

US 6/Wadsworth



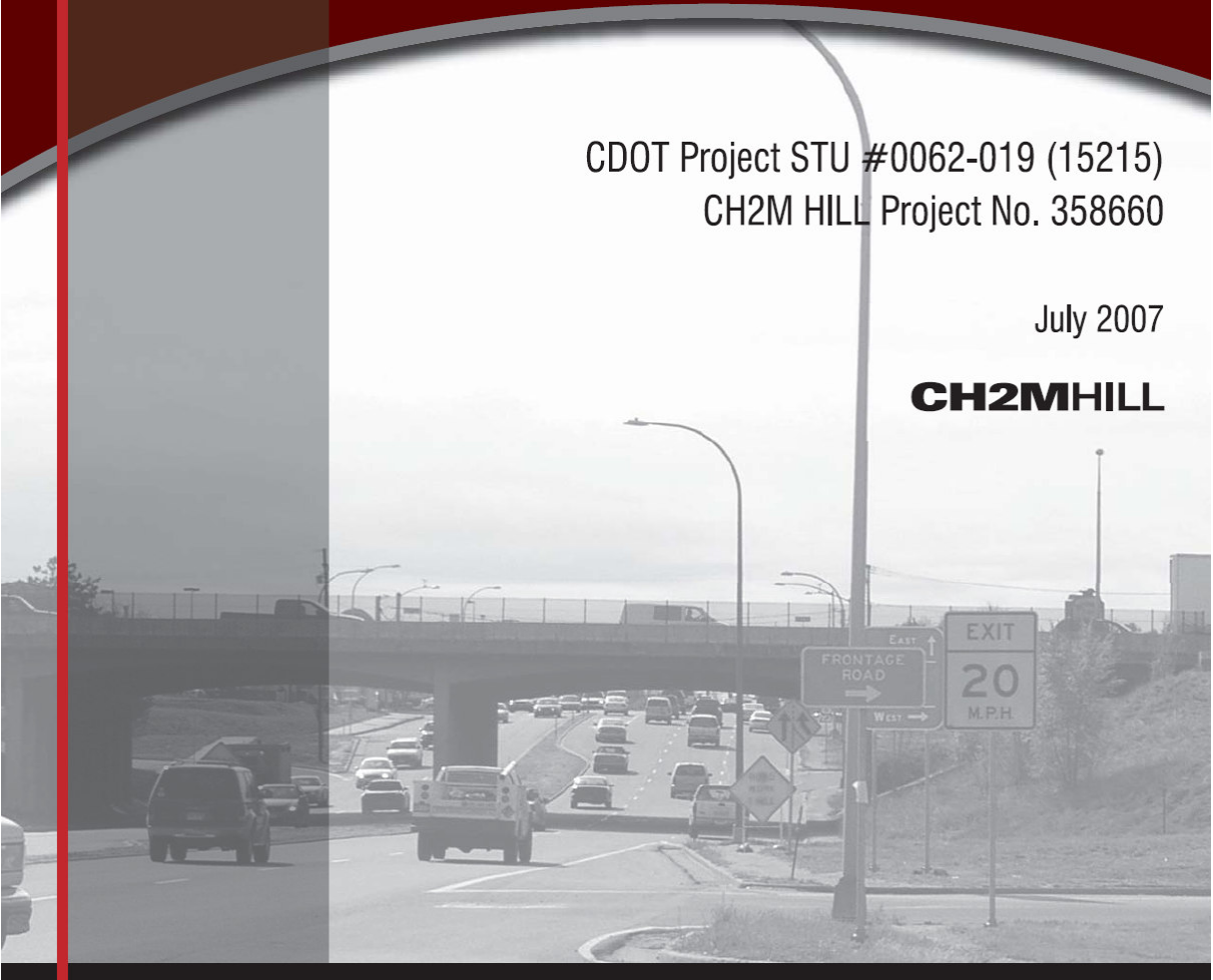
**Environmental
Assessment**

Visual Resources Technical Memorandum

CDOT Project STU #0062-019 (15215)
CH2M HILL Project No. 358660

July 2007

CH2MHILL



TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

CH2MHILL

6th Avenue/Wadsworth Boulevard Aesthetic and Visual Context

PREPARED FOR: CH2M HILL

PREPARED BY: Civitas

COPIES:

