

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT (CBD) TOLLING PROGRAM

Appendix 9, Visual Resources

2023

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Acronyms

AVEArea of Visual Effect

CBD Central Business District

FDR DriveFranklin D. Roosevelt Drive

FHWA..... Federal Highway Administration

NYCDOT New York City Department of Transportation

PANYNJ Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

VIA Visual Impact Assessment

Appendix 9. Visual Resources

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This appendix evaluates the potential effects of implementation of the Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program (the Project) on visual resources and aesthetic conditions in the local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment.

9.2 METHODOLOGY

FHWA's *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (VIA guidance)¹ provide procedures for assessing the impact of roadway projects on prominent visual resources and aesthetic conditions of the surrounding communities.

FHWA's VIA guidance begins with a "visual impact assessment (VIA) decision tree," a process that determines whether a VIA is required for a project and, if so, the appropriate level of documentation, ranging from a VIA memorandum, to an abbreviated VIA, a standard VIA, or an expanded VIA. The appropriate level of analysis is based on the potential visual effects of a project. The guidance calls for a scoping tool—the VIA Scoping Questionnaire (**Appendix 9, "Visual Resources: Attachment 1"**)—to help determine first if a VIA is necessary, and if so, the level of detail needed to fulfill regulatory and judicial requirements.² Noting that "the assessment of visual impacts should not place an undue burden on the government entities providing those transportation services and improvements necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of the communities they serve," the guidance recommends that no assessment be prepared if there would be no noticeable visible changes to visual resources, viewers, or visual quality and that if there would be a visual change, the level of assessment be tailored to the potential level of visual change.³

The Project Sponsors completed the VIA Scoping Questionnaire, and the resulting score for the Project determined that no visual impact assessment is required (**Appendix 9, "Visual Resources: Attachment 1"**). Nonetheless, the Project Sponsors prepared this appendix to describe the physical elements of the CBD Tolling Alternative that could affect the visual environment. The appendix demonstrates that the effects of the Project would be neutral and not adverse.

¹ Federal Highway Administration. January 2015. *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*. FHWA-HEP-15-029. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx.

² Refer to FHWA's *Visual Impact Assessment Guidelines of Highway Projects*, Chapter 3, for more information. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx#chap3.

³ Ibid. pp. 3 through 5.

9.3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

9.3.1 Regulatory Context

FHWA's VIA guidance calls for identifying local, state, regional, and Federal plans, policies, and regulations related to visual resources, views, or visual quality in the area that could be affected by a project. According to the guidance, these plans, policies, and regulations are evidence of a community's visual preferences.

In the Manhattan CBD and local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment, regulations that relate to visual resources, views, and visual quality include the Zoning Resolution of the City of New York, which governs the shape and form of buildings and mandates provision of visual corridors to the waterfront.⁴ In addition, as described in **Chapter 8, "Historic and Cultural Resources,"** certain properties in areas near the Project location are recognized as historic properties, including National Historic Landmarks, properties listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and/or properties designated as New York City Landmarks. The visual setting for historic properties is an important consideration for the assessment of a project's visual effects. One of the historic properties near the Project location is Central Park, which in addition to being a historic property is also a New York City Scenic Landmark. FHWA and the Project Sponsors assessed the potential visual effects associated with implementation of the Project as part of the process required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as discussed in **Chapter 8.**

9.3.2 Area of Visual Effect

FHWA's VIA guidance provides information on defining the area of visual effect (sometimes referred to as the AVE), which is the study area for a VIA. According to the guidance, the area of visual effect is "the area in which views of the project would be visible as influenced by the presence or absence of intervening topography, vegetation, and structures."

The assessment of potential visual effects of the Project presented in this appendix uses the area where tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be visible to viewer groups as the area of visual effect. **Figure 3-2a** in **Chapter 3, "Environmental Analysis Framework,"** shows the local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment, which was used as the area of visual effect for the Project because it encompasses the areas of proposed new visual elements (i.e., project environment) associated with the Project and adjacent areas. **Figure 3-2b through Figure 3-2g** provide more detailed information on the local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment. **Figure 3-3a through Figure 3-3j** illustrate the proposed locations of tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment. As described and illustrated in **Chapter 3**, the local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment, which is the basis for the study area for potential visual effects, consists of the areas where tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be installed for the CBD Tolling Alternative and immediately adjacent

⁴ Zoning Resolution of the City of New York City. Article VI Chapter 2. <https://zr.planning.nyc.gov/article-vi/chapter-2>.

areas on the same city block. These are also the areas where the tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be visible.

