

2.1 AESTHETICS

<u>Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):</u>	<u>Potentially Significant Impact</u>	<u>Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation</u>	<u>Less Than Significant Impact</u>	<u>No Impact</u>
AESTHETICS—Would the proposed project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SETTING

INTRODUCTION

Visual or aesthetic resources are generally defined as both the natural and built features of the landscape that contribute to the public’s experience and appreciation of the environment. Depending on the extent to which a project’s presence will alter the perceived visual character and quality of the environment, visual or aesthetic impacts may occur. The analysis of potential visual effects is based on review of a variety of data, including: project maps and drawings, aerial and ground level photographs of the project area, planning documents, and visual simulation of aboveground project elements proposed for Potrero and Hunters Point switchyards.

VISUAL CHARACTER

The proposed project lies on relatively flat terrain in an urbanized area in southeast San Francisco, devoted primarily to industrial and commercial uses with the exception of a residential building on Minnesota Street between 25th and 26th Streets. There are no designated scenic vistas in the proposed project area; an industrial and warehouse character dominates the Southern Waterfront area. Urban design elements that give the area a working industrial waterfront character include large maintenance and storage yards, warehouses, container cranes, railroad tracks, grain silos, and smoke stacks. The character of most open spaces in the area is one of industrial storage yards with maritime and cargo-related equipment and materials. Large-scale industrial facilities located near the proposed project route include container terminals, in addition to the Potrero and Hunters Point power plants, which are situated at the northern and southern ends of the project route, respectively. A summary of the visual character of project components is provided below:

Potrero Switchyard

The proposed project begins at the PG&E Potrero Switchyard, located on the east side of Illinois Street between 22nd Street and 23rd Street. A photograph of the switchyard taken from a representative public viewpoint is provided in **Figure 2.1-1a**. As shown in the photograph, the Switchyard and the vicinity encompass an industrial setting. A chain link fence borders the western side of the power plant site, separating the Switchyard from the adjacent sidewalk and street. The Switchyard occupies an approximately 6-acre site that includes frontage along Illinois Street and 22nd Street. Unobstructed views of the Switchyard can also be seen from the adjacent short block of 22nd Street; however, in this location, the street is unpaved and does not include sidewalks. Adjacent to the southwest is the Hunters Point Switchyard and Power Plant facility that includes a variety of industrial structures. Opposite the Switchyard are two multi-story office/warehouse buildings with loading docks that front Illinois Street.

Proposed Underground Cable Line Area

The proposed cable line would generally be installed underneath streets in an area devoted primarily to industrial and commercial uses. At several locations along the roads, ornamental landscaping has been planted along streets, industrial lots, and other facilities

Representative photos of the cable installation areas are presented in **Figures 2.1-1b** through **2.1-1i**. From the Potrero Switchyard, the route turns south on Illinois Street, which is characterized by warehouse/office and industrial sites. The proposed project route then turns west and follows 23rd Street for two blocks prior turning south at Tennessee Street. This area of the proposed project contains relatively flat terrain and supports primarily industrial and commercial uses. Wide-scale public views from land surrounding this area are limited due to urban development. The route continues along Tennessee Street and then goes west again on 25th Street, then turns south and continues on Minnesota Street until reaching Cesar Chavez Street, where it again turns west. Note that in **Figure 2.1-1d** there is a residential building in the upper left corner of the picture. This is one of the few residential buildings along the proposed project route. **Mitigation Measure LUP-1**, provided in Section 2.9 *Land Use*, has been proposed to move the proposed project route from Minnesota Street between 25th Street and Cesar Chavez in order to eliminate any project-related impacts to the residents. The proposed route continues west on Cesar Chavez for several blocks, passing an apartment building at Indiana Street. Caltrain and the Union Pacific rail corridors traverse Cesar Chavez Street, as do two elevated regional freeways, Interstate 280 (I-280) and Highway 101. The proposed project area does not include transportation corridors designated as a state scenic highway. To the southwest, Potrero Hill can be viewed, which rises to an elevation of more than 300 feet above sea level.