PROJECT: US 6 and Wadsworth Boulevard Interchange Environmental Assessment

DATE: July 24, 2007

Wadsworth Corridor between 3rd and 13th Avenues

Aesthetic Considerations

The Visual Context

Between 3rd and 13th Avenues, the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor can be characterized as a wide open urban street that is fronted primarily by parking lots, low-scale commercial buildings, and commercial signage. Vegetation throughout the corridor is limited to sparsely located street trees and occasional median plantings. Roadway lights and pedestrian amenities exist within the corridor but do very little to create a strong sense of street edge, memorable street character, or comfortable urban scale. However, due to topographic variation, this corridor offers tremendous visual links both north and south to the Belmar/ Lakewood Town Center and North Lakewood/Colfax Avenue. The Wadsworth corridor, as a whole, is a visual resource that plays a very strong role in defining the urban character of Lakewood's civic heart.

Land Use and Spatial Definition

Current land uses along the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor are predominately one- to two-story commercial and retail buildings that are fronted with parking facilities, which dominate the Wadsworth Street edge. Building setbacks, combined with minimal street tree canopy and six lanes of un-interrupted traffic, give the corridor a very wide and exposed character that makes it uncomfortable for pedestrians and lacks aesthetic distinction from other major collector streets within the City. Currently, the corridor lacks spatial enclosure and definition. The street walls of the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor are loosely defined by low-profile, sporadic building mass and street lights that are not visually strong enough to create a sense of spatial enclosure or distinct streetscape character (Figure 1). However, in specific cases along the corridor like 12th Avenue, there is good spatial enclosure due primarily to taller buildings and street trees occupying the street edge.

The majority of the corridor's view sheds are defined by the tall urban forest that exists both east and west of the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor. The canopy along surrounding streets and neighborhoods is for the most part, consistent up and down the corridor; it blocks distant views to the east and west and serves as a backdrop to the streetscape foreground

views. The urban forest canopy east and west of the corridor also helps to change the perception and the color of the corridor throughout the seasons.

Street Rhythm and Interruption

The corridor from 3rd to 13th Avenues offers several landscape features that influence the street rhythm, scale, and spatial quality of the corridor. The first and most obvious is the US 6 interchange. The interchange creates a visual break and spatial definition for motorists and pedestrians passing northward and southward. The green landscape character of the interchange is in stark contrast to the urban and paved character of the rest of the boulevard and serves to break the monotony of the street's development pattern. The interchange also marks a visual and experiential moment within the corridor that divides the length of the boulevard and offers an opportunity to create a focal point within the corridor, as well as create a sense of gateway into Lakewood from both the north and the south. (See Figure 1.)

The McIntyre Gulch crosses the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor north of Highland drive and 8th Avenue. In its current condition, this riparian corridor creates some visual interruption in the urban character of the boulevard, but it is overgrown and tends to blend into the visual clutter of the streetscape. The Dry Creek corridor crosses Wadsworth adjacent to 12th Street. This feature currently contributes very little to the overall visual quality of the corridor in part because the water course west of Wadsworth Boulevard is piped under a gravel parking area. However, both drainage systems have the potential to create visual interest and spatial rhythm along the corridor by contrasting the natural landscape characteristics of the drainage corridors with the more urban qualities of the Wadsworth Boulevard streetscape.

Topographic Influences, Distant Views, and Creating Focus

Although Wadsworth Boulevard is in relative proximity to the foothills and Downtown Denver, the views to both are virtually non-existent. The tree canopies east and west of the corridor define north-south oriented view sheds that offer distant views of the foothills to the south and Lakewood neighborhoods to the north. In both directions, the foreground and mid-ground to these distant views are fairly homogenous and lack focal interest, with the exception of the US 6 interchange.

In contrast to the homogenous distant views, the topographic characteristics of the corridor vary greatly from north to south creating visual sequential interest, vistas to distant views, and the opportunity to create visual focus for both the northern and southern view sheds (Figure 2). Generally, the high point of the corridor plateaus from 10th to 12th Avenues, creating good southern views to the Belmar area and the foothills beyond. While 3rd Avenue marks the high ground of the project corridor south of US 6, the US 6 underpass marks the low point of the project corridor. The underpass condition creates a visual 'bowl' as viewed from both the northbound and southbound lanes of Wadsworth Boulevard. This creates a strong visual emphasis on this portion of the corridor from both directions. However, from the northbound lanes at 3rd Avenue, the interchange is set low relative to the high ground of 10th and 12th Avenues; thus making the interchange the mid-ground feature of this view shed which places visual emphasis on the high ground of 10th and 12th Avenues. Currently the 10th and 12th Avenues area lacks a strong visual element that will give the overall view focus. This is important to note because the newly planned 12th Avenue Light Rail Station is an opportunity to create focus for this view. This same principle is at play in the southbound direction as viewed from 10th Avenue. The

interchange becomes the mid-ground feature with the focal area of the view shed being the Alameda intersection and foothills as a backdrop. New development adjacent to Alameda and in the Belmar Town Center area becomes the opportunity to give this view shed focus.