9.3.3 Description of the Visual Environment

This appendix describes the general visual character of the Manhattan CBD as it applies to the area of visual effect, which, as noted earlier, consists of locations where tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be placed and adjacent areas.

FHWA's guidance identifies three types of visual environments:

- Natural environment, which is a landscape without built elements.
- Cultural environment, which is a landscape that is composed of built elements or is otherwise highly manipulated. Cultural environments can include buildings, infrastructure, structures, and other artifacts and art, as discussed later in this appendix.
- Project environment, which is landscape inside the proposed transportation right-of-way and can be natural environment, cultural environment, or a combination of both.

The existing visual character of an area is determined by its visual distinctive features, or "visual resources." As defined in the FHWA guidance, visual resources are visible components of the natural, cultural, or project environments.

For the CBD Tolling Alternative, the area of visual effect is a cultural environment, because it is a fully developed urban landscape. The Project environment (i.e., the specific locations where Project elements are proposed) consists of the transportation right-of-way and adjacent sidewalks where new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be placed. The area of visual effect also includes portions of roadway and adjacent sidewalk in three small areas of Central Park near its southern boundary. There is natural environment in Central Park, but the area of visual effect for the Project in Central Park is limited to grassy areas and trees close to the roadway that can be considered a cultural environment according to the definition in the FHWA guidance. Other landscaped park spaces are in the area of visual effect, but these are urban parks that are also not natural environment according to the definition in the FHWA guidance. The next section of this appendix describes the parks in the area of visual effect.

9.3.3.1 Cultural Environment

The cultural environment of the area of visual effect is densely developed. It contains all four of the visual elements of a cultural environment described in FHWA's VIA guidance: buildings, infrastructure, structures, and artifacts and art.

As defined in FHWA's VIA guidance, buildings (defined as "enclosed structures that are or have been used by people") are often the dominant human-constructed objects in a landscape and are prevalent in the Manhattan CBD. Lower Manhattan (generally the area south of Canal Street) and Midtown Manhattan (generally the area north of 34th Street, between 34th and 60th Streets) feature mid- and high-rise

commercial and residential buildings in an area that has been developed and redeveloped for more than 100 years. Most buildings are built to the sidewalk line, forming a continuous streetwall along most streets and avenues. The area of visual effect, and particularly the 60th Street corridor and the areas near the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, is consistent with this pattern.

FHWA's VIA guidance notes, "In addition to buildings, the country's infrastructure systems add to visual character of the cultural environment."⁵ Infrastructure, such as streets, sidewalks, and bridges, supports the human functions within the cultural study area. Streets are a prominent feature of the Manhattan CBD. Most of the Manhattan CBD—including the 60th Street corridor and the areas near the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels—has a grid pattern of streets with wide, north–south avenues and narrower east–west streets that intersect at standard, 90-degree angles. Most avenues are about 100 feet wide from property line to property line, including a wide sidewalk on each side of the roadway. Streets are typically 60 feet wide from property line to property line, including a sidewalk on each side. Broadway is an exception to the grid street pattern. Broadway cuts through the regular grid on a diagonal, forming irregular intersections with the east–west streets and north–south avenues, including West 59th and 60th Streets in the area of visual effect. In Lower Manhattan near the Brooklyn Bridge and Manhattan Bridge, the street pattern is irregular. While some streets and avenues intersect at 90-degree angles, others intersect at nonstandard angles.

Traffic controls, including traffic lights on mast arms extending over the street, streetlights, and signage are common features throughout the Manhattan CBD and the area of visual effect.