The proposed project then intersects property owned by the City, which has sparse ground cover consisting of shrubs and grass and a paved parking lot owned by the San Francisco Chronicle (see **Figure 2.1-1g**). The route turns west on Marin Street, then continues south-southeast along Evans Avenue.



Figure 2.1-1a: Potrero Switchyard from Illinois Street facing East



Figure 2.1-1b: 23rd Street facing West



Figure 2.1-1c: Corner of 23rd Street and Tennessee facing South



Figure 2.1-1d: Tennessee Street and 25th facing West



Figure 2.1-1e: Illinois Street facing South



Figure 2.1-1f: Minnesota Street and Caesar Chavez facing West



Figure 2.1-1g: Right of Way South of Mississippi Street
(San Francisco Chronicle property)



Figure 2.1-1h: Marin Street facing West



Figure 2.1-1i: Evans Avenue facing South



Figure 2.1-1j: Hunters Point Power Plant
(View from Evans Avenue and Jennings Street facing Southeast)

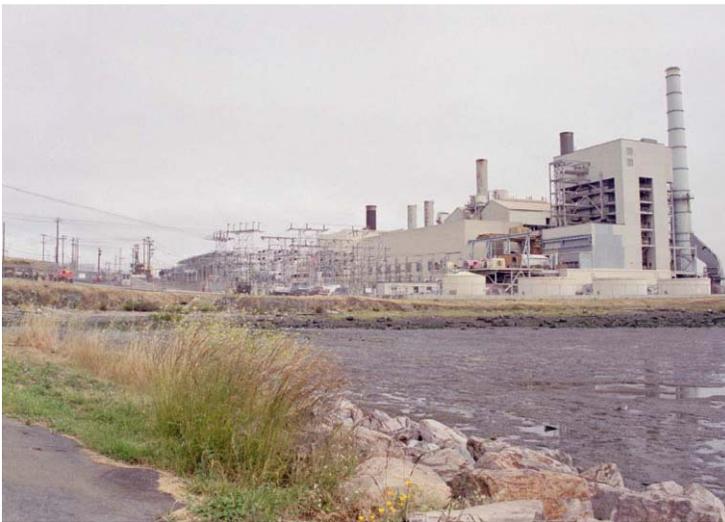


Figure 2.1-1k: Hunters Power Point Plant and Switchyard
facing Southeast



Figure 2.1-1l: West Point Road looking East



Figure 2.1-1m: West Point Road at Middle Point Road looking East



Figure 2.1-1n: Heron's Head Park Trail

Hunters Point Switchyard

The proposed cable line enters the Hunters Point Switchyard, which occupies a portion of the Power Plant, from Evans Avenue and there it terminates. As shown in the photos presented in **Figures 2.1-1k** through **2.1-1n**, the Hunters Power Plant and Switchyard encompass an industrial setting. The facility includes a variety of industrial structures. A chain link fence borders the northern and western side of the power plant site, separating the switchyard from adjacent businesses and street traffic along Jennings Street and Evans Avenue. Access to the southern and eastern boundaries is limited by portions of the San Francisco Bay to the southeast and a chain link fence. There are ornamental shrubs situated approximately every 10 feet along Jennings Street and Evans Avenue, adjacent to the chain link fence.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

The Recreation and Open Space and the Urban Design Elements of the San Francisco General Plan, as well as the Central Waterfront Area Plan, the South Bayshore Area Plan, and the Port of San Francisco Waterfront Land Use Plan contain relevant visual and design policies. In addition, the City has approved improvement plans for Illinois Street.

SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL PLAN RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

The Recreation and Open Space Element is composed of several sections that address certain aspects of the City's recreation and open space system. The sections are (1) The Regional Open Space System, (2) The Citywide Open Space System, (3) The Shoreline, (4) The Neighborhoods, and (5) Downtown. The following objective and policies are relevant to the proposed project.

