

# **Visual Impacts Technical Memorandum**

## **New Pueblo Freeway**

CDOT Project No. IM 0251-165

Project Control No. 12831

**Colorado Department of Transportation**

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In some cases, information in this Environmental Technical Report may have been refined or updated as preparation of the DEIS advanced. In such cases, the information and conclusions presented in the DEIS supersede all previous background material included in this Technical Report.



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## Project Description

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the New Pueblo Freeway project, a proposal to improve a 7-mile segment of Interstate 25 (I-25) through Pueblo, Colorado. Improvements are necessary to address an outdated roadway and bridges with inadequate geometrics, safety issues, and existing and future traffic demand.

Alternatives under consideration include taking no action (No Action Alternative), reconstruction of the interstate on essentially the existing alignment (Existing I-25 Alternative), and reconstruction of the interstate on existing and new alignments (Modified I-25 Alternative). The alternatives are further described as follows:

- **No Action Alternative** - This alternative provides only for minor improvements, repairs, and other maintenance actions. The existing four-lane highway will otherwise remain unchanged.
- **Existing I-25 Alternative** - This alternative consists of reconstructing I-25 to six lanes on essentially the same location, reconfiguring and eliminating access points to the interstate to improve safety, and providing other improvements to the local street system to enhance system connectivity and traffic movement near the interstate.
- **Modified I-25 Alternative** - This alternative consists of rebuilding I-25 to six lanes and providing the other improvements included in the Existing Alternative, except the alignment would be shifted to accommodate different interchange configurations.

Transportation Management strategies and design variations of grade and alignment are incorporated into the build alternatives.

## Methodology

The visual resources assessment is a multi-step process that includes defining baseline visual resources, determining the degree of visual impact, and developing mitigation for defined adverse impacts on visual resources.

An extensive project reconnaissance was conducted for the project limits and environs to establish firsthand knowledge of the place and spirit of the corridor and surrounding areas. A photo inventory of the project area, including 360° views from strategic points along the corridor was developed. From these points, most of the corridor through Pueblo is visible.

The Visual Inventory Maps (Exhibits 1 through 4 at the end of this document) identify significant view sheds, key views, and natural features of aesthetic value. It is an element of the New Pueblo Freeway Project Geographic Improvement System (GIS), providing a graphic spatial presentation of the information.

## Current Conditions

For the purpose of the visual resources assessment, the study area is defined by three view sheds. These three view sheds were inventoried and described below.

### Fountain Creek View Shed

The Fountain Creek View Shed extends from roughly the 29th Street interchange on the north to the 8th Street Bridge on the south. On the east, the Fountain Creek View Shed is bounded by the eastern edge of the Fountain Creek Floodplain, with both residential and commercial structures defining this edge. To the west, the view shed is bounded by residential neighborhoods, while further south the view shed begins to open up to the west, including views into Mineral Palace Park and the north end of Downtown Pueblo. The view shed is dominated to the east by the Fountain Creek Floodplain. Both filtered and direct views to the floodplain make the naturalized appearance of the floodplain ever present. Mineral Palace Park and the 29th Avenue detention pond contribute to an overall feeling of openness within this view shed. This strong sense of open space and parks is unique to this view shed. Major views, or focal points, in the view shed include Mineral Palace Park, the County building between 10th and 11th Streets, the flood wall north of 8th Street along the east side of I-25, and Fountain Creek.

From the eastern half of the view shed, within the Fountain Creek Flood Plain and adjacent neighborhoods, I-25 is visible. The bridges and overpasses at the interchanges are the most visible I-25 elements. In the winter months, when much of the naturalized deciduous vegetation along Fountain Creek has lost its leaves, I-25 is even more visible. From the western half of the view shed, I-25 is very visible from Mineral Palace Park and Mineral Palace Towers. I-25 is also very visible from the homes that front or back on the west side of the I-25 right-of-way. Glimpses of I-25 down the east/west streets of the residential and commercial neighborhoods are also prevalent.

