to strengthen the City Riverside's identity as a cultural and arts center for regional visitors.
<i>Public Safety Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy PS-5.2: Develop objectives and detailed standards for treatment of public streetscapes to improve safety and walkability. Recommendations should address street trees, street lighting, traffic-calming, and other pertinent issues. Establish funding sources and priorities and set forth a phased implementation program.</li> <li>• Policy PS-5.4: Require that new development provide adequate safety lighting in pedestrian areas and parking lots.</li> </ul>

Law, Regulation, or Plan	Description
<i>Appendix D – Eastside Neighborhood Plan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tool ENP 4.1.2: Work with RCTC to pursue development on land owned by RCTC in the Marketplace area, including the Metrolink Station site.</li> <li>• Objective ENP8: Enhance the quality of life in the Eastside Neighborhood’s quality of life by resolving parking and traffic problems and all modes of transportation, including sidewalks, bus routes, and public transportation.</li> <li>• Policy ENP 8.1: Enhance walkability and bike routes throughout the Eastside Neighborhood.</li> <li>• Policy ENP 12.5: Promote increased safety by adhering to the objectives, policies and tools identified in Section 6, Traffic, Transit, Walkability and Parking of the Eastside Neighborhood Plan.</li> </ul>
<b>Local – Riverside Citywide Design Guidelines (2007)</b>	
The Riverside Citywide Design Guidelines includes the following policies that may be applicable to visual impacts	V. Industrial Design Guidelines A. Site Design 1. Parking and Loading 2. Landscaping 3. Walls and Fencing 4. Screening D. Lighting
<b>Local – Riverside Municipal Code</b>	
The Riverside Municipal Code includes the following standards and requirements that may be applicable to visual impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 17.188 — Off-Street Vehicle Parking Standards</li> <li>• Chapter 17.276 — Water Efficient Landscape Requirements</li> </ul>
<b>County Agencies – Riverside County Guidelines</b>	
The Riverside County Guidelines include the following policies that may be applicable to visual impacts	
<i>Land Use Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LU 18.1: Ensure compliance with Riverside County's water-efficient landscape policies.</li> <li>• LU 18.2: Minimize use of turf.</li> <li>• LU 18.3: Design and field check irrigation plans to reduce run-off.</li> </ul>

Law, Regulation, or Plan	Description
<i>Circulation Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C 1.3: Support development of transit connections between Riverside County and regional activity centers in other counties, as well as transit connections that link the community centers located throughout the county and as identified in the Land Use Element and in the individual Area Plans (AI 26).</li> <li>• C 4.3: Assure and facilitate pedestrian access from the developments to existing and future transit routes and terminal facilities through project design (AI 26, 45).</li> <li>• C 4.4: Plan for pedestrian access consistent with road design standards when designing street and road projects. Include provisions for pedestrian paths or sidewalks and timing of traffic signals to allow for safe pedestrian street crossing.</li> <li>• C 4.7: Make reasonable accommodations for safe pedestrian walkways that comply with the ADA requirements within commercial, office, industrial, mixed use, residential and recreational developments.</li> <li>• C 4.8: Coordinate with all transit operators to ensure that ADA-compliant pedestrian facilities are provided along and/or near all transit routes, wherever feasible.</li> <li>• C 5.2: Encourage the use of drought-tolerant native plants and the use of recycled water for roadway landscaping.</li> <li>• C 5.3: Require all commercial and industrial land use parking areas that abut residential areas be buffered and shielded by adequate landscaping.</li> <li>• C 9.2: Support the expansion of Metrolink service and transit operators' programs to increase usage to implement bus rapid transit services, and to make other express and local bus service improvements.</li> <li>• C 13.1: Support continued development and implementation of the Riverside County Rail Program, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– New rail lines and stations.</li> <li>– The proposed California High Speed Rail System with at least two stations in Riverside County.</li> <li>– Coachella Valley San Geronio Pass Intercity Rail Service.</li> <li>– The proposed Intercity Rail Service.</li> <li>– The proposed Intercity Rail Corridor between Calexico and Los Angeles.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• C 13.2: Support continued improvements to The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) and Metrolink rail passenger service within Riverside County and throughout the Southern California region.</li> <li>• C 22.2: Coordinate with Caltrans, RCTC, transit agencies, and responsible agencies to identify the need for additional park-n-ride facilities along major commuter travel corridors and at major activity centers.</li> </ul>

Law, Regulation, or Plan	Description
<i>Air Quality Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AQ 2.2: Require site plan designs to protect people and land uses sensitive to air pollution through the use of barriers and/or distance from emissions sources where possible. (AI 114).</li> <li>• AQ 2.3: Encourage the use of pollution control measures such as landscaping, vegetation and other materials that trap particulate matter or control pollution. (AI 114).</li> <li>• AQ 20.14: Reduce the amount of water used for landscape irrigation through the implementation of County Ordinance 849 and increase use of non-potable water.</li> </ul>
<i>Noise Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N 10.1: Encourage the development and use of alternative transportation modes, including bicycle paths and pedestrian walkways, to minimize vehicular noise within sensitive receptor areas.</li> <li>• N 11.5: Locate light rail and fixed rail routes and design rail stations that are accessible to both residential and commercial areas and minimize noise impacts on surrounding residential and sensitive land uses. (AI 106, 109).</li> </ul>
<i>Healthy Communities Element</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HC 2.2: Promote increased physical activity, reduced driving, and increased walking, cycling and public transit use by (AI 139, 140) increasing opportunities for active transportation (walking and biking) and transit use.</li> <li>• HC 5.4: Consider pedestrian safety and crime prevention measures in major transit centers and high-pedestrian traffic generators such as schools, community centers, etc. (AI 142).</li> <li>• HC 5.5: Build sidewalks to ensure they are sufficiently wide, clear of obstructions, facilitate pedestrian movement, and provide access for the disabled.</li> <li>• HC 5.6: Implement traffic-calming and traffic-slowing measures on roads with a high level of pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle activity. (AI 138, 142, 143).</li> <li>• HC 9.4: Improve safety and the perception of safety by requiring adequate lighting, street visibility, and defensible space.</li> </ul>

## 1.6.1 Regulations

### FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Visual and aesthetic resources are subject to U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulation.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, establishes that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings (42 USC, Section 4331[b][2]). Federal regulations require visual impacts to be addressed for cultural resources and properties protected by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966<sup>1</sup> and Section 4(f) of

<sup>1</sup> "Effect of Undertaking on Historic Property", Title 54, U.S.C., Sec. 306108. 2014. Available at: [https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=4908d84d9d15501f57c7d9bbb46147f1&mc=true&node=se36.3.800\\_116&rgn=div8](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=4908d84d9d15501f57c7d9bbb46147f1&mc=true&node=se36.3.800_116&rgn=div8). Accessed May 2020.

USDOT's Act of 1966.<sup>2</sup> No specific federal or state visual regulatory requirement applies to parklands or to properties that are not listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. NEPA forms the general basis for consideration of potential visual impacts to these other properties not protected under Section 106. *The Historic Resources Report and Finding of Effect for the Riverside -Downtown Station Improvements Project (September 2020)* addresses Project-related impacts to the visual quality of historic properties.

## STATE REGULATIONS

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes that it is the policy of the state to take all action necessary to provide the people of the state "with...enjoyment of aesthetic, natural, scenic and historic environmental qualities" (California Public Resources Code, Section 21001[b]). CEQA was adopted to:

- Inform about the potential significant environmental impacts of proposed activities, including visual impacts.
- Identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced; require changes in a project through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when feasible.
- Disclose to the public the reasons why a project is approved if significant environmental impacts are involved.

Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines contains thresholds of significance for aesthetics, and specifically asks if the activity would:

- Have a substantial effect on the scenic vista?
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings and historical buildings within a state scenic highway area?
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

### 1.6.2 Methodology

The potential visual impacts of the proposed Project were assessed using the following steps:

1. Define the project location and setting.
2. Identify visual assessment unit and key views.
3. Analyze existing visual resources, resource change, and viewer response.
4. Depict the visual appearance of project options.
5. Assess the visual impacts of project options.
6. Propose measures to offset visual impacts.

The VIA documents the area of visual effect (AVE) (i.e., study area), describes existing visual quality or visual resources, characterizes typical viewing experiences from adjacent neighbors

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<sup>2</sup> "Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966," as amended, Title 49, U.S.C., Sec. 303 et seq. Available at: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2009-title49/html/USCODE-2009-title49-subtitleI-chap3-subchapI-sec303.htm>. Accessed May 2020.

or travelers, and qualitatively describes how the visual character of the study area would change as a result of project improvements. The AVE includes the project footprint and the adjacent properties with a visual connection to the project.