Objective 3: Provide Continuous Public Open Space Along the Shoreline Unless Public Access Clearly Conflicts with Maritime Uses or Other Uses Requiring a Waterfront Location.

Policy: Preserve and enhance the natural shoreline where it exists;

Policy: Maintain visual access to the water from more distant inland areas by preserving view corridors and lowering the profile of buildings; and

Policy: Screen development from view from the shoreline if it will detract from the natural setting of the shoreline.

SAN FRANCISCO GENERAL PLAN URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

The Urban Design Element concerns the physical character and order of the city development, the relationship between people and their environment, and preservation. It is a concerted effort to recognize the positive attributes of the city, to enhance and conserve those attributes, and to improve the living environment where it is less than satisfactory. The Urban Design Element contains the following pertinent policy.

- Policy 1.1: Recognize and protect major views in the City, with particular attention to those of open space and water.

CENTRAL WATERFRONT AREA PLAN

The purpose of the Central Waterfront Area Plan is to guide the future development of the Central Waterfront in a manner that serves the varying needs and interests of the City of San Francisco. The Plan establishes goals, objectives, and policies that provide direction for private and public investment in the area. In addition, the Plan calls for development that will meet the City's pressing economic and employment needs without sacrificing environmental quality. The Plan, which is part of the San Francisco Master Plan, contains the following pertinent policies.

Urban Design

- Policy 10.1: Reinforce the visual contrast between the waterfront and hills by limiting the height of structures near the shoreline. Relate the height and bulk of new structures away from the shoreline to the character of the topography and existing development.
- Policy 10.2: Protect and create views of the downtown skyline and the bay. Design and locate new development to minimize obstruction of existing views.

Central Basin Subarea

- Policy 18.1: Minimize blockage of private and public views and maintain, to the extent feasible, sightlines from Potrero Hill to the waterfront and downtown.

SOUTH BAYSHORE AREA PLAN

The South Bayshore Area Plan is a tool for residents and the City to guide the future development of the South Bayshore District of San Francisco. The Plan includes sections on Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Commerce, Industry, Recreation and Open Space, Urban Design, Community Facilities and Services, and Public Safety. The South Bayshore Area Plan includes the following pertinent policies.

- Policy 13.1: Assure that new development adjacent to the shoreline capitalizes on the unique waterfront location by improving visual and psychological access to the water in conformance with urban design policies.

PORT OF SAN FRANCISCO WATERFRONT LAND USE PLAN

The proposed project lies within the Southern Waterfront, an area that extends south from 18th Street to India Basin. The Port of San Francisco's Waterfront Land Use Plan envisions continued use of the Southern Waterfront as home to the Port's major cargo and ship repair operations. The Plan promotes both maximization of use of existing cargo facilities and expansion of cargo and maritime support uses on underutilized land within the area. The Port also recognizes that "the

Southern Waterfront's industrial areas are interspersed with natural habitat, habitat restoration, public access, and recreation sites that are identified and preserved." Warm Water Cove, located at the Bayside terminus of 24th Street, and the India Basin Shoreline Park, located south of the Hunters Point Switchyard, are among the identified public access sites. The Plan contains the following objectives for the Southern Waterfront area.

- Continue and expand cargo and ship repair operations
- Allow limited non-maritime uses to generate revenues
- Enhance wetlands, public access, and open space
- Restore Union Iron Works historic buildings

IMPACTS DISCUSSION OF AESTHETICS

METHODOLOGY AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Analyses of the potential intensity of impacts to visual resources were derived from staff observations in the field. Visual simulations provided in PG&E's Proponent's Environmental Assessment (Essex Environmental, 2003) were also used to determine project impacts to visual resources. Compatibility with the design character of the project area is the main consideration during analysis of visual impacts. To determine the level of significance of the impacts anticipated from the proposed project, the proposed project's effects were evaluated as provided under the CEQA Guidelines. This significance criteria, as set forth in CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, are summarized in the checklist provided at the beginning of this section.