The character of the views both northbound and southbound from 2nd and 9th Avenue begin to deemphasize the distant views and the focus shifts to the interchange itself. The new interchange design, with its architecture and landscape, will play an extremely important role in creating visual quality both as a foreground element to distant views and as the focus of more intimate views in the immediate vicinity of the interchange.

Existing Visual Resources and Opportunities

The visual resources that are inherent to the corridor are important and should be considered in idea generation, design, and design evaluation. Some of the site's visual resources are not necessarily positive, relative to the goals and objectives of this project, or in creating a beautiful, well-scaled urban corridor. The following are the key visual resources that should be carefully evaluated in the next steps of the project's process;

- **Streetscape structure and land use**-Understanding the role of land use, building setbacks, lighting/furnishings systems, and landscape treatment is critical to the visual, experiential, and economic success of the corridor.
- **Topography**-Understanding the role the topography plays in the visual sequence and experience of the corridor will help to create visual and experiential interest, clarity, and focus.
- **Interruption and street rhythm**-The site currently offers two natural drainage systems that run perpendicular to Wadsworth Boulevard. These systems can be made into healthy and attractive interruptions to the urban character of the corridor and help to create a cadence and rhythm to the streetscape experience.
- **The US 6 interchange and a sense of gateway**-The new design for the US 6 interchange marks a tremendous opportunity to give identity to both the Wadsworth corridor and the City of Lakewood as the gateway element to the City of Lakewood both northbound and southbound.

US 6 Corridor

Aesthetic Considerations

The Visual Context

The visual and aesthetic context for the US 6 and Wadsworth Boulevard interchange can be characterized as a well-defined and contained view corridor that focuses views to the foothills in a westward direction and to Denver neighborhoods to the east. In both directions the road alignment is fairly straight, creating a one-point perspective view that is framed by 11-foot-high masonry noise walls, the urban forest canopy, and small-scale single family houses. The corridor west of the interchange currently does not have noise walls, and the visual penetration to the north and south is greater but still very contained.

Topographic Influences and Distant Views

The topographic character along this portion of US 6 is fairly flat with a gentle raise in both directions to the overpass bridge. Currently the beginning points of the exit ramps mark a

very clear “opening’ in the view corridor, allowing great views to the Belmar Town Center area of Lakewood and Pikes Peak beyond to the south, and to the future Light Rail station and northern Lakewood neighborhoods to the north.

Experiential Considerations

Because of the 65 mph speed, the visual impact of the interchange to a driver on US 6 is brief. However, the scale and opportunity to create distinction at this interchange relative to and Kipling is great. This is an important concept for creating an identity and a sense of gateway for Lakewood.

The immediate views to the off and on ramps contain some mature evergreen trees that help to give scale to the large open environment created by ramp configuration. However, the majority of the landscape in this area is fairly open, exposed, and without the necessary architectural/landscape presence to create an appropriate scale, interest and a recognizable character that is necessary to create a sense of gateway for Lakewood.

Visual Resources and Opportunities

The visual resources that are inherent to the US 6 corridor are minor but important and should be a consideration for idea generation and design alternatives as well as design evaluation. Aside from the mountain backdrop for west-bound motorists and the visual interest that could be created by the new Wadsworth Boulevard interchange the visual resources are limited to the masonry noise walls and the urban forest canopy that frames the enclosed view corridor. Because the corridor west of the Wadsworth Boulevard interchange currently does not have noise walls, the visual depth of view is greater to the north and south. However it is likely that the continuation of the noise walls in the future would change the visual character to a similar condition as the corridor east of the Wadsworth interchange. The following are the key visual resources that should be carefully evaluated in the next steps of the project’s process;

- **Scale and the sense of ‘Gateway’**-Understanding the role of scale in this environment as viewed at 65 mph is critical. The openness of the freeway interchange landscape combined with the architectural opportunity of a new interchange creates an opportunity for dynamic visual distinction and design character relative to the Wadsworth Boulevard corridor and the US 6 corridor
- **Creating continuity in the Corridor**-Considering the likelihood of noise walls west of the Wadsworth interchange, the impact of design and materialization of these walls is an opportunity to create continuity throughout this portion of the US 6 corridor. By creating continuity on both the east and west sides of the corridor further enhances the opportunity for the US 6 and Wadsworth Boulevard interchange to become an iconic gateway for the Lakewood.