The AVE was studied and inventoried using mapping, and web research. A description of the existing visual context of this project is provided as a basis for understanding the affected environment. The following information includes specific features of visual quality that comprise the existing environment and are generally described in this VIA without value or preference.

- **Physical environment:** Includes all structural and landscape features defined as part of the project. These are the constructed structural features that would be introduced in the environment as part of the project. For this project, the features include both the guideway and other infrastructure modified by the project. Landscape features may include trees and other vegetation that would be introduced as part of the project.
- **Natural environment:** Includes natural features within the surrounding area such as native vegetation, land formations, and rock outcroppings.
- **Cultural environment:** Includes the buildings, structures, infrastructure, and artifacts that compose the surrounding the Project. These are features that were constructed by people and are not considered natural.

The visual impact of project alternatives is determined by assessing the visual resource change resulting from the Project and predicting viewer response to that change. Visual resource change is the total change in visual character and visual quality. The first step in determining a visual resource change is to assess the compatibility of the proposed Project with the existing visual character of the landscape. The second step is to compare the visual quality of the existing resources with the projected visual quality after the Project is constructed. Next, viewer response to the changes is the sum of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity to the Project. The resulting level of visual impact is determined by combining the severity of resource change with the degree to which people are likely to react to the change.

Under CEQA, a significant impact would occur if the proposed Project would result in any conditions listed in Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines Checklist, I. Aesthetics*, Issues (a) to (d). If a significant impact is identified, mitigation measures would be applied to reduce the effect to less than significant levels on aesthetic resource(s). If mitigation measures are not feasible to implement or do not reduce the proposed Project's effect, then a significant and unavoidable significant impact would occur. Under NEPA, visual impacts are determined by assessing changes to the visual resources and predicting viewer response to those changes.

### 1.6.3 Affected Environment

#### PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

The regional landscape of Riverside County is characterized by mountain peaks, deserts, and valleys. The City of Riverside is predominantly urbanized and surrounded by hills and ridgelines providing scenic vistas to residents of Riverside, where they can experience long distance views of natural terrain. Vista points exist throughout the city, and can be viewed from urban areas toward the hills and from wilderness areas toward Riverside. The most notable scenic vistas in the city include the La Sierra/Norco Hills, Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Park, and Box Springs Mountain Reserve. The peaks of Box Springs Mountain, Mount Rubidoux, Arlington Mountain, Alessandro Heights, and the La Sierra/Norco Hills provide scenic views of the city and the region.

Adjoining ridgelines within the project area can be seen, including Mt. Mount Rubidoux to the west, Box Springs Mountain Reserve to the east, and San Bernardino Mountains to the far southeast of the project site. Mount Rubidoux and Box Springs Mountain to the west and east are larger in scale and darker in color than the ridgelines to the southeast. The horizontal pattern of development parallels the low-lying terrain of the basin and is positioned within the verticality and scale of the surrounding ridgelines. A wide array of habitats is found within the non-developed lands in Western Riverside County, including coastal sage scrub, vernal pools, montane coniferous forest, chaparral, foothill woodland, annual grassland, and desert.

The Project is located at the existing Riverside-Downtown Station in the City of Riverside, in Riverside County, California from MP 9.9 (southern limits) to MP 10.2 (northern limits) on the BNSF Railway San Bernardino Subdivision. The project site is situated in the Eastside Neighborhood and surrounded by commercial, industrial, and residential structures.

### **AREA OF VISUAL EFFECT**

The Project AVE is bound by Vine Street to the west, Howard Avenue to the east, 14<sup>th</sup> Street to the south and University Avenue to the north (Figure 2-1). Key views have been identified within the AVE. There are no direct or indirect visual impacts beyond these streets. The AVE is relatively flat. Within the AVE the cultural resources potentially and directly impacted by Parking Option Alternatives include the Prism Aerospace Building; two residences on the northwest corner of Howard Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street; and two residences on the south side of 9<sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to the existing overflow parking lot (east side) bound by 10<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Commerce Street. Viewers are residents, neighborhood travelers and employees, neighborhood travelers (drivers, bicyclists and walkers), travelling commuters arriving and departing from the station and traveling commuters as they pass by the warehouse building at the station. As mentioned previously, the project is located within the heavily urbanized core of Downtown Riverside where existing residential, commercial, and industrial development surround the project site.

### **SCENIC VISTA**

A scenic vista is defined as a viewpoint that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape for the benefit of the general public. In addition, some scenic vistas are officially designated by public agencies, or informally designated by tourists and tourist guides. A significant impact to such a scenic vista is one that degrades the view from a designated scenic vista. Within the vicinity of the project site and the AVE, most of the existing foreground and middle-ground views consist of the typical urban environment, dominated by paved roadways, ornamental landscaping, overhead utility lines, and buildings that obstruct background views of the surrounding mountain ranges such as Mount Rubidoux to the west and Box Springs Mountain to the east. The proposed Project is located within an urbanized area, and views of surrounding mountains are mostly obscured by existing development.

## 2 Viewers and Viewer Response

The population affected by the Project is composed of viewers. Viewers are people whose views of the landscape may be altered by the proposed Project – either because the landscape itself has changed or their perception of the landscape has changed.

The following variables determine the extent of visual impacts caused by the construction and operation of the proposed Project:

1. Viewers, or more specifically the response viewers have to changes in their visual environment.
2. Changes to visual resources, as discussed in Section 2.3.1, Visual Resources and Resource Change.

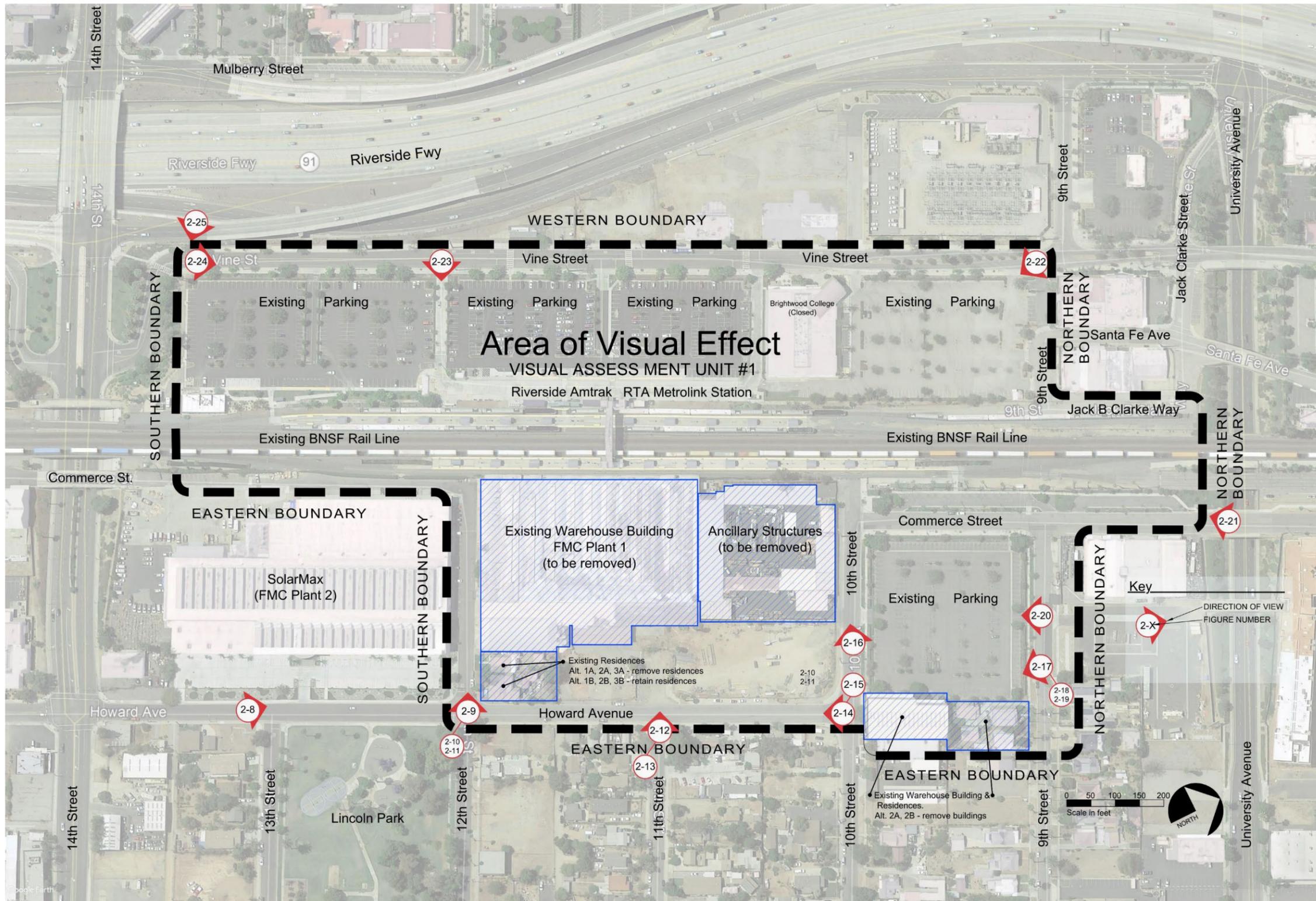
*Note: In the AVE, the Riverside Freeway SR 91 is depressed and effectively blocks views from the roadway to the project area. Tall downtown office buildings to the west of the Riverside Freeway are effectively separated from the project area and present no visual impacts to viewers in these buildings.*