The area of visual effect includes the two peripheral highways on the far west and far east sides of the Manhattan CBD. On the west side along the Hudson River waterfront, the West Side Highway/Route 9A is a two-way, at-grade arterial roadway that extends from the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel to West 57th Street, where it transitions to an elevated roadway that extends beyond the Manhattan CBD. For most of the at-grade portion of this highway, a landscaped median separates northbound and southbound traffic. The West Side Highway/Route 9A has overhead signs and in Lower Manhattan has pedestrian bridges that cross the highway. On the east side along the East River waterfront, the Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) Drive begins at the Battery (the southern end of Manhattan) and runs along the East River for the full length of the Manhattan CBD. The FDR Drive is a limited-access highway with interchanges at principal east–west streets. It is close to existing commercial and residential neighborhoods and is either at-grade or on a viaduct elevated about 20 feet above local streets. Like the West Side Highway/Route 9A, the FDR Drive has overhead sign structures at intervals along its route and some overhead pedestrian bridges. Both peripheral highways also have streetlights, signage including overhead sign structures, and overhead pedestrian bridges; the West Side Highway/Route 9A also has traffic lights.

Close to its western and eastern edges, the area of visual effect also includes four tunnels and four bridges that provide vehicular access to and from the Manhattan CBD. On the west side in Midtown, the Holland

⁵ The VIA guidance states, "Railroads, airports, harbors, roads, canals, dams, electrical and telecommunication utilities, pipelines, sewer and water systems, solar arrays, wind turbines, and other infrastructure provide a special set of buildings, structures, and associated artifacts that, as part of an intermodal system of moving people, goods, and services, can affect the visual character of an adjacent highway project. A major visual attribute of infrastructure is its linearity." Federal Highway Administration, p. 5-13.

and Lincoln Tunnels connect to the Manhattan street grid with curved access ramps; the Lincoln Tunnel in particular has a number of below-grade access roads that cut through the street grid as well as above-grade ramps that connect directly into the Port Authority Bus Terminal structure. In Lower Manhattan, access to and from the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel is via a plaza-like area that is lower than the surrounding street grid. On the east side, access to and from the Queens-Midtown Tunnel is also via a plaza-like area and several below-grade roads that cut through the street grid. For these four tunnels, the access roadways are notable interruptions to the surrounding streetscape.

The four bridges that connect directly to the Manhattan CBD—the Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Williamsburg Bridges in Lower Manhattan and the Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge in Midtown near East 59th Street—are prominent visual features in the nearby area of visual effect. Each includes multiple access ramps that cut through the street grid, typically on ramps above the local streets. The bridges' superstructures are also dominant visually from the area of visual effect.

As defined in FHWA's VIA guidance, structures are "engineered elements that provide a necessary social function but are not buildings or part of a larger infrastructure system" (e.g., walls, towers, or other constructed items that serve a utilitarian function). The area of visual effect has very few structures that are not buildings, but the areas near the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels and along the West Side Highway/Route 9A have ventilation structures for the vehicle and rail tunnels that cross beneath the area.

The last type of visual element defined in the FHWA VIA guidance is artifacts and art, which are elements other than buildings, infrastructure, and structures that contribute to the visual environment. As noted earlier, public parks and plazas are present in the area of visual effect. These include Central Park and Columbus Circle in the 60th Street corridor, as well as smaller plazas. Along the West Side Highway/Route 9A and FDR Drive, there are two linear waterfront parks beside the highways—Hudson River Park and East River Park—as well as many smaller parks and plazas that abut the highways. Many of the parks and plazas in the area of visual effect feature public art, including fountains, sculptures, and landscaping features. **Chapter 7, "Parks and Recreational Resources,"** provides a list and maps of the parks in the area of visual effect. As discussed in **Chapter 7** and illustrated in **Figure 7-1a through Figure 7-1g**, the area of visual effect includes 82 parks, as follows:

- **60th Street corridor:** 19 parks and plazas adjacent to city blocks that are included in the area of visual effect. Most of these are small plaza areas close to the street. The 60th Street corridor also includes Central Park, discussed more below.
- **Lincoln Tunnel area:** Four plazas close to the roadway and the High Line, a park atop an elevated former freight railroad line. These plazas are close to the street.
- **Holland Tunnel area:** Three plazas close to the roadway.
- **Queens-Midtown Tunnel area:** Three plazas close to the roadway.
- **Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Williamsburg Bridges approaches:** Nine plazas close to the roadway.

- **West Side Highway/Route 9A and the FDR Drive:** Many parks and plazas are adjacent to these two peripheral highways. They include Hudson River Park, which is adjacent to the west side of the West Side Highway/Route 9A from Lower Manhattan to West 59th Street, and John V. Lindsay East River Park, which is adjacent to the east side of the FDR Drive from Lower Manhattan to East 13th Street. They also include many smaller parks and plazas along the approximately 10.6 miles of these two peripheral highways included in the Manhattan CBD.