### Downtown View Shed

The Downtown View Shed extends from roughly the 8th Street Bridge on the north to the bluffs above the Arkansas River on the south. On the east, the Downtown View Shed is bounded by the eastern edge of the Fountain Creek Flood Plain. To the west, it is bounded by the bluffs just west of Pueblo. The Downtown View Shed is the largest view shed within the project area. Long-range views exist to the west. Within this view shed there are several high points east of I-25 that block views to the east. These are the bluffs just west of Runyon Field and Goat Hill. Goat Hill is a focal point within the view shed because of its elevation and proximity to downtown and I-25. This view shed is made up of the two converging flood plains associated with the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek confluence area. The view shed is very urban with the majority of Downtown Pueblo located within this view shed. Brick Victorian structures dominate the area. Rail yards and views to the CFI Steel Mill all work together to make this view shed feel like a window to Pueblo's past.

Throughout this very flat view shed, I-25 is elevated on embankments and viaducts, providing the I-25 traveler with a unique bird's-eye perspective of Downtown Pueblo. Also, the curves along I-25, traveling both northbound and southbound, create some very dramatic focal point views to the steel mill and Goat Hill. Because I-25 is elevated, it is a

very visually apparent element throughout this view shed; I-25 appears to be a barrier between the east and west ends of the view shed.

Focal points include Goat Hill, Runyon Field, the bluffs along the Arkansas River, and the rail yards. Major views include the views west from I-25 to downtown for the full length of the view shed, and the view south to the steel mill. Along the Arkansas River, naturalized mature vegetation becomes a soft southern edge to the view shed.

## Steel Mill View Shed

The Steel Mill View Shed extends from the Arkansas River on the north to Pueblo Boulevard on the south. The east edge of the view shed is created by the steep side slopes adjacent to I-25 between the Arkansas River and Mesa Avenue. South of Mesa Avenue, the eastern boundary transitions into elements of the steel mill, including the tailing piles at Pueblo Boulevard. There are views into the steel mill, but not beyond. The west edge of the view shed is created by the steep side slopes and noise walls between the Arkansas River and Northern Avenue. South of Northern Avenue, the view shed is bounded by the Bessemer Neighborhood. Generally, the view shed extends two to three blocks into the neighborhood. At Pueblo Boulevard, the view shed to the west opens up with mid-range views into J.J. Raigoza Park and the underdeveloped land just south of the park.

The visually dominant element of this view shed is the steel mill, with the associated industrial properties along the eastern edge of this view shed. The industrial properties' visual character is typical of this type of land use. However, many older, Victorian-style and Mission-style structures exist on or around the steel mill property, providing a historic context to the view shed. Also, the neighborhoods around the mill reflect a company town appearance, also contributing to the historic context.

Mature vegetation is also a key element of the Steel Mill View Shed, particularly north of the steel mill. Most of this vegetation is naturalized. In the southern portion of the view shed, mature vegetation in the Bessemer Neighborhood and J.J. Raigoza Park form a soft western edge of the view shed. The vegetation type is predominantly deciduous trees and shrubs planted as a part of a conscious landscaping effort.

Due to the confined nature of the view shed, certain long and mid-range views from I-25 are accentuated when they occur. They include a northbound view to downtown at the Arkansas River and several northbound views to the steel mill at the two gentle curves in I-25 north of Pueblo Boulevard. Other specific focal points in the view shed include the CFI Headquarters Building, the stoves, the power house, and the high line track all at the steel mill.

Views to I-25 are somewhat limited in this view shed because I-25 is recessed with mature vegetation and noise walls. The high line track blocks some views from the steel mill to I-25 as well. During the winter months, I-25 is more visible. I-25 can be seen from the southern end of the steel mill, from J.J. Raigoza Park, and down the east/west streets in the residential neighborhoods. Dramatic views to the steel mill also exist from many of the overpasses of I-25 and from the CFI Headquarters Building. Other visual elements of this view shed include the railroad and the close proximity of homes to the west side of the I-25 right-of-way south of the CFI Headquarters Building.

# Environmental Consequences

## No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, I-25 would become increasingly congested. The resulting traffic would become more visually apparent in all View Sheds.

In addition, the I-25 corridor would continue to have an assortment of bridge types, lighting, and other highway elements. These elements were built over the past 50 years without sensitivity to the historic and environmental context of I-25.