3. The analysis used a rating system consistent with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance (high, moderate, or minimal) to qualitatively assess the level of visual contrast that Project elements would have on visual resources. The following definitions summarize each classification:
  - a. **High:** Introduction of new elements that would result in a major visual contrast where elements may obstruct views or substantially alter character
  - b. **Moderate:** Introduction of new elements that would have a noticeable visual contrast where elements may obstruct or alter views or character
  - c. **Minimal/Low:** Introduction of new elements that would have minor visual contrast where elements are similar to existing features

## 2.1 Existing Conditions/Area of Visual Effect

Figure 2-1 illustrates existing conditions, the boundaries of the visual assessment unit (east, north, west, and south, as described below), the AVE, and key views for the Project.

- **Eastern Boundary:** Residences and businesses fronting Howard Avenue form the eastern visual boundary.
- **Northern Boundary:** Ninth Street and University Avenue (depressed) form the northern visual boundary.
- **Western Boundary:** Park-and-ride surface parking lots, serving the Riverside-Downtown Station and Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Metrolink Station; Brightwood College, with adjoining surface parking lots (now closed); and “Riverside Naval Growers Association” office and warehouse building (vacant and boarded) are located west of the BNSF Railway tracks from south to north.
- **Southern Boundary:** Vine Street turns from west to south and ramps down to the east to connect to 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Vine Street is heavily landscaped and restricts views to the project area. The southern edge, east of the BNSF Railway tracks, is the northern side of the SolarMax office/warehouse building.



**Figure 2-1. Existing Conditions/Area of Visual Effect**

*Note: This map delineates one visual assessment unit and the associated key views that will be used to assess visual impacts that may be caused by the proposed Project.  
Source: Google Earth*



## 2.2 Environmental Consequences

### 2.2.1 Build Alternative Summary of Proposed Work

The parking design options and potential ROW impacts (Figures 2-2, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, 2-6, and 2-7 presented in Section 2.3) were considered in evaluating the visual change to the study area.

Physical project elements that would change the visual quality include:

- Acquisition of property (minimal) from the solar panel manufacturing building property located southeast of the existing station platforms
- Acquisition and demolition of property from the former tank assembly building, property to the east of the station between Commerce Street, Howard Avenue, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and 10<sup>th</sup> Street
- Relocation of existing ADA-compliant parking and replacement and/or transplant of palm trees within the Project limits
- Modification of the transit drop-off area and relocation of the exit driveway
- Acquisition and demolition of warehouse building, east of existing overflow parking, and two multi-residential units on 9<sup>th</sup> Street (Parking Design Options 2A and 2B only)
- Construction of a new 720-foot center platform
- Construction of a (extend existing) pedestrian overpass (elevator, stairs, and bridge)
- Construction of new platform tracks
- Construction of a new sidewalk

### 2.3 Build Alternative with Parking Design Option Exhibits

Figures 2-2 through 2-7 illustrate Build Alternatives with six parking design options.



### PARKING DESIGN OPTION 1A

Add new surface parking lot and maintain separation from existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station. Acquisition and demolition of residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue would be required (Figure 2-2).

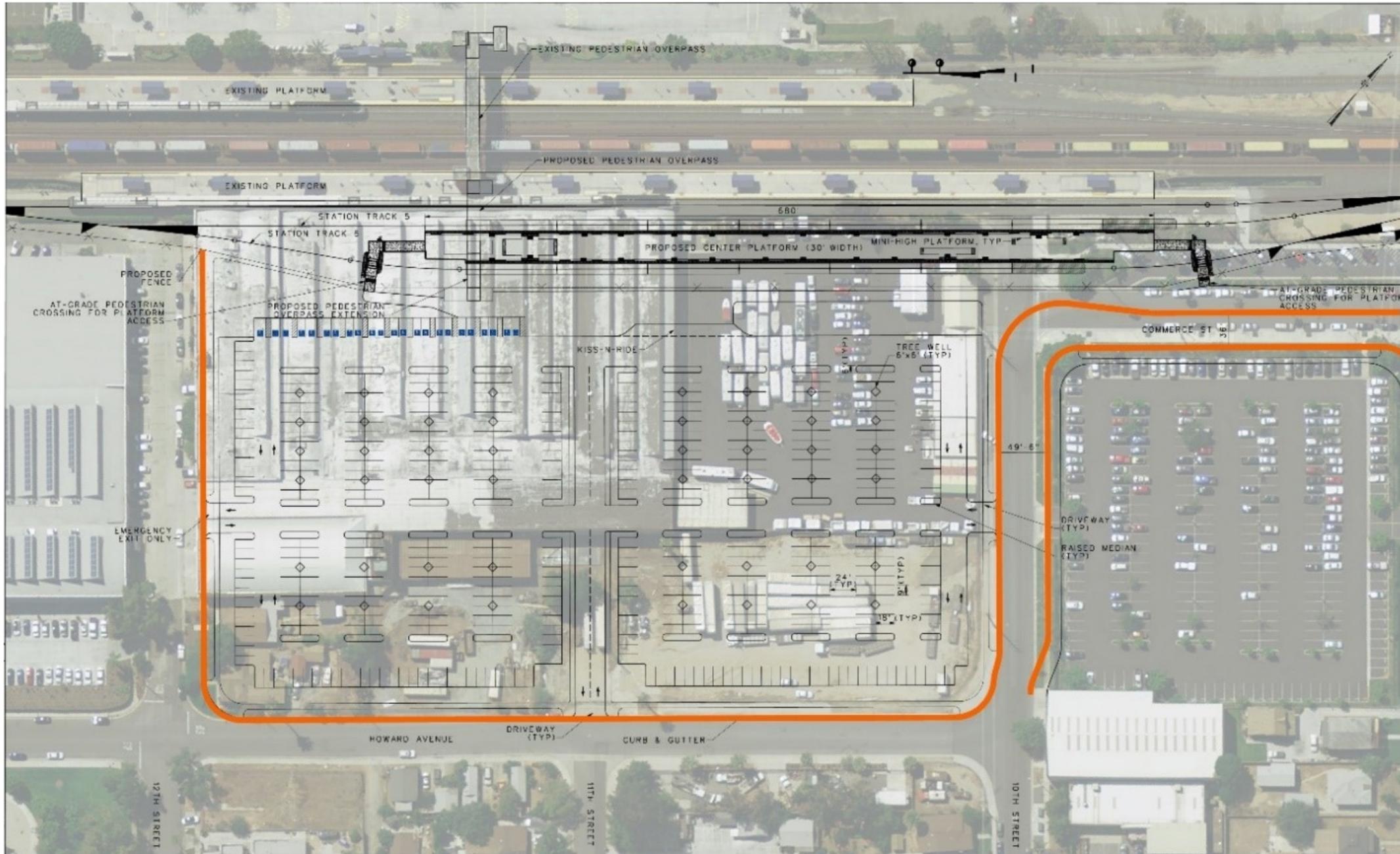


Figure 2-2. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 1A

### PARKING DESIGN OPTION 1B

Add proposed surface parking lot and maintain separation from existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station and avoid impacts to residential parcels at the corner of 12th Street and Howard Avenue (Figure 2-3).