The southernmost portion of Central Park is at the northern boundary of the Manhattan CBD and within the area of visual effect. Central Park is an 840-acre park bounded by Central Park South (59th Street), Fifth Avenue, Central Park North (110th Street), and Central Park West (the extension of Eighth Avenue). The area of visual effect within Central Park encompasses small areas of three park roadways close to the park border. These roads provide access for park patrons. Each roadway has adjacent walkways and signage, landscaped lawns, and mature trees. **Chapter 7, “Parks and Recreational Resources,”** provides more information on the area of Central Park that would be affected by the Project. **Chapter 7** also provides information on the numerous other parks that are within the parks study area, which is the same area as the area of visual effect (see **Table 7-1**).

9.3.3.2 Project Environment

According to FHWA VIA guidance, the Project environment is the landscape inside the proposed transportation right-of-way and can be natural environment, cultural environment, or a combination of both. For this Project, the Project environment consists of roads and the adjacent sidewalks, tunnel portals and bridges, and in a few cases, median islands or overhead sign structures.

Avenues and streets are the primary elements of the Project environment. Most avenues and wide crosstown streets have long north–south sightlines, but sightlines on narrow streets tend to be obstructed by mature street trees, signage, and other building and sidewalk features. Avenues and streets in the Project environment are level, at-grade terrain. Most serve one-way traffic within the Manhattan CBD, but notable exceptions include Eleventh Avenue/West End Avenue, Broadway, Park Avenue, and York Avenue in the 60th Street corridor, and Eleventh Avenue near the Lincoln Tunnel. Most avenues have four to five lanes for moving traffic with some sections with curbside or offset bus lanes, bicycle lanes, and/or parking lanes. Most one-way streets have one or two lanes for moving traffic with curbside parking and/or bike lanes, and two-way streets have two or four lanes for moving traffic with curbside bus lanes, bicycle lanes, and/or parking lanes. Park Avenue and Broadway have center medians, and some avenues have concrete islands and raised features to delineate bicycle lanes and provide pedestrian refuge. The avenues and streets in the Project environment have streetlight poles at regular intervals and poles with mast arms over the roadway supporting traffic lights at each intersection. Signage is also a common feature in the Project environment.

The two peripheral highways in the Project environment both serve two-way traffic. The West Side Highway/Route 9A is generally three to four lanes wide in each direction with a landscaped median dividing the two directions of traffic. This highway runs north–south along the western edge of Manhattan, with regular intersections with east–west local streets that are controlled by traffic lights. For most of its length

south of West 57th Street, the West Side Highway/Route 9A has on-street parking on the east (northbound) side of the street. At West 57th Street, the highway ramps upward to become an elevated highway above the local street grid. Roadway-related infrastructure along the West Side Highway/Route 9A includes traffic lights on mast arms extending over the street, streetlights, signage (including overhead sign structures), and overhead pedestrian bridges.

On the east side of Manhattan, the FDR Drive is a limited-access peripheral highway. It is generally three lanes in each direction with a barrier in the median to separate traffic. Access to and from the highway is via ramps that connect to the local street grid. Similar to the West Side Highway/Route 9A, roadway-related infrastructure along the FDR Drive includes streetlights, signage (including overhead sign structures), and overhead pedestrian bridges.

The four tunnels and four bridges that connect to the Manhattan CBD are also part of the Project environment. Along the roads leading to and from these tunnels and bridges are streetlight poles and poles with traffic controls; there are also similar poles along the sides of the roadways on the bridges.

The Project environment within Central Park consists of sidewalks adjacent to paved roadways. Within Central Park, streetlight poles and other types of poles with equipment mounted on them are already adjacent to the park road system, including in the area where the proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be placed (discussed in **Section 9.3.2**).