## Build Alternatives

### North Area

#### Viewshed Impacts

**Fountain Creek View Shed.** Both the Existing and Modified I-25 Alternatives are the same north of Ilex Street. Both alternatives would accommodate more I-25 traffic than is seen today and also more traffic than could be carried under the No Action Alternative. There would be physical alteration of I-25, including increased width of the highway and modifications at interchanges. The 29<sup>th</sup> Street connection, the US 50 B interchange, and the 13<sup>th</sup> Street-to-1<sup>st</sup> Street split-diamond interchange would all create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and fill slopes.

These modifications would contrast with the open space and park setting of the Fountain Creek View Shed. The I-25 improvements would impact views from historic Mineral Palace Park, Fountain Creek, and the adjacent historic neighborhoods by eliminating some trees and riparian vegetation. Overall, the improvements in the Fountain Creek View Shed would give the entire area a more modern urban appearance.

**Downtown View Shed.** I-25 would continue to be elevated on a series of embankments, bridges and viaducts within the Downtown View Shed between 13<sup>th</sup> Street and the Arkansas River. In several locations, the roadway would be 40 feet above adjacent properties, making the highway more visually apparent. Retaining walls and fill slopes along the raised portions of the roadway would also become a visual impact. I-25 would be a visually dominant element of the Downtown View Shed, contrasting with the brick Victorian structures that are a part of Pueblo's heritage.

#### *Other Visual Impacts*

Noise walls would be installed to help mitigate sound, but they can sometimes create visual impacts. This would be the case for the Bonneville Mobile Home Park, Mineral Palace Park, Downtown, and the Grove and other associated neighborhoods. Other visual impacts would come from the Dillon Road extension adjacent to Fountain Creek; the pedestrian bridge crossing of I-25 at Mineral Palace Park; and the water quality ponds at US 50 B, Mineral Palace Park, and 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

### South Area

The new interchange at Pueblo Boulevard would create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and cut/fill slopes, contrasting with the historic company-town character of the Steel Mill View Shed. Other visual impacts would result from the extension of Pueblo

Boulevard east through the steel mill tailings pile and the water quality ponds at Pueblo Boulevard. Noise walls that are planned in the Bessemer neighborhood would impact views both to and from JJ Raigoza Park.

## Central Area

### Existing I-25 Alternative

South of Ilex Street the physical alteration of I-25 would involve an increase in the width of the highway, modifications at interchanges, and lowering of the highway between the Arkansas River and Central Avenue. I-25 would follow the existing highway alignment, except at Abriendo Avenue and Central Avenue. The tight curves at these locations would be flattened out to improve roadway safety. The retaining walls associated with lowering and straightening I-25 would limit the views of travelers on I-25. The loss of mature, woody vegetation along I-25 in the Steel Mill View Shed would also impact all views in this View Shed.

The new interchanges at Abriendo Avenue, Northern Avenue, and Indiana Avenue would create more ramps, retaining walls, structures, and cut/fill slopes, contrasting with the historic company-town character of the Steel Mill View Shed. Other visual impacts south of Ilex Street would come from the Abriendo Avenue connection to Santa Fe Drive and the relocation of Benedict Park.

Water quality ponds at Runyon Field, Abriendo Avenue, Central Avenue, and Indiana Avenue would also create visual impacts. Overall, the improvements would make the highway a more visually apparent element of the View Shed, rivaling focal points like the steel mill structures and the CF&I Headquarters building. Also, widening the highway would require the removal of the historic high line track structure that runs parallel to the highway on the east side, creating a visual impact to the steel mill.

In both the Downtown and Steel Mill View Sheds, the Grove, Minnequa Heights, and Bessemer neighborhoods would experience visual impacts from noise walls that are planned as a part of the Existing I-25 Alternative.

### Modified I-25 Alternative

South of Ilex Street the physical alteration of I-25 involves the realignment of the highway to the east from Stanton Avenue to Indiana Avenue. The former I-25 alignment between the Arkansas River and Minnequa Avenue would become an extension of Santa Fe Avenue. Multiple roadways, increased I-25 highway widths, new interchanges, and new intersections would create more ramps, structures, and cut/fill slopes within the company-town setting of the Steel Mill View Shed. This would give the entire area a more urban appearance.

Visual impacts related to the realignment of I-25 in the Steel Mill View Shed would result from raising the grade of I-25 approximately 30 feet on a bridge structure to pass over the existing railroad between the Bessemer Ditch and Indiana Avenue. This highway design would make I-25 more visually apparent from adjacent properties. Retaining walls in the raised portions would also have a visual impact. Raising the highway, along with the loss of mature, woody vegetation along I-25 in the Steel Mill View Shed, would impact all views in this View Shed. This is especially true for the Mesa neighborhoods and the Runyon Lake area east of I-25 because the highway would move east, closer to these areas.