In applying these criteria to determine significance, a variety of factors were considered, including:

- the extent of project visibility from residential areas and public open space;
- the degree to which the various project elements will contrast with or be integrated into the existing landscape;
- the extent of change in the landscape's composition and character; and
- the number and sensitivity of viewers.

Project conformance with public policies regarding visual quality was also taken into account.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Consistency with Adopted Plans and Policies

The proposed project would not conflict with the San Francisco General Plan Recreation and Open Space Element, San Francisco General Plan Urban Design Element, Central Waterfront Area Plan, or South Bayshore Areas Plan policies on visual quality because it would not affect views of the water or shoreline. Similarly, because the proposed project is compatible with cargo and maritime support uses in the area and would not affect available public shoreline access, it would not conflict with the Port of San Francisco Waterfront Land Use Plan policies.

Project Construction

As discussed below, construction impacts would be less than significant and would not affect a scenic vista, damage scenic resources, nor substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the project area.

Potrero Switchyard

Construction-related impacts to visual quality would result from the presence of construction equipment, materials, and work crews at the Switchyard. The impacts to visual quality would be relatively short-term (approximately 9 months) and most noticeable to pedestrians and motorists traveling along the proposed project route. It is anticipated that switchyard-related construction effects would be somewhat less noticeable as compared to the proposed cable line (discussed below) mostly because the switchyard modifications would occur within an area that is currently occupied by existing facilities and where maintenance and repair equipment routinely operates.

Underground Cable Line Area

Areas where cable line construction would occur are shown in **Figure 1-1** in Section 1.0, *Project Description*. Urban development limits public views from land surrounding the area. Construction-related impacts to visual quality would result from the presence of construction equipment, materials, and work crews along the proposed project route on public streets. Although these effects would be relatively short-term, they would be most noticeable to motorists traveling within the proposed project area.

Hunters Point Switchyard

Construction-related impacts to the Hunters Point Switchyard would be the same as those discussed above for the Potrero Switchyard.

Project Operations

As discussed below, the public would not be able to see the underground cable line portion of the proposed cable line and therefore, it would not result in any permanent impacts to existing visual resources. The project proposes aboveground changes at the Potrero and Hunters Point Switchyards. As described below, these project components would be slightly visible and marginally noticeable to the public.

Potrero Switchyard

The aboveground components of the proposed project include areas within the existing Potrero Switchyard, which is fenced and would result in minor impacts to views, as discussed below. The proposed modifications include a termination structure that would be approximately 16 feet tall; a transition structure (dead-end or H-frame) that would be approximately 45 feet tall by 40 feet wide; a breaker (bypass switch structure) that would be 40 feet wide, 50 feet tall, and 40 feet long; a coupling capacitive voltage transformer (CCVT) structure; and bus connections from the new cable line to the existing structures in the switchyard. All of these proposed modifications would occur within the existing footprint of the Switchyard. Typical drawings of

the structures to be added to the Hunters Point Switchyard are presented in **Figures 1-2 through 1-8** in Section 1.0, *Project Description*.

Figures 2.1-2a and 2.1-2b present existing conditions and simulated images to identify the location of proposed project components that would be visible at the Potrero Switchyard as could be seen from two Illinois Street vantage points. As shown in **Figures 2.1-2a and 2.1-2b**, project components would be seen behind the existing switchyard structures, chain link fence, and vegetation along the sidewalk.

From Illinois Street near 22nd Street looking south (**Figure 2.1-2a**), the visual simulation demonstrates that portions of the new termination, switch, and bus structures would be visible. The new facility components would appear within the context of an urban industrial setting, which includes the existing switchyard structures. As shown in **Figure 2.1b**, looking north, the simulation of the new switchyard elements would appear against the backdrop of the existing facility. In terms of scale and appearance, the new structures would be similar in aesthetic appearance to the existing switchyard facilities and would not be particularly noticeable.