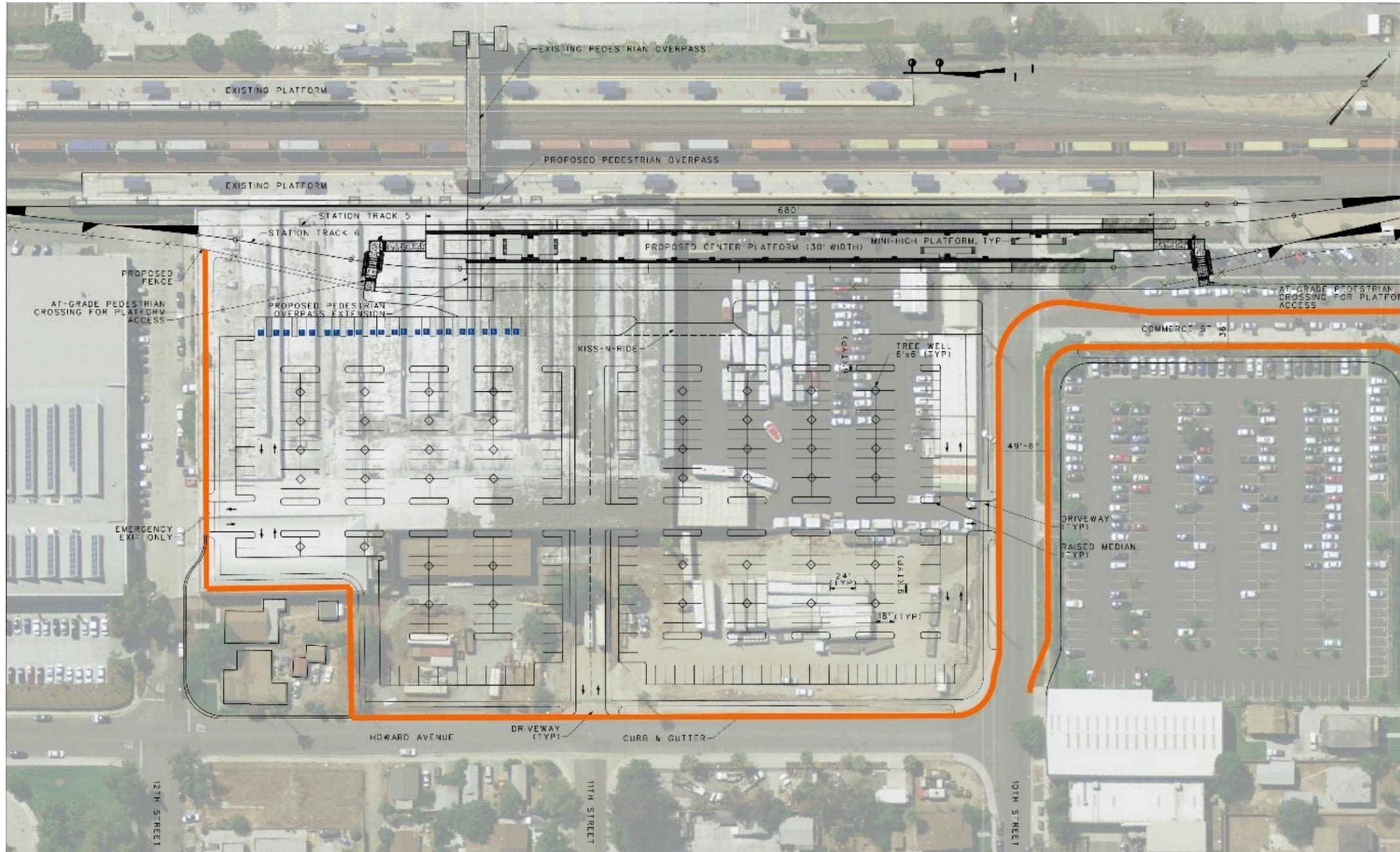


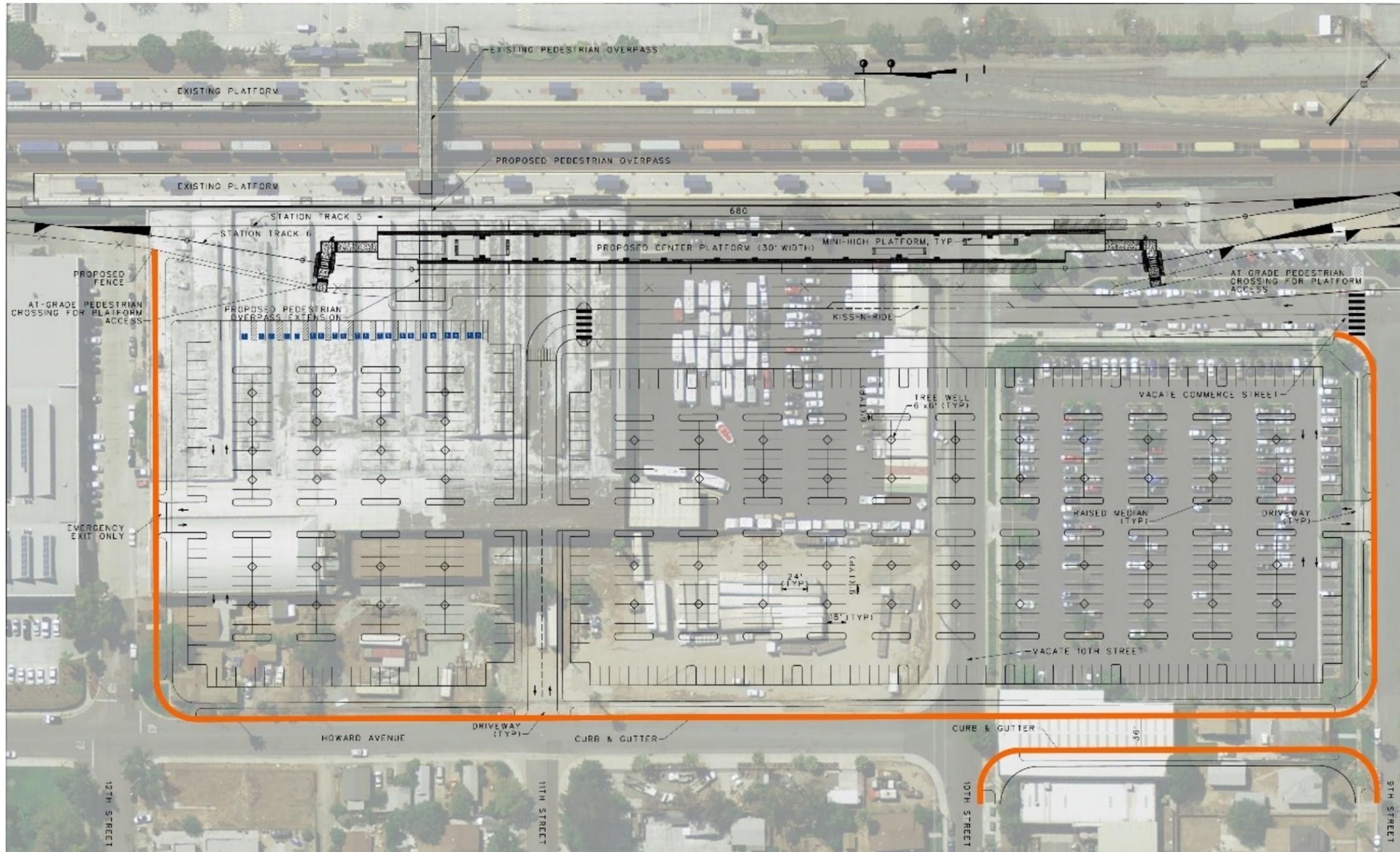
Figure 2-3. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 1B

**PARKING DESIGN OPTIONS 2A AND 2B**

Parking Design Options 2A and 2B proposes a new surface parking lot directly east of the station combined with the existing overflow parking lot (Figure 2-4 and Figure 2-5).

