

# Visual Resource Scoping Documentation

## Version 2 – Revised September 25, 2020

Visual resource scoping is conducted early in the visual impact assessment (VIA) process to identify issues, determine if a VIA is necessary, and identify the appropriate level of VIA evaluation.

Preparers should complete the following tables and questionnaire to document scoping findings regarding:

- ▶ **Project Information and Visual Attributes**
- ▶ **Visual Context**
- ▶ **Policies, Guidelines, and Feedback**
- ▶ **Decision Tree: VIA Requirements/Level of Documentation**
- ▶ **VIA Scoping Questionnaire** – Issues and VIA requirements (*Not Required, Memorandum, or Standard*)

This step-by-step approach should be conducted in coordination with the CDOT environmental team and visual resource specialist assigned to the project. **Chapter 2** of CDOT’s VIA Guidelines (available on CDOT’s LA [website](#)) includes further information about the Establishment/Scoping Phase.

Completion of the visual resource scoping steps and documentation may be accomplished through desktop research and reconnaissance, collaboration with CDOT, and/or field observations.

## Project Information and Visual Attributes

<b>Project Name:</b>	<Insert project name>
<b>Project Location:</b>	<Insert project location>
<b>Author:</b>	<Insert author name>
<b>Visual Attributes of Proposed Action and (if applicable) Build Alternative(s):</b>	<p>&lt;Describe how the features would look in terms of form, line, color, texture, and scale&gt; [Refer to Step E-2 in Section 2.1 of CDOT’s VIA Guidelines]</p> <p>Consider project elements, such as proposed roadway width, lanes, medians, shoulders; horizontal alignment and vertical profile; anticipated cut-and-fill slopes, rock cut locations, vertical elements (walls, buildings), and tree/forest clearing.</p>

## Visual Context

<b>Landscape Observations:</b>	<Describe general visual observations> Including colors, lines, textures, or water features, and dominant landforms; observations about adjacent land uses and ownership patterns; and land use areas that may be visually sensitive
<b>Influence of Roadway on Natural and Cultural Environment Settings:</b>	<Describe the influence of the existing roadway on the environmental and cultural setting > e.g., How well or not does the existing roadway fit the context of the surrounding environment? Does the roadway flow through the topography or contrast with natural surface relief?
<b>Landscape Context(s) and Development Patterns:</b> See Figure 3 of CDOT’s VIA Guidelines	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural/ Undeveloped <input type="checkbox"/> Rural <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Are development patterns in sync or contrasting with the environment?



## Policies, Guidelines, and Feedback

<b>Needs for Federal, State, or Local Agency Consultation:</b>	<Document whether the project is influenced by adjacent land ownership, land uses, easements, deeds, or management plans that would require agency consultation during the VIA> (e.g., US Forest Service or BLM visually sensitive areas, community parks, or local agency protected viewsheds)
<b>Involvement with Federal Lands MOU:</b>	<Document whether the project involves a HED and requirements of the Federal Lands MOU>
<b>Involvement with Scenic, Historic District, or Historic Byways:</b>	<Document whether the project involves a scenic or historic byway>
<b>Associated Regulations, Policies, or Guidelines:</b>	<Describe applicable local, state, regional, tribal, and federal agency regulations, policies, plans, and guidelines that pertain to managing or protecting visual resources>
<b>Influence of Agency &amp; Public Feedback:</b>	<Document input from public meetings and interviews regarding visual preferences and identify visually sensitive views, scenic places within communities, and special or valued landscape settings>
<b>Additional Details:</b>	<Document other noteworthy scoping findings>



# VIA Scoping Questionnaire

## Environmental Compatibility

1. Will the project result in a noticeable visual change in the physical characteristics of the existing or future project setting? *(Consider all project components and construction impacts—both permanent and temporary, including landform changes, structures, noise barriers, vegetation removal, railing, signage, and construction activities.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High level of permanent change (3)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Low level of permanent or temporary change (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate level of permanent change (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> No noticeable change (0)                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement       | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing change to project setting   |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

2. Will the project complement or contrast with the community visual character? *(Evaluate the scale and extent of project features compared to the surrounding scale of the community. Is the project likely to give an urban appearance to an existing rural or suburban community? Do you anticipate that the public will view the change as positive or negative? Research planning documents or talk with local planner/community representatives to understand the type of visual character local residents envision for their community.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low compatibility (3)            | <input type="checkbox"/> High compatibility (1)                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate compatibility (2)       | <input type="checkbox"/> No visual change or visual contrast (0)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing to community character |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

3. What level of local concern is there for the types of proposed project features (e.g., bridge structures, large excavations, noise barriers, or median planting removal) and construction footprint? *(Certain project improvements can be of special interest to local citizens, causing a heightened level of public concern and requiring a more focused visual analysis.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High concern (3)                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Low concern (1)                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate concern (2)             | <input type="checkbox"/> Negligible project features (0)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**