9.3.4 Viewer Groups

The FHWA VIA guidance calls for identifying the population, referred to as viewers, who could be affected by any changes in the visual environment that would result from the Project. As defined in the guidance, there are two distinct groups of viewers: neighbors and travelers. Neighbors are people who are adjacent to the highway (i.e., Project site) and have views of the road, and travelers are people who use the highway (i.e., Project site) and have views from the road. The guidance further divides these types of potential travelers, to help establish viewer preferences and their sensitivity to changes in the visual environment:⁶

- Neighbors, consisting of people who may have a view of the Project, include the following:
 - Residential neighbors, consisting of people who live within viewing distance of the Project
 - Recreational neighbors, who participate in recreation in the area of visual effect
 - Institutional neighbors, including people who provide or receive services from institutions, such as schools and hospitals
 - Civic neighbors, consisting of people who provide or receive services from a government organization
 - Retail neighbors, including merchants and shoppers

⁶ The FHWA VIA guidance also notes that for an abbreviated visual impact assessment and frequently for a standard visual impact assessment, the simple division between neighbors and travelers is sufficient for assessing visual impacts.

- Commercial neighbors, or people who occupy or use office buildings and other commercial structures
 - Industrial neighbors, who work in industrial facilities
 - Agricultural neighbors, or farmers
 - Viewer neighbors, who are traveling but not in the Project site; these can include pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists on other routes
- Travelers, defined as the users of the existing highway or future users of the improved highway (in this case, people who would travel past the proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment); these can be motorists, bicyclists, or pedestrians:
 - Commuting travelers, who are regular travelers of the same route
 - Touring travelers, who use the highway (Project site) primarily for enjoyment
 - Shipping travelers, consisting primarily of drivers delivering goods and can also include delivery people and messengers in the Manhattan CBD

The Manhattan CBD has a wide mix of land uses and therefore supports all of these viewer groups except industrial and agricultural neighbors. Residential neighbors are most sensitive to the changes in the visual environment, although residents of the Manhattan CBD are accustomed to the urban character of the Manhattan CBD. Institutional, civic, retail, and commercial neighbors have less sensitivity to changes in the visual environment than residential neighbors, and they are also accustomed to the urban character of the Manhattan CBD. Recreational neighbors are sensitive to changes in their recreational spaces (i.e., parks); in the Manhattan CBD, recreational spaces are urban parks, plazas, promenades, and indoor facilities that are typical of the physical and cultural environment of the Manhattan CBD.

The Manhattan CBD's transportation right-of-way serves motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians for various trip purposes; therefore, it supports commuting travelers, touring travelers (i.e., tourists), and shipping travelers by multiple modes (i.e., car, bus, truck, bicycle, and on foot).⁷ Travelers in the Manhattan CBD are highly acclimated to its transportation network and the supporting infrastructure. While commuters and shippers have frequent exposure to the same visual environment, they may not be sensitive to changes in the visual environment because they are focused mainly on the business purpose of their trip rather than leisure or other purposes. Touring travelers have greater sensitivity to the visual environment because pleasure takes more prominence in the purpose of their trips; however, views of the Manhattan CBD's physical and cultural environment, including its skyscrapers, signs, public art, and street life, are generally the points of interest for touring travelers. Pedestrians are more sensitive to changes in the visual environment than motorists and bicyclists because pedestrians, moving at slower speeds, spend more time experiencing a trip than bicyclists and motorists at higher speeds; however, all three user groups are highly accustomed to the urban character of the Manhattan CBD.

⁷ Refer to FHWA's *Visual Impact Assessment Guidelines of Highway Projects*, Section 5.3, for a definition of viewer groups. www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx#chap52.

9.4 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

9.4.1 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would not result in a vehicular tolling program or any associated tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment; therefore, it would have no effect on visual resources in the Manhattan CBD or area of visual effect. The area of visual effect would remain the same, and viewer groups would continue to be accustomed to that environment.

9.4.2 CBD Tolling Alternative

9.4.2.1 Appearance of Tolling Infrastructure and Tolling System Equipment

Chapter 2, “Project Alternatives,” describes the proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment for the CBD Tolling Alternative (Section 2.4.2.2). As discussed there, this would include poles and mast arms, similar to those used for streetlights and traffic lights today; tolling system equipment housed in enclosures; and signage similar in size and character to signs already present throughout Manhattan. Figure 9-1 through Figure 9-18 at the end of this appendix provide illustrations comparing the No Action Alternative and the CBD Tolling Alternative at representative locations within the area of visual effect. Figure 9-1a and Figure 9-1b depict the area of visual effect and provide a photo key showing the locations for the figures that follow. Figure 9-2 through Figure 9-18 provide renderings of conditions with the No Action Alternative and the CBD Tolling Alternative. In addition, Appendix 2D, “Project Alternatives: CBD Tolling Program Signage,” provides details about the size and location of signage associated with the CBD Tolling Alternative.

The tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment has been designed to minimize its visual impact, by using existing infrastructure as much as possible and coordinating the appearance of new infrastructure and equipment with the existing street furniture palette. Different tolling infrastructure would be used, depending on location, to minimize the Project footprint and reflect the existing setting. In most locations, the CBD Tolling Alternative would use octagonal poles that are similar in appearance to the New York City Department of Transportation’s (NYCDOT) standard poles for traffic signals and streetlights (these are called “M-2A” poles), except that the poles would be larger in diameter (potentially up to 14 inches in diameter rather than 8.5 inches). The poles for the CBD Tolling Alternative would typically be at locations where standard poles are currently installed or would replace existing poles with new poles that are up to about 20 feet from the existing poles. In some locations, new poles would be installed where no poles currently exist. In all cases, the Project Sponsors would avoid the removal of street trees for pole placement to the maximum extent feasible and practicable. Figure 2-2a through Figure 2-2k in Chapter 2, “Project Alternatives,” provide information on the proposed locations and types of infrastructure at each location based on preliminary design.

On some poles, a new mast arm (similar to the mast arms that support traffic signals throughout New York City) would extend 20 to 50 feet over the roadway with tolling system equipment mounted on it. On other poles, tolling system equipment would be mounted directly on the pole without a mast arm. The color of

poles, cabinets, and tolling system equipment would be consistent and would match existing light pole colors. Supports, fasteners, and other hardware would also be designed to be minimally visible. **Figure 9-2, Figure 9-3, Figure 9-5, Figure 9-6, Figure 9-7, Figure 9-8, and Figure 9-15** illustrate locations with proposed mast arms over the roadway. **Figure 9-4a, Figure 9-4b, Figure 9-4c, and Figure 9-5** show locations with tolling system equipment mounted on poles without a mast arm.

On the East River bridges, West Side Highway/Route 9A, and along the FDR Drive, tolling system equipment would be mounted on existing structures, including the bridge superstructures and light poles and on existing overhead sign structures and pedestrian bridges. **Figure 9-9a, Figure 9-9b, Figure 9-9c, and Figure 9-11** provide views of proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment at the Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge and Manhattan Bridge. **Figure 9-10** illustrates the proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment mounted to an existing pedestrian bridge over the FDR Drive. At the Queens-Midtown Tunnel and Hugh L. Carey Tunnel, tolling system equipment already in place would be used.

The Project Sponsors are coordinating with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) regarding the locations for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment near the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels. If PANYNJ approves the use of its property for associated tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment, this would allow the Project Sponsors to eliminate tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment from the local streets near the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels. **Figure 9-12** illustrates proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment on a local street near the Holland Tunnel. **Figure 9-13 and Figure 9-15** show views of proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment on a local street near the Lincoln Tunnel. **Figure 9-14a and Figure 9-14b** show tolling system infrastructure and tolling system equipment on PANYNJ property at the Lincoln Tunnel.

The proposed tolling system equipment would be clustered into single enclosures to reduce its visual impact. These enclosures would house the license-plate reader cameras, illuminators, and antenna in a single unit comparable in size and mass to traffic control devices currently used throughout the area of visual effect. The cameras included in the array of tolling system equipment would use infrared illumination at night to allow images of license plates to be collected without any need for visible light.

The CBD Tolling Alternative would include new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment at three locations in Central Park near its southern boundary at Central Park South/59th Street. At these locations, four existing streetlight poles would be replaced with new poles supporting tolling system equipment. These replacement streetlight poles would be in the same location and have the same appearance as existing streetlight poles. The tolling system equipment mounted on them would use matching color schemes to blend with the appearance of the poles.

In addition to the tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment, the CBD Tolling Alternative would include signage on local streets outside the Manhattan CBD to advise drivers before they enter the tolling zone, and within the Manhattan CBD to advise drivers before they exit the zone. These signs would be similar in size and nature to existing signs and would be mounted on standard sign posts on local streets and on existing infrastructure where feasible.