It is anticipated that the proposed additional lighting at the site would represent a minor, incremental change in existing nighttime visual conditions in the project area that would not be noticeable to the public. Views of the project from more distant locations, including from the Potrero Hill residential area, would be screened by existing intervening buildings and vegetation. Therefore, visual resources impacts would be less than significant and would not affect a scenic vista, damage scenic resources, nor substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the area.

Underground Cable Line Project Area

The proposed 115 kV cable line would be placed underground and operation of the cable line would not result in any impacts to visual quality of the proposed project area.

Hunters Point Switchyard

Similar to the Potrero Switchyard, all proposed modifications at the Hunters Point Switchyard would be within the existing footprint of the fenced switchyard. Proposed modifications include an aboveground termination structure that would be approximately 16 feet tall; a transition structure (dead-end or H-frame) that would be approximately 45 feet tall by 40 feet wide (see **Figure 1-3** in Section 1.0, *Project Description*); a breaker (bypass switch structure) that would be 40 feet wide, 50 feet tall, and 40 feet long; a CCVT structure (see **Figure 1-6** in Section 1.0, *Project Description*); bus connections from the new cable line to the existing structures in the switchyard; and a new metal-roofed control building that would be approximately 16 feet wide, 48 feet long, and 10 feet tall (see **Figure 1-7** in Section 1.0, *Project Description*). The control building would be located north of Evans Avenue and immediately south of an existing 40-foot-tall water tank, some smaller tanks, and aboveground piping. New lighting proposed at the Hunters Point Switchyard includes two fixtures that would be mounted on the breaker switch and bus structure and a fixture on the control building. The fixtures would be mounted approximately 9 feet from the ground.



Existing southerly view from Illinois Street near 22nd Street



Visual simulation of proposed project



Existing northerly view from Illinois Street between 22nd and 23rd Streets



Visual simulation of proposed project

SOURCE: Essex Environmental (2003)

PG&E's Potrero to Hunters Point 115 kV Cable Project (A.03-12-039) / 204039 ■

Figure 2.1-2b
Existing and Simulated View of Potrero Switchyard
(Northerly View)

When seen from many of the potentially affected locations, including Evans Avenue, the India Basin Shoreline Park, and the Fitch Street public open space, views of the proposed structures would generally be screened by existing power plant and switchyard facilities. Views of the proposed project from the hillside residential area near West Point Road would largely be screened by a combination of intervening vegetation and existing power plant and switchyard facilities. Even though a small portion of the project may be visible from limited areas of the Bayview residential area, the new structures would blend with the character of the existing switchyard. Views of the project from the Heron's Head Park trail would be generally screened by the power plant.

A small portion of the control building may be visible from a limited area along the Heron's Head Park trail. From the trail, the existing water tank would partially obstruct views of the new building. Where visible, the new structures seen from the Bayview residential area and from the Heron's Head Park trail would appear within the context of an industrial setting. Given the amount of intervening screening and because the new structures would be comparable in scale and aesthetic appearance to the existing switchyard facilities, the proposed Hunters Point Switchyard modifications would be minimally noticeable. Similarly, it is anticipated that the additional lighting at the site would represent a minor, incremental change in nighttime visual conditions that would not be noticeable to the public and would not affect day or nighttime views. These visual impacts would not affect a scenic vista, damage scenic resources, nor substantially degrade the visual character or quality of the area.

CHECKLIST IMPACT CONCLUSIONS

- a) The proposed project would not have an adverse effect on scenic vistas.
- b) The proposed project would not result in any significant impacts to scenic resources.
- c) The proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- d) The proposed project would create new light sources in the switchyards; however, the additional lighting would have less than a significant impact on day or nighttime views in the project area.

REFERENCES – Aesthetics

Essex Environmental, 2003. *PG&E Potrero to Hunters Point 115 kV Cable Project Proponent's Environmental Assessment*. December 2003.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 2003. Various project plans and drawings for Potrero and Hunters Point Switchyards.

Port of San Francisco, 1996. *Port of San Francisco Waterfront Land Use Plan*.

City of San Francisco, 1996. *City of San Francisco General Plan*.