***Parking Design Option 2A***

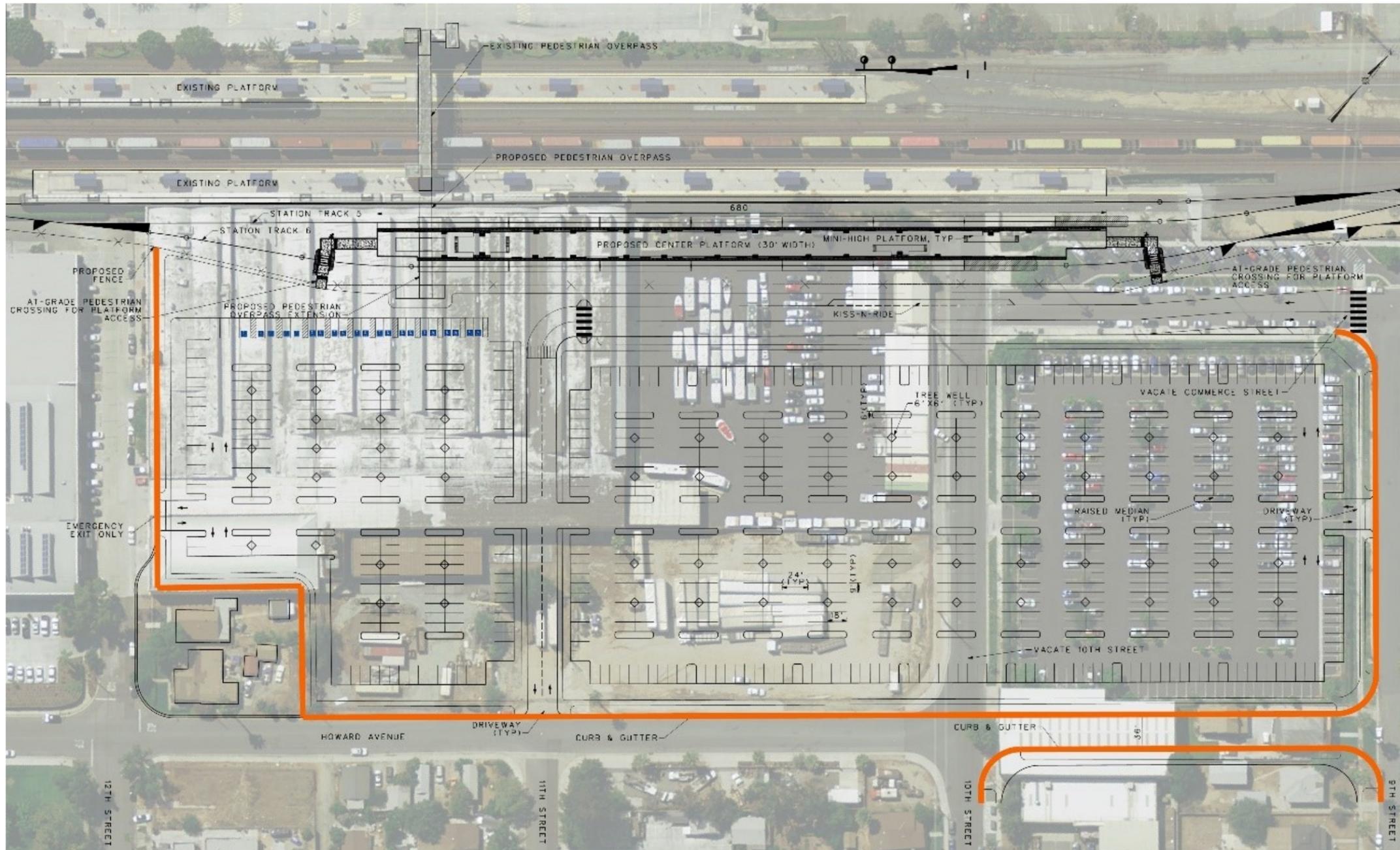
Combine proposed surface parking lot with existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station which would require acquisition of parcels directly to the east of the station and demolition of the existing manufacturing building, ancillary structures while avoiding residential parcels at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. This option would also include extending Howard Avenue through to 9<sup>th</sup> Street and would require additional acquisition of parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot as well as partial street vacations for 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Commerce Street (Figure 2-4).



**Figure 2-4. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 2A**

**Parking Design Option 2B**

Combine proposed surface parking lot with existing overflow parking lot on the east side of the station and avoid impacts to residential parcels at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. This option would also include extending Howard Avenue through to 9<sup>th</sup> Street and would require additional acquisition of parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot as well as partial street vacations for 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Commerce Street (Figure 2-5).



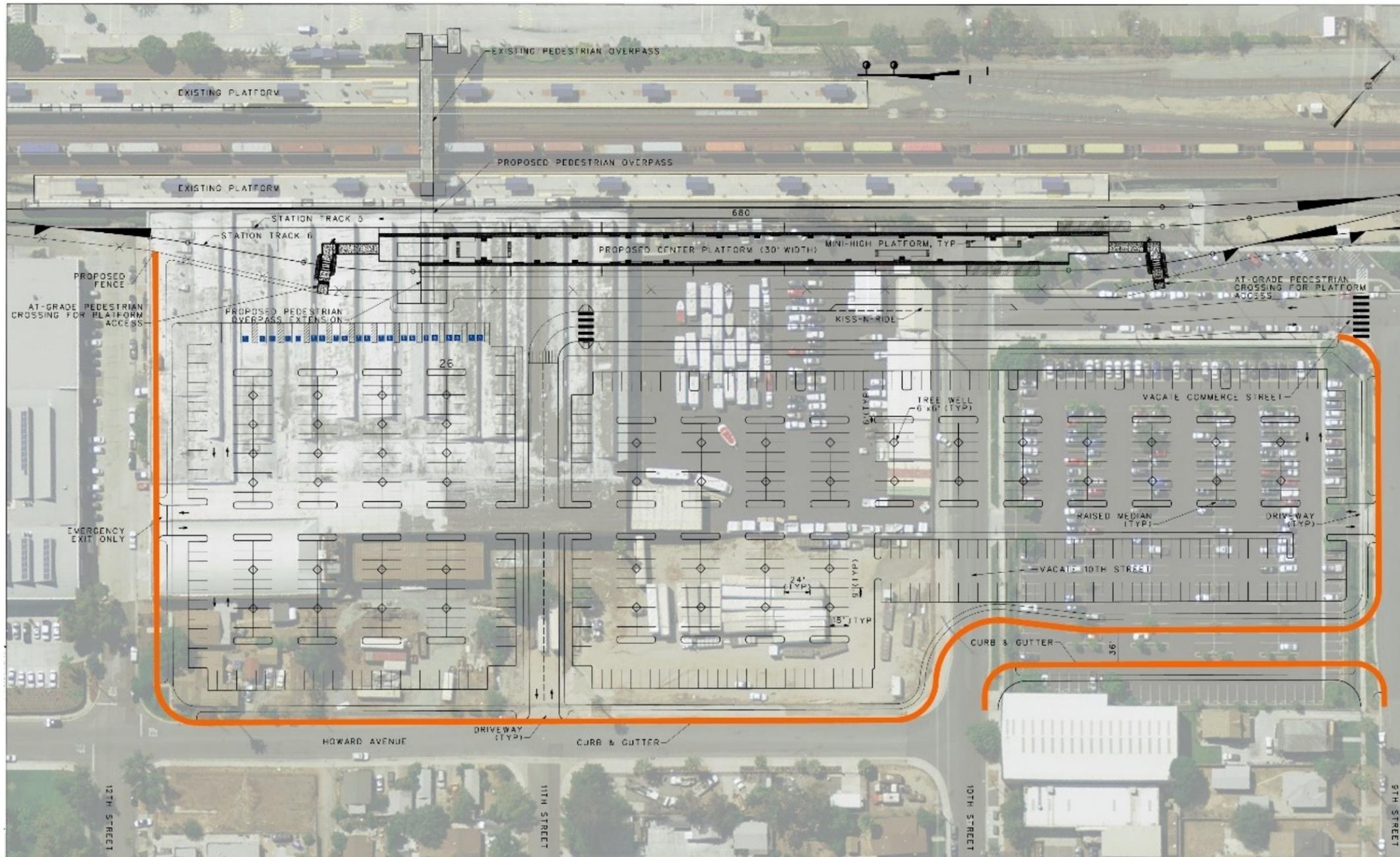
**Figure 2-5. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 2B**

**PARKING DESIGN OPTIONS 3A AND 3B**

Parking Design Options 3A and 3B propose a new surface parking lot directly east of the station combined with the existing overflow parking lot and extension of Howard Avenue through to 9<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 2-6 and Figure 2-7).