The type, sequence, and quantity of signs would differ depending on the location. **Chapter 2, “Project Alternatives,” Section 2.4.2.2,** includes a description of the types, numbers, and sizes of proposed signs, and **Appendix 2D, “Project Alternatives: CBD Tolling Program Signage,”** provides maps illustrating potential locations for signage and depictions of the types of signs, based on preliminary design. This information would be further refined during final design, and some additional signs or signs in different locations might be required as a result of final design. **Figure 9-5, Figure 9-16, Figure 9-17, and Figure 9-18** illustrate the types of signage included as part of the CBD Tolling Alternative.

9.4.2.2 Assessment of Visual Effect

In most locations, the Project environment where the proposed new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be installed is on city streets, bridges and bridge ramps over land, near tunnel portals, and on the West Side Highway/Route 9A and the FDR Drive. The tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment on city streets would be placed where there is already a variety of sidewalk structures and infrastructure, including streetlight poles, traffic lights, bus stops, and signs.

The CBD Tolling Alternative would minimize interference with public sightlines, view corridors, and open spaces at the locations of proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment. The infrastructure and equipment would be visually consistent with the existing streetscape and would have the same or similar appearance as adjacent NYCDOT standard signal and streetlight poles or as NYCDOT’s family of street furniture. Therefore, the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on the visual environment of the surrounding area.

At the three locations in Central Park where tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment is proposed, four existing streetlight poles would be replaced with new poles supporting tolling system equipment. These replacement streetlight poles would be in the same location and have the same appearance as existing streetlight poles, and the tolling system equipment mounted on them would use matching color schemes to blend with the appearance of the poles. In addition, tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be installed along the sidewalk bordering the park on Fifth Avenue between East 60th and 61st Streets and on the sidewalk bordering the park on Central Park West between West 60th and 61st Streets. Based on preliminary design, on the west side of Fifth Avenue an existing modern streetlight pole would be replaced with a new light pole of similar appearance. On Central Park West, a new 26-foot-tall pole with a narrow profile, with a 50-foot mast arm extending over the Central Park West roadway would be installed on the east (park) side of the road. These poles along the sidewalk bordering Central Park would be consistent with the presence of modern street furniture in the area and would constitute a minimal change. The CBD Tolling Alternative would not change the character of Central Park’s use or of physical features within the property’s setting that contribute to its historic significance and would not introduce visual elements that diminish the integrity of Central Park’s significant features. Therefore, the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on the visual environment of Central Park and the surrounding area.

FHWA and the Project Sponsors assessed the potential visual effects on historic properties associated with implementation of the Project as part of the process required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as discussed in **Chapter 8, “Historic and Cultural Resources.”** That assessment concludes

that the tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would not result in adverse effects on historic architectural resources, many of which are also prominent visual features within or near the area of visual effect. This includes Central Park, as discussed previously, as well as other historic properties. Each of the bridges that connect to the Manhattan CBD is a historic property, as described in **Chapter 8**. The proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment that would be installed on those bridges would generally have minimal visibility that is consistent with the type of infrastructure already located on the bridges (including signage) and would not obstruct views to any visually significant portions of the bridge structures. On the Manhattan Bridge, a new steel girder that supports tolling system equipment would be installed above the westbound inner roadway, and would be supported on the existing steel framing that once supported an upper-deck roadway (removed in the mid-20th century) between the westbound inner roadway and the outer roadways (**Figure 9-11**). The new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be at a substantial distance from the arch and colonnade located at the bridge entrance on Canal Street in Manhattan, where it would be prominent in views only for drivers in the westbound center lanes as they approach the end of the bridge. This view would be available only for a short time as drivers move toward the end of the bridge.

The new signs within and outside of the Manhattan CBD would be similar in size and placement to other signs already common throughout the area of visual effect. These would have a neutral effect on the visual environment of the Project area.

For the various viewer groups in the area of visual effect, including neighbors (residential, recreational, institutional, civic, retail, and commercial; see **Section 9.3.4** earlier in this appendix) and travelers (commuting, touring, and shipping; see also **Section 9.3.4**), the visual changes introduced by the CBD Tolling Alternative would be minimal in the context of the urban landscape and are not likely result in a change in visual quality as perceived by these viewers. Therefore, the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on viewer groups.