4. Would design changes that could minimize impacts or provide visual enhancement (e.g., landscaping, architectural treatment, color choices) require: **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extensive changes or redesign (3)          | <input type="checkbox"/> Few, minimal design options (1)                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some redesign or minimization measures (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> No minimization or enhancement opportunities likely (0) |

**Assumptions/issues:** **<insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

5. Will this project, when seen collectively with other projects, likely result in cumulative impacts to landscape character, views, or visual quality? *(Identify any projects [both state and local] in the area that have been constructed in recent years and those currently planned for future construction. The window of time and the extent of area applicable to possible cumulative impacts should be based on a reasonable anticipation of the viewing public's perception.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cumulative impacts likely: 0-5 years (3)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Cumulative impacts unlikely (1)         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cumulative impacts likely: 6-10 years (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> No potential for cumulative impacts (0) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement          | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features     |

**Assumptions/issues:** **<insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

### Viewer Sensitivity

6. What is the potential for the project proposal to become controversial within the community or to be opposed by the public or any organized group? *(This can be researched initially by talking with the state DOT and local agency management and local or regional planning staff familiar with the affected community's sentiments as evidenced by past projects and/or current information.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High potential (3)               | <input type="checkbox"/> Low potential (1)                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate potential (2)           | <input type="checkbox"/> No potential (0)                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features |

**Assumptions/issues:** **<insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**





7. How sensitive are viewers likely to be to the scale and character of visible project features? *(Consider among other factors the number of viewers within the group, probable viewer expectations, activities, viewing duration, and orientation. The expected viewer sensitivity level may be scoped by applying professional judgment and by soliciting information from other DOT staff, local agencies, and community representatives familiar with the affected community’s sentiments and demonstrated concerns.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting?

**describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High sensitivity (3)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Low sensitivity (1)                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate sensitivity (2)                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Insensitive (0)                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement for viewers | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features for viewers |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

8. Are there applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, policies, or standards that would affect or influence this project? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, complex Federal/State laws and regulations (3)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, minor agency policies/planning standards (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, Federal/State/Local agency policies or standards (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> No (0)  |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions/issues>**

9. Will the project change, or visually enhance, the views or character of visually sensitive public use areas, historic properties, or scenic designations? *(Identify proximity and potential visual influence of the proposed project to parks, open space, trails, vistas and protected viewsheds, historic properties, Colorado Byways, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and other scenic designations.)* **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, changes would be visually dominant within open views (3) | <input type="checkbox"/> Potentially, changes would be partially screened and/or visually subordinate (1) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, changes would be visually apparent within open views (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Not visible (0)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features  |

**Assumptions/issues: <insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**



10. Will a more detailed visual analysis assist in the screening of alternatives or project design? *(Consider the proposed project features, possible visual impacts, and probable mitigation recommendations.)* Will the project components visually enhance the existing or future project setting? **<describe this in the assumptions/issues below>**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project impacts would likely require complex mitigation (3) | <input type="checkbox"/> Minor impacts anticipated (1)       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project impacts may require standard mitigation (2)         | <input type="checkbox"/> No impacts anticipated (0)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Potential for visual enhancement                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Visually enhancing project features |

**Assumptions/issues:** **<insert assumptions, issues, and/or enhancements>**

## VIA Requirements

Date of Assessment	<Insert date>
VIA Requirements: Based on initial scoping, collaboration with CDOT, and the VIA Scoping Questionnaire score, this level of analysis and documentation is required:	<input type="checkbox"/> VIA not required (Score 0-9) <input type="checkbox"/> VIA Memorandum (Score 10-19) <input type="checkbox"/> Standard VIA (Score 20-30)
<input type="checkbox"/> VIA not required (Score 0-9)	Consider this as the visual resource clearance for <insert project name>. If the scope of work changes or additional information warrants further review and analysis, a reevaluation may be required.
<b>&lt;CDOT Clearance when VIA is not required&gt;</b>	<b>&lt;insert signature and date&gt;</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> VIA Memorandum (Score 10-19)	<b>&lt;Follow VIA Memorandum Template in Appendix A of CDOT's VIA Guidelines&gt;</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Standard VIA (Score 20-30)	<b>&lt;Follow Standard VIA Template in Appendix A of CDOT's VIA Guidelines&gt;</b>

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

***Score 0 to 9: VIA Not Required***

No noticeable visual or physical changes to the environment are proposed; therefore, no further analysis is required. The VIA questionnaire and a project memo may be used to document that there is no effect and to explain the approach used for the determination.

***Score 10 to 19: VIA Memorandum***

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

***Score 20 to 30: Standard VIA***

A *Standard VIA* is recommended. This technical study will likely receive extensive local, perhaps statewide, public review. It would typically include several visual simulations. It would also include a thorough examination of public planning and policy documents supplemented with a direct public engagement process (usually part of the overall NEPA public scoping and stakeholder involvement) to determine visual preferences.