**Parking Design Option 3A**

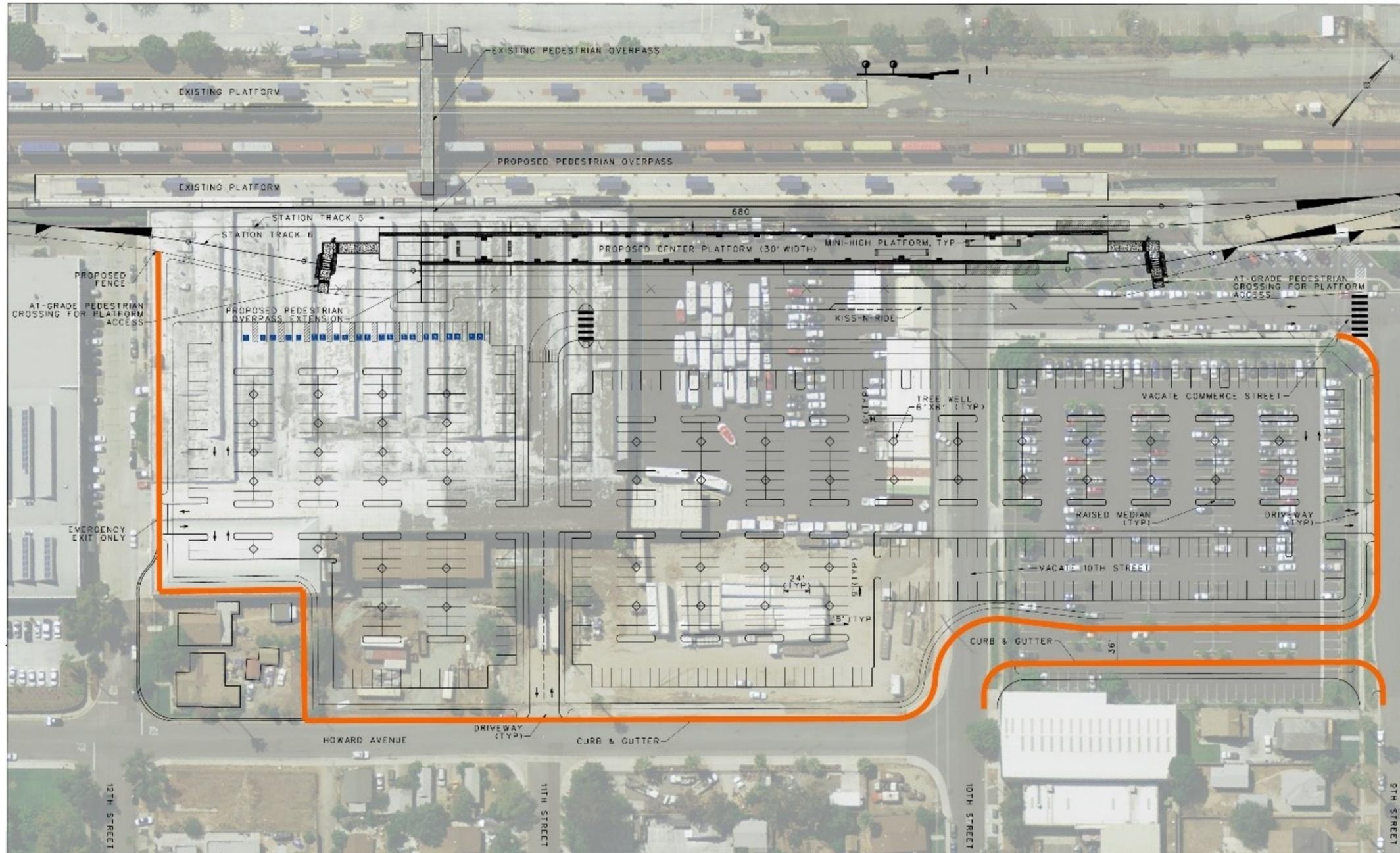
Combine proposed surface parking lot with existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station which would require and demolition of residential parcels on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. This option would also include extending Howard Avenue through to 9<sup>th</sup> Street as well as partial street vacations for 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Commerce Street while avoiding additional acquisition of parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot (Figure 2-6).



**Figure 2-6. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 3A**

**Parking Design Option 3B**

Combine proposed surface parking lot with existing overflow parking lot on the eastern side of the station and avoid impacts to residential parcels at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. This option would also include extending Howard Avenue through to 9<sup>th</sup> Street as well as partial street vacations for 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Commerce Street while avoiding additional acquisition of parcels directly east of the existing overflow parking lot (Figure 2-7).



**Figure 2-7. Build Alternative with Parking Design Option 3B**

### 2.3.1 Visual Resources and Resource Change

The analysis used a rating system consistent with FHWA guidance (high, moderate, or minimal/low) to qualitatively assess the level of visual contrast that project elements would have on visual resources. The following definitions summarize each classification:

- **High:** Introduction of new elements that would result in a major visual contrast where elements may obstruct views or substantially alter character
- **Moderate:** Introduction of new elements that would have a noticeable visual contrast where elements may obstruct or alter views or character
- **Minimal/Low:** Introduction of new elements that would have minor visual contrast where elements are like existing features)

### 2.3.2 Operating Phase (Permanent) Impacts

*Note: All viewpoints of figures with photographs of existing conditions or visualizations of proposed following options are referenced on Figure 2-1.*

#### EASTERN BOUNDARY

The SolarMax Building fronting Howard Avenue effectively screens much of the project area for residents and Lincoln Park users (Figure 2-8).



**Figure 2-8. SolarMax Building on Howard Avenue (looking northwest, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth*

The historic warehouse building to the north of Howard Avenue on 12<sup>th</sup> Street also effectively screens the project area and proposed improvements (Figure 2-9, Figure 2-10, and Figure 2-11).

Parking Options 2A and 3A (Figure 2-4 and Figure 2-6, respectively) proposal are to:

- Remove the historic warehouse building and the assorted ancillary buildings to the north
- Remove two residences on 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue
- Vacate 10<sup>th</sup> Street between Howard Avenue and Commerce Street
- Vacate Commerce Street between 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> streets
- Create a large, landscaped parking lot in the area bounded by 12<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets and BNSF Railway tracks and Howard Avenue

Parking Options 1B, 2B and 3B (Figure 2-3, Figure 2-5, Figure 2-7, respectively) would be very similar to Parking Options 1A, 2A and 3A (Figure 2-2, Figure 2-4, Figure 2-6, respectively) but would retain the existing residences just east of the warehouse building on Howard Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

The new parking lot proposed between 12<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets and adjoining Howard Avenue would be designed to wrap around these two existing residences. This would result in moderate (positive) visual contrast to viewers east of these properties and to commuters who would be using this new parking lot.

Residents and commuters are familiar with the large historic warehouse building and may view its removal as a negative visual impact; however, views to nearby ridgelines would be visible looking west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

Figure 2-9 shows existing conditions on 12<sup>th</sup> Street looking west on Howard Avenue.

Figure 2-10 is a visualization depicting Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A with a proposed landscaped surface parking lot (consistent with the current parking lot to the north bounded by Commerce Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street) and a proposed noise barrier.

Figure 2-11 depicts Parking Design Options 1B, 2B, and 3B and retain the two residences on the corner of Howard Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

For travelers on Howard Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street (drivers, bicyclists, and walkers) residents, park users, and employees, these changes would result in moderate (positive) visual contrast.



**Figure 2-9. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Existing View)**



**Figure 2-10. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A)*



**Figure 2-11. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 1B, 2B, and 3B)*

Figure 2-12 shows existing conditions on 11<sup>th</sup> Street looking across Howard Avenue to the west. Figure 2-13 is a visualization depicting Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A with a proposed landscaped surface parking lot (consistent with the current parking lot to the north bounded by Commerce Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street) and proposed noise barrier.

For travelers on Howard Avenue (drivers, bicyclists, and walkers) residents, park users, and employees, these changes would result in moderate (positive) visual contrast.



**Figure 2-12. 11<sup>th</sup> Street looking west across Howard Avenue**



**Figure 2-13. 11<sup>th</sup> Street looking west across Howard Avenue (Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A)*

Figure 2-14 shows existing conditions on the west side of Howard Avenue between 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue.

Figure 2-15 is a visualization depicting Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A with a proposed landscaped surface parking lot (consistent with the current parking lot to the north bounded by Commerce Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street) and proposed noise barrier. Parking Design Options 1B, 2B, and 3B are very similar; however, these options retain the two residences on the corner of Howard Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

For travelers on Howard Avenue (drivers, bicyclists, and walkers) residents, park users, and employees, these changes would result in moderate (positive) visual contrast.



**Figure 2-14. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west, Existing View)**



**Figure 2-15. 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A)*

Figure 2-16 shows existing conditions on the south side of 10<sup>th</sup> Street between Howard Avenue and Commerce Street.

For all Parking Options, these ancillary buildings would be removed, and they would be replaced with landscaped surface parking lots resulting in low/moderate visual contrast for residents and travelers on Howard Avenue.



**Figure 2-16. 10<sup>th</sup> Street (looking west on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*

### **NORTHERN BOUNDARY**

On 9<sup>th</sup> Street, between Howard Avenue and Commerce Street, businesses and residences face an existing landscaped surface parking lot (Figure 2-17). As part of this Project, there will be accessible parking stalls relocated from the western side of Commerce Street to the western edge of this existing parking lot, resulting in minimal/low visual contrast to employees and residents. In addition, removing the ancillary buildings and parking lot south of 10<sup>th</sup> Street and replacing those with a landscaped parking lot will result in low/minimal visual contrast to residents, businesses, and travelers on 9<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 2-17 and Figure 2-20).

Parking Options 1A and 1B (Figure 2-2 and Figure 2-3) propose shifting Commerce Street to the west, resulting in low/minimal contrast to residents, businesses, and travelers on 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

Parking Options 2A and 2B (Figure 2-4 and Figure 2-5) propose an extension of Howard Avenue from 10<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> streets, which requires property acquisition and the removal of a warehouse building and two residences.

Removing the residences will result in moderate visual contrast to residents and employees on 9<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition, the Howard Avenue extension will add street trees, and sidewalks to the new segment of Howard Avenue (Figure 2-18).