Following the implementation of the CBD Tolling Alternative, motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists would continue to use existing roadways and sidewalks. As described in **Subchapter 5B, "Social Conditions: Neighborhood Character,"** changes in traffic volumes and pedestrian activity that would result with implementation of the CBD Tolling Alternative would not result in adverse effects on the aesthetic characteristics of the areas where they would occur. Projected changes in traffic, transit ridership, and pedestrians would occur on busy arterial roadways and near transit hubs (see **Chapter 4, "Transportation,"** including **Subchapter 4A, "Regional Transportation Effects and Modeling,"** **Subchapter 4B, "Highways and Local Intersections,"** **Subchapter 4C, "Transit,"** and **Subchapter 4E, "Pedestrians and Bicycles"**), where heavy transportation activities are already part of the Project environment. Therefore, these changes in traffic and pedestrian activity associated with the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on viewer groups.





Overall, the installation of tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment as well as changes in traffic and pedestrian volumes that would result from the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on viewer groups and would not result in adverse effects on the visual environment.

9.5 CONCLUSION

For the various viewer groups in the area of visual effect—including residential, recreational, institutional, civic, retail, and commercial “neighbors” (i.e., those who may have a view of the Project), and commuting, touring, and shipping “travelers” (i.e., those who would use the affected roadways)—the visual changes introduced by the CBD Tolling Alternative would be minimal in the context of the urban landscape and are not likely to result in a change in visual quality as perceived by these viewers. Therefore, the CBD Tolling Alternative would have a neutral effect on viewer groups.

Figure 9-1a. Area of Visual Effect and Photo Key for Renderings



-  Manhattan Central Business District (as defined by the MTA Reform and Traffic Mobility Act)
-  Area of Visual Effect (AVE) for Tolling Infrastructure and Tolling System Equipment
-  Photograph View Direction and Reference Number (see Figures 9-2 through 9-18)
-  Park or Recreational Resource

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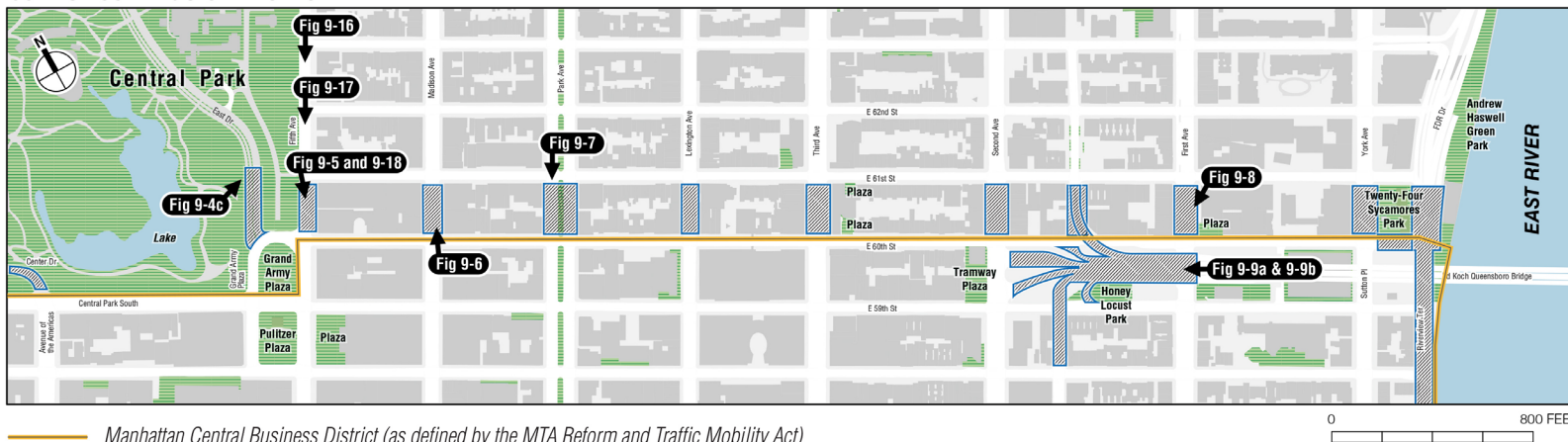
Source: Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications. NYC Open Data, NYC Planimetrics. <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Transportation/NYC-Planimetrics/wt4d-