The extension of Stanton Road and water quality ponds located near Runyon Field, Abriendo Avenue, Central Avenue, and Minnequa Avenue would also create visual impacts. Because several smoke stacks and stoves would be removed to accommodate the highway realignments, the Modified I-25 Alternative would have visual impacts to the steel mill. These steel mill structures are an obvious and key element of the South Pueblo skyline.

In both the Downtown and Steel Mill View Sheds, the Grove, Minnequa Heights, and Bessemer neighborhoods would experience visual impacts from noise walls that are planned as a part of the Modified I-25 Alternative.

EXHIBIT 1  
View Sheds in I-25 Corridor

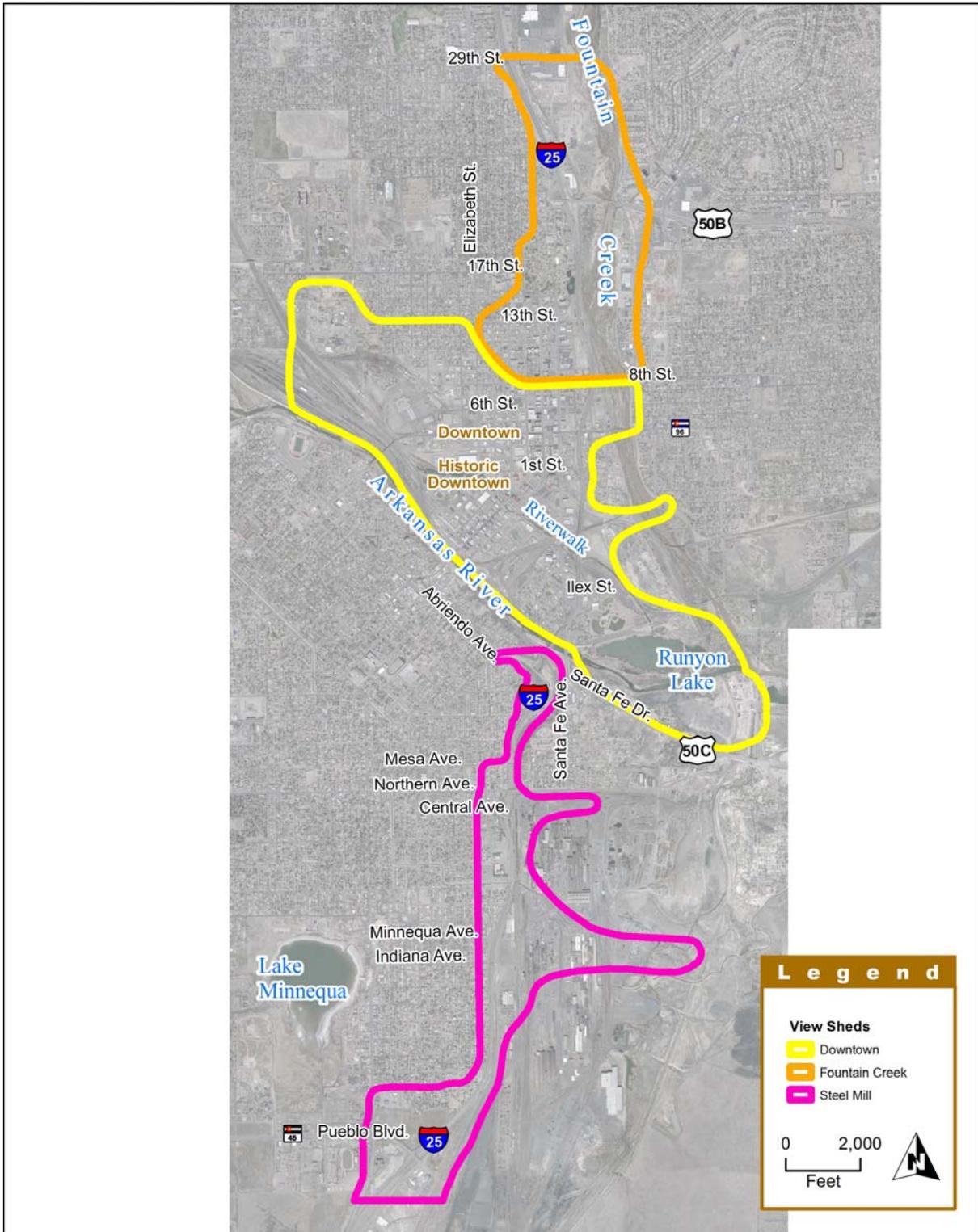


EXHIBIT 2  
Visual Inventory Map for Fountain Creek and Downtown View Sheds

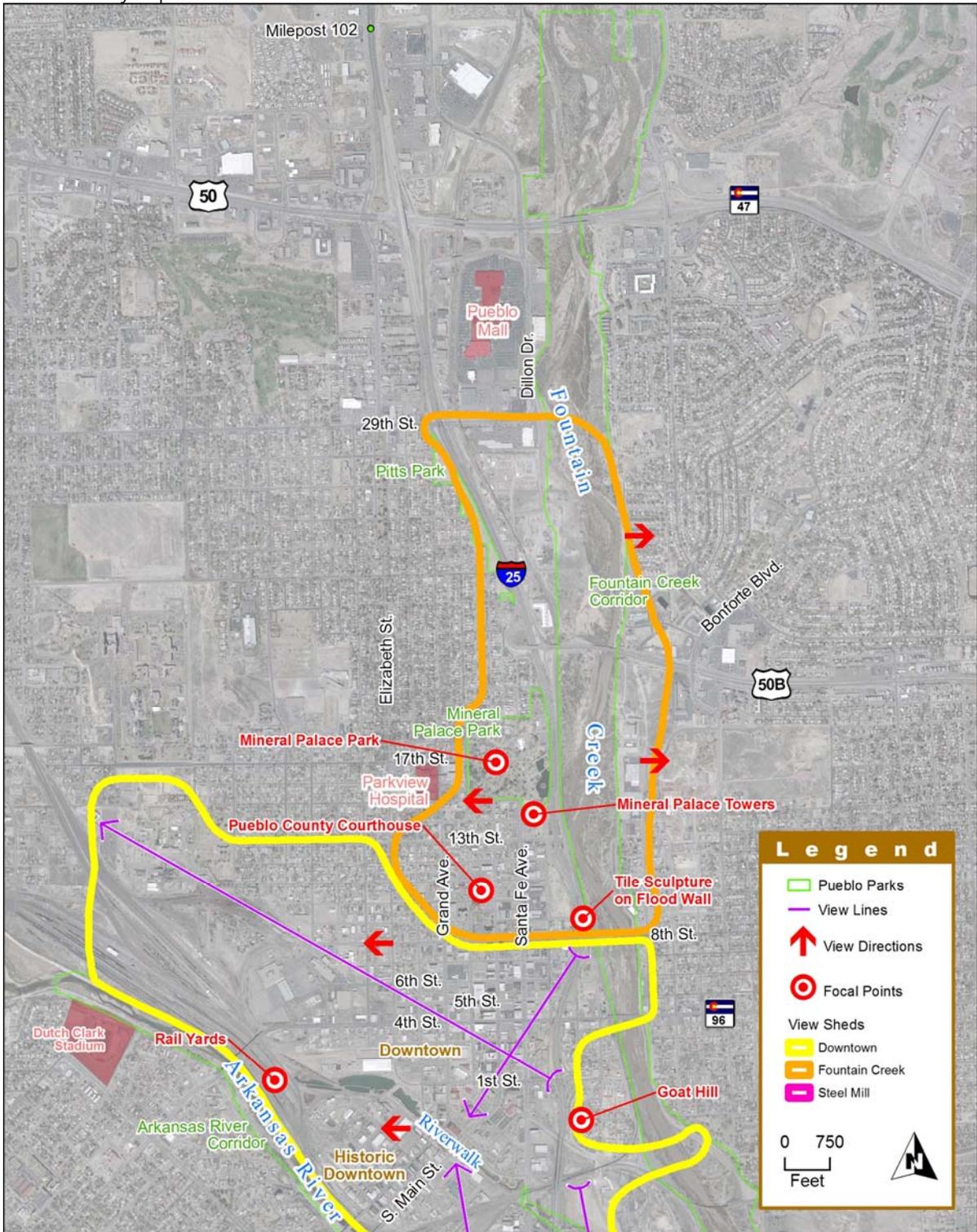
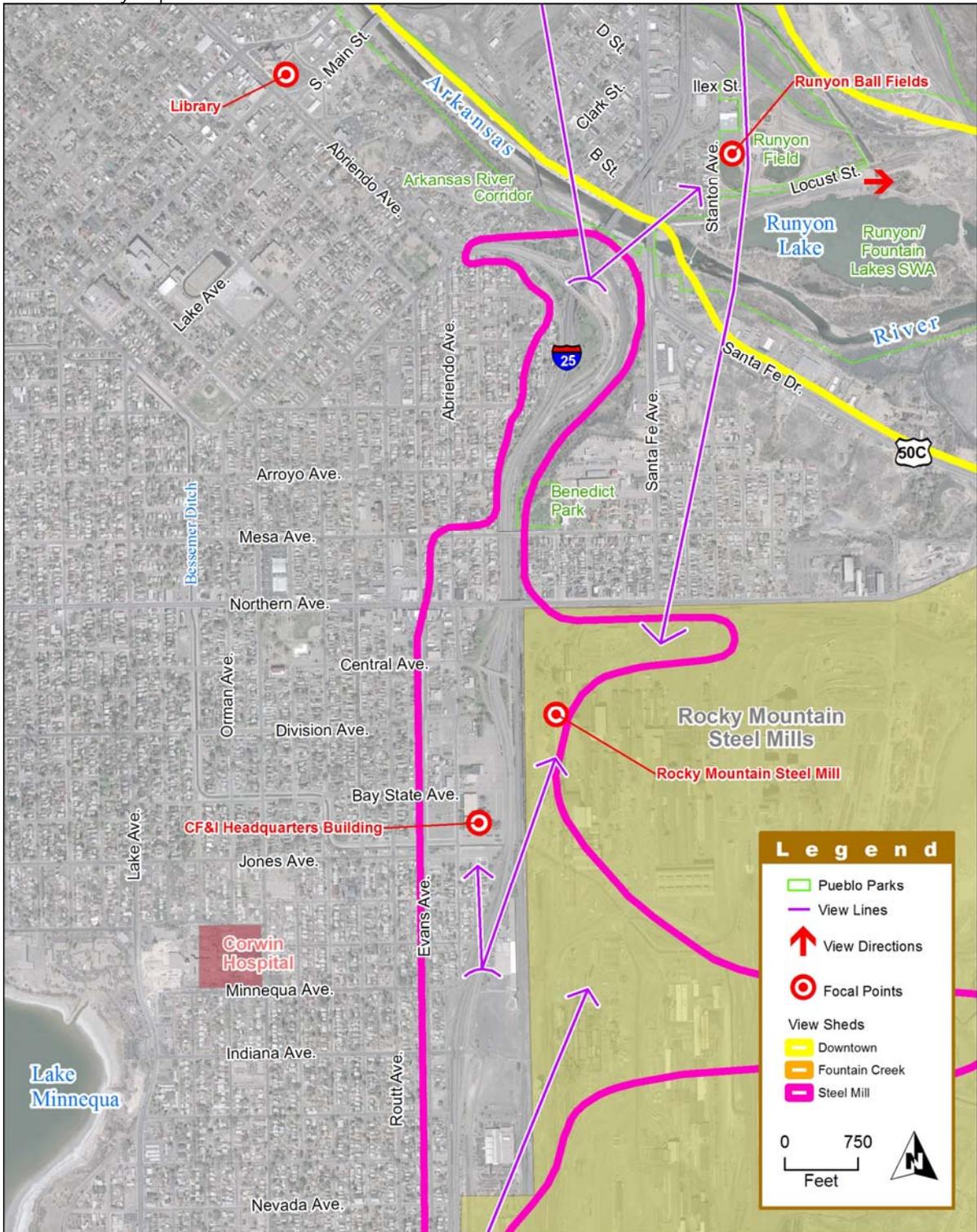


EXHIBIT 3  
Visual Inventory Map for Downtown and Steel Mill View Sheds



**EXHIBIT 4**  
Visual Inventory Map for Steel Mill View Shed