Parking Options 3A and 3B (Figure 2-6 and Figure 2-7) also propose a Howard Avenue extension (jogged to avoid business and residences) from 10<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> streets. In this case, there will be no adverse impacts to the existing business or residences. The new extension of Howard Avenue will provide an area for landscape buffering against the existing warehouse building and residence. This will result in low/minimal contrast to residents and employees on 9<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 2-19).

On Commerce Street to just south of University Avenue (Figure 2-21), low/minimal visual impact is anticipated with the removal and relocation of accessible parking stalls, construction of new tracks, the addition of a new platform with small platform shelters, and construction of a new connecting sidewalk. There will also be moderate visual impact associated with the removal of existing palm trees in this area, however, palm trees will be replaced and/or transplanted within the Project limits. Overall, these design modifications are consistent with this existing visual context.

On 9<sup>th</sup> Street, north of BNSF Railway there is one vacant building (Riverside Naval Growers Association Building) and a brick two-story office building. Both overlook 9<sup>th</sup> Street and a landscaped surface parking lot to the south. From these businesses there is limited view to the project area and limited view to the project improvements to the east and southeast; therefore, there will be low/minimal visual contrast for employees in these buildings. This is also true for very limited travelers on this short segment of 9<sup>th</sup> Street.



**Figure 2-17. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (looking southeast, Existing View)**



**Figure 2-18. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (looking southeast, Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 2A and 2B)*



**Figure 2-19. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (looking southeast, Proposed View)**  
*(Parking Design Options 3A and 3B)*



**Figure 2-20. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (looking south, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*



**Figure 2-21. Commerce Street (looking south, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*

## **WESTERN BOUNDARY**

Vine Street is the western boundary of the visual impact area. Because of both the distance to the project and landscaping in the surface parking lots, the project improvements will have a low/moderate visual contrast for travelers on Vine Street. In addition, the project improvements integrate well into the visual setting and minimize visual impact. West of Vine Street there is currently a vacant lot, a transformation station enclosed by a tall brick wall and a landscaped surface parking lot.

These land uses have minimal viewers and because of the distance to the project, there will be low/minimal visual contrast at these locations (Figure 2-22, Figure 2-23, Figure 2-24, and Figure 2-25).



**Figure 2-22. Vine Street (looking southeast, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*



**Figure 2-23. Vine Street (looking east, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*



**Figure 2-24. Vine Street (looking north, Existing View)**

*Source: Google Earth (Street View)*



**Figure 2-25. Vine Street (looking northeast, Existing View)**

Source: Google Earth (Street View)

### **SOUTHERN BOUNDARY**

The southwestern corner of the landscaped surface lot on Vine Street forms the western half of the southern boundary of the VIA. Because of the landscaped surface lot and the distance to the project area, there is minimal visual impact to travelers on Vine Street, resulting in low/minimal visual impact (Figure 2-25). Vine Street turns the corner at this location, continues east, and ramps down to a depressed 14<sup>th</sup> Street, which effectively blocks visibility to the project area. The northern side of the SolarMax building forms the eastern half of the southern boundary. Removing the historic warehouse building to the north and replacing it with a landscaped-surface parking lot will result in moderate visual contrast.

### **NOISE ABATEMENT**

Existing buildings adjacent to the station are effectively shielding receptors from major noise sources (such as the SR 91 freeway and trains) adjacent to the project site. As a consequence of the removal of the existing Prism Aerospace building and potential residential structures east of the station under the Build Alternative, moderate to severe noise impacts would occur at nearby residential and outdoor receptors. According to the *Noise Study Report* (Helix, 2021) prepared for the proposed Project, noise abatement would be required for the Build Alternative to reduce noise impacts in the form of a noise barrier. A 12-foot-high noise barrier that is approximately 500 feet in length is proposed in roughly the same location as the east wall of the existing Prism Aerospace building. The location of the noise barrier would effectively reduce noise levels. A proposed 8-foot-high masonry wall along the Howard Avenue extension adjacent to multi-family units (Assessors Parcel Number [APN] 211-191-005) would replace an existing property wall under Design Option 2A and 2B to abate noise due to the removal of the

neighboring multi-family structure. The proposed 8-foot masonry wall is not anticipated to obstruct any existing scenic views. Because of the absence of scenic views and the degree of the change in views between existing and post-project conditions with the construction of noise barriers (obstructed views), visual impacts are not anticipated.

## 3 Project Visual Impact

Post construction, all areas within the AVE will have low/minimal visual impact compared with the existing condition resulting in minimal impact. The proposed construction is consistent with the existing visual setting including modification and addition of existing tracks, platform with shelters, sidewalk, accessible stalls, and a landscaped parking lot. Potential moderate visual impact may be associated with the removal of the historic warehouse building, two residences on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, a business on 10<sup>th</sup> Street, two residences on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and palm trees that are currently located where existing accessible stalls will be removed on Commerce Street. In addition, commuters and train travelers will experience low/minimal impact with the removal of the historic warehouse building and palm trees. Table 3-1 summarizes the potential permanent visual impacts of the Build Alternative by option.

### 3.1 Resources

#### 3.1.1 Historic Resources

Although the Project would remove a historic resource, and this may be viewed by some as a negative visual change, the removal of an existing obstruction to background views of ridgelines would be the resulting visual change. From a visual perspective, at the street level, the exterior of the existing building looks like a typical industrial building with corrugated steel exterior, and appears to be in disrepair, with missing corrugated steel panels, and rust on the exterior walls. The surrounding area of the property is overgrown with patches of vegetation and littered with debris. Much of the site is used as equipment storage where construction equipment, trailers, steel drums, and large steel containers are visible along the sidewalk. As such, the removal of the historic building for some viewers may be viewed as a positive change, as the Build Alternative would result in a more unified visual appearance, consistent with the elements of the existing Riverside-Downtown Station. RCTC considered other alternatives and options to avoid removal of the historic building; however, these alternatives would not meet project objectives. Further discussion on avoidance alternatives is provided in the Historic Resources Report (HNTB 2021) and the Draft Individual Section 4(f) Evaluation (HNTB2021) prepared for the Project.

#### 3.1.2 Scenic Resources

As previously mentioned, the project site does not contain views that would be considered a scenic vista due to existing man-made obstructions to nearby mountain ranges. Demolition of existing buildings and other vertical structures within the project site would result in enhanced views to nearby land formations from 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue (looking west) under Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A. Post-project views of Mount Rubidoux could be seen at this vantage point with the removal of the existing obstruction. Under Design Options 1B, 2B, and 3B, views to nearby land formations would be similar to existing conditions. The Build Alternative and all design options would incorporate landscape elements that would enhance the visual environment within the vicinity of the Riverside-Downtown Station. Although a 12-foot-

high noise barrier is proposed, the location is roughly in the same location as the east wall of the existing Prism Aerospace building but much lower than the existing building to allow views of the ridgeline. An 8-foot-high noise barrier along an existing multi-family property (under Design Option 2A and 2B) is recommended, the noise barrier would not obstruct scenic views because they would be located within a general area that would replace an existing property wall of similar height and length.

Because of the limited existing visual and aesthetic resources within the AVE and the proposed Project's minor changes to the existing visual environment, impacts to visual and aesthetic resources are not anticipated to be substantial.

**Table 3-1. Build Alternative Permanent Visual Impacts by Design Option**

Design Option	Resource Impacted	Visual Impact
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Historic Warehouse Building (removed)	Moderate
Parking Design Options 1B, 2B, 3B	Two residences on 12 <sup>th</sup> Street, east of warehouse building (removed)	Moderate
Parking Design Option 2A, 2B	Two residences and one business on 9 <sup>th</sup> Street and 10 <sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to existing overflow parking lot (removed)	Moderate
Design Option	Group Impacted	Visual Impact
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Park users, residents, businesses and travelers (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian) on Howard Avenue	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Travelers on Howard Avenue (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian)	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Residents, businesses and travelers (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian) on 9 <sup>th</sup> Street	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Travelers on 10 <sup>th</sup> Street (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian)	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Travelers on 9 <sup>th</sup> Street (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian)	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Travelers on Vine Street (auto, bicycle, and pedestrian)	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Commuters using parking lots east of Commerce Street	Minimal/Moderate
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Commuters using parking lots east of Vine Street	Minimal/Low
Parking Design Options 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B	Train Commuters on BNSF Rail Line	Minimal/Low

### 3.1.3 State Scenic Highways

According to the latest Caltrans *Scenic Highway System List* (Caltrans, 2020), the following highways within Riverside County are eligible or officially designated as a state scenic highway:

- SR 62 from Interstate (I) 10 to the San Bernardino County line
- SR 71 near the City of Corona
- I-215 near SR 74 Romoland and City of Perris
- SR 243 from SR 74 to I-10 near Banning
- SR 243 from SR 74 to Banning
- SR 74 from the western boundary of the San Bernardino National Forest to Route 111 in Palm Desert

The proposed Project is not located within or near the previously mentioned eligible and/or designated state scenic highway area. The existing Prism Aerospace building is considered a historic building; however, this resource is not located within a state scenic highway area. No temporary or permanent impacts are anticipated to state scenic highways.

## 3.2 Local Plans and Regulations

The proposed Project and all design options are located in an urbanized area within an existing industrial land use in Downtown Riverside. The existing Riverside-Downtown Station is under the jurisdiction of RCTC. Because physical station improvements would occur within the existing Riverside-Downtown Station and the proposed property acquisitions would be incorporated as part of the improved station, design elements of the station improvements would follow RCTC's Station Design Criteria,<sup>3</sup> which contains provisions addressing general landscape requirements, architectural design, and visual continuity. Compliance with RCTC's design guidelines would avoid conflicts with applicable regulations governing scenic quality.

City of Riverside zoning and other regulations governing scenic resources are applicable in areas within the existing city ROW, which includes sidewalks and roadways adjacent to the project site. The Citywide Design Guidelines and the Zoning Code (Zoning Code) implements the provisions in the City of Riverside's General Plan and guides development standards related to aesthetics and visual resources within the city. The city's Zoning Code requires all site plans to be reviewed to prevent unlawful, nonconforming uses and structures. The Zoning Code regulates building setbacks, building heights, land uses, landscaping, parking, etc. Article V (*Base Zones and Related Use and Development Provisions*) establishes clear standards for use and development of all properties. Article VIII (*Site Planning and General Development Provisions*) provides standards for fences and walls, landscaping, screening of exterior mechanical equipment, treatment of trash enclosures, and similar features that affect the visual integrity of a development site. The proposed Project would comply with RCTC's design criteria for station improvements and coordinate with the City of Riverside on landscape, parking, and roadway design elements, which would ensure that the design and operation of the proposed Project would not conflict with regulations governing scenic quality.

In addition to local ordinances, the City of Riverside (*City of Riverside General Plan 2025 Environmental Impact Report, 2007*) has designated several scenic and special boulevards

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<sup>3</sup> *Commuter Rail and Multimodal Facility Design Criteria Manual, RCTC, April 2009*

within the city that meet local criteria for designation as scenic parkways, as summarized in Table 3-2.

The proposed Project would result in the demolition of an existing industrial building and convert the area to transportation uses. The removal of the industrial building structure and the expansion of the station facility would be the most prominent visual change within the project site; however, the visual character of the current industrial use is compatible with the proposed transportation use, as the station improvements are within the existing urbanized environment. In addition, removing existing vertical structures would enhance views to surrounding ridgelines under Design Options 1A, 2A, and 3A (looking west on 12<sup>th</sup> Street). Other proposed design options would be similar to the existing views.

The proposed Project would not affect any of the City of Riverside’s scenic parkways identified in Table 3-2. Station improvements would be located within the project site and adjacent to 9<sup>th</sup> street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Howard Avenue, and Commerce Street; these roadways are not designated as scenic parkways. Therefore, station improvements would not conflict with applicable zoning or other regulations governing scenic quality. Substantial impacts are not anticipated during the operations of the proposed Project.

**Table 3-2. City of Riverside Scenic Parkway**

Scenic Parkway	Description
Victoria Avenue	A historic parkway lined with many species of trees. Long recognized as an important local and regional scenic resource and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The lush landscaping and quiet surroundings make Victoria Avenue feel like a linear park.
Magnolia Avenue/ Market Street	A 17-mile-long historic parkway that was once Riverside's grandest street, this street has the potential to be restored to much of its former stature.
University Avenue	This major connector between Downtown, the Eastside neighborhood, and the University of California, Riverside will support a symbiotic mix of uses along a visually pleasing road corridor.
Van Buren Boulevard	With a dramatic crossing of the Santa Ana River at the city's northern edge and the city's greenbelt at its southern end, Van Buren Boulevard already provides connections to key elements of Riverside Park.
Riverwalk Parkway	Located near La Sierra University, this new drive will provide a water-lined parkway connection between neighborhoods through a portion of the La Sierra community.
La Sierra Avenue	Stretching from near the Santa Ana River in the north to the Lake Mathews area in the south, La Sierra Avenue is the prime thoroughfare for western Riverside.
Overlook Parkway	The connection of the two ends of Overlook across the Alessandro Arroyo poses an opportunity to create a beautiful and dramatic new parkway.
Canyon Crest Drive	This lushly landscaped drive traverses rolling, scenic terrain in connecting the Eastside/University neighborhoods with open space amenities to the south.
Arlington Avenue	A major connector between the east and west sides of the city, this avenue supports a symbiotic mix of uses and will provide connections to key elements of Riverside Park.

Source: City of Riverside General Plan 2025, Environmental Impact Report (2007)

### 3.3 Light and Glare

Existing lighting and glare in the project study area are characteristic of a typical urban environment that includes multiple sources and types of lighting typically associated along a transportation route and adjacent buildings. Existing sources of light in the project study area include streetlights, headlights, and taillights on cars and other vehicles on the roadway and interior and exterior lighting from adjacent buildings. There are no major sources of glare in the project study area.

Proposed station improvements would incorporate additional lighting within the station at the expanded train platforms and parking lot under the Build Alternative and all design options. Installation of additional lighting would enhance safety and security within the station during nighttime hours. Although additional sources of light would be installed, the new sources of light would be located within a developed urban area where there is currently a large amount of lighting from transportation, commercial, and industrial uses. Impacts related to lighting would not be expected to substantially affect the surrounding area. In addition, the new lighting fixtures would include appropriate shielding and be designed so light is directed away from residential areas. As previously mentioned, there are no existing scenic views within the AVE that could be potentially impacted by the Project; hence, new sources of light are anticipated to result in less than significant impacts.

### 3.4 Construction Phase (Temporary) Impacts

Anticipated effects on visual resources during construction would be like those typical of rail projects, including the presence of heavy equipment and traffic control measures. Users in buildings or on streets and sidewalks that are in proximity to the project area would encounter views of the construction. Residents in adjacent homes and employees in local businesses would likely perceive construction activities as visually disruptive. Staff of railroads, businesses, and commuters would likely view construction activities as visually disruptive. Also anticipated are temporary detour routes, noise, and dust that would be associated with demolition and construction.

During construction of the proposed Project and all the design options, construction equipment and heavy machinery would be placed on-site and near adjacent streets. The viewpoints to these natural land formations are significantly obstructed by existing man-made structures within a heavily urbanized environment. The presence of construction equipment would be temporary and cease upon completion of the Project. Construction of the proposed Project would be contained within adjacent streets and would not encroach within the city's designated scenic parkways, as summarized in Table 3-2. During construction, substantial impacts, as related to the proposed Project's compliance with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality are not anticipated.

During nighttime construction activities, temporary lighting may be used at discrete locations for certain construction activities. The use of construction lighting during nighttime hours would not change the visual character of the area or degrade the visual quality because lighting would only be temporary and placed in select locations. Due to the proximity of the construction work zone, some nearby residences along Howard Avenue, 12<sup>th</sup> Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Street, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street may temporarily be exposed to higher levels of nighttime lighting throughout project construction. To minimize potential light and glare during construction, night lighting will be directed toward the construction area and away from nearby residences. If needed, temporary

lighting shields will be installed within the work area to prevent light from trespassing. Substantial impacts are not anticipated during construction.

### **3.5 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures**

The Riverside-Downtown Station Improvements Project and all design options being considered would not result in major changes to the visual character of the AVE. The following measures would ensure that potential visual impacts are avoided or minimized.

- Landscape design will be in accordance with RCTC Station Design Criteria, following RCTC's general landscape requirements to the greatest extent possible. The new parking lot design will be compatible with landscaped parking lots within the project area to include hedges on the perimeter of the parking lot, trees, and lighting.
- Noise barrier design will be consistent with RCTC and local jurisdiction standards.
- Palm trees will be replaced and/or transplanted within the Project limits to the greatest extent possible.
- Consultation regarding potential indirect adverse visual effects to historic properties will be conducted with consulting parties in accordance with Section 106.
- Nighttime construction activities near residential areas will be avoided to the extent feasible. If nighttime work is required, the construction contractor will install temporary lighting in a manner that directs light toward the construction area and install temporary shields, as necessary, so that light does not spill over into residential areas.
- During final design, all new or replacement lighting would be designed so that light is directed away from residential areas. To the greatest extent feasible, new light fixtures will include shields so that light does not spill to residential areas.