FIGURE 1
Street Walls, Spatial Enclosure, and Spatial Rhythms with Interruptions

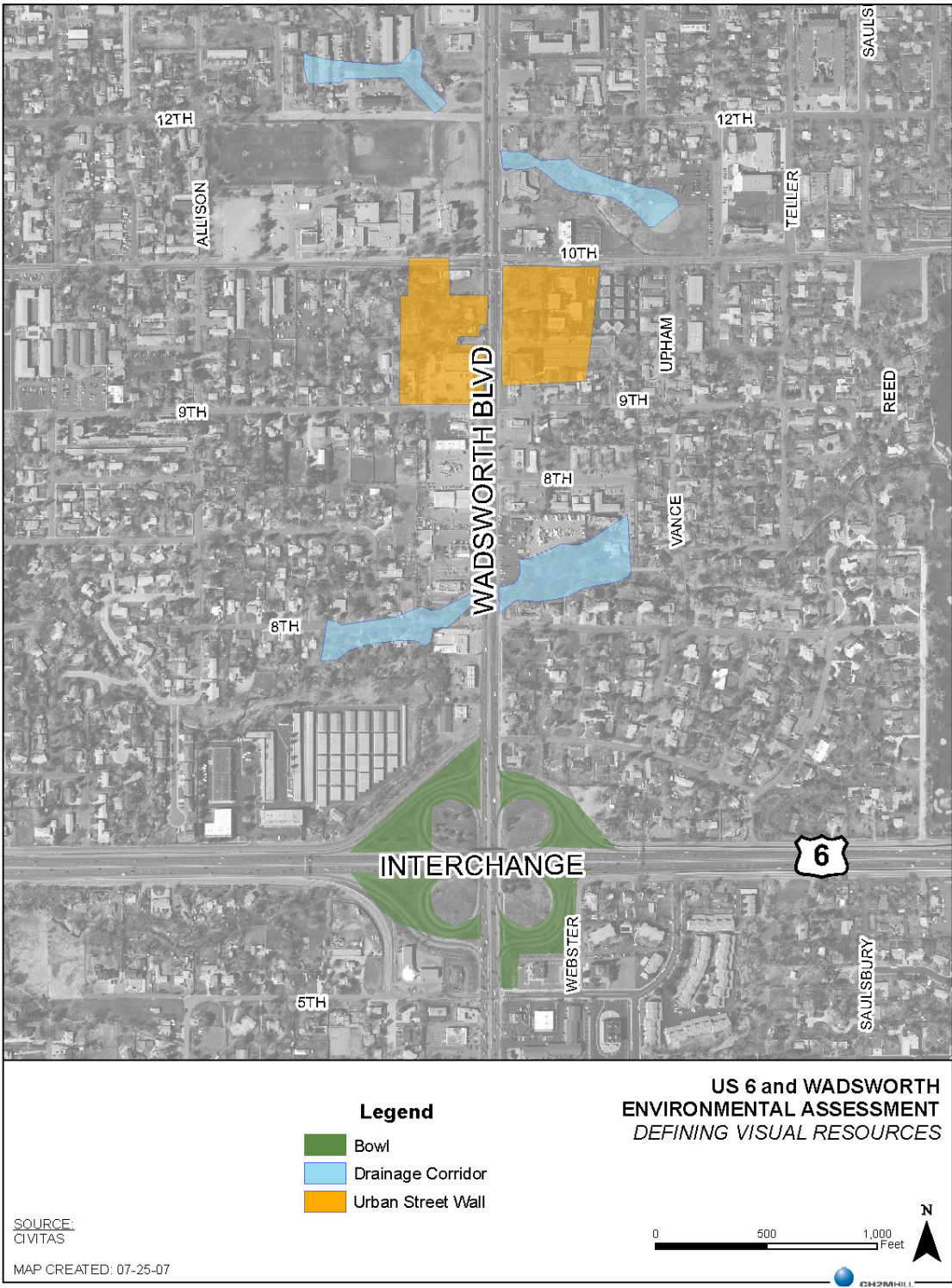
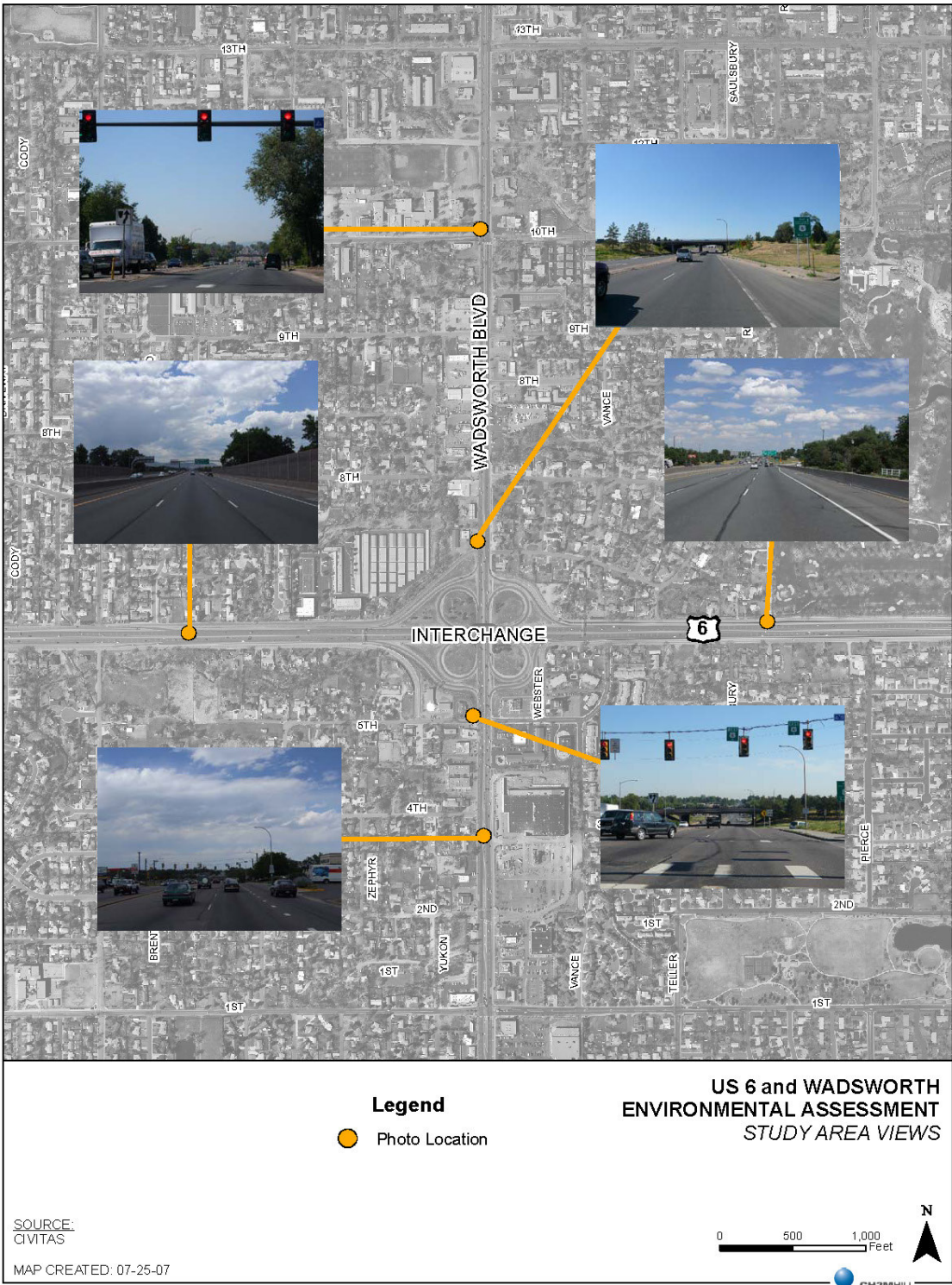


FIGURE 3
Distant Views



\\COBRA\GIS\PROJECTS\6TH_WADSWORTH\MAPFILES\REPORT_FIGURES\EXISTING_CONDITIONS\AETHS_VISUAL_PHOTOPOINTS.MXD 7/24/2007 16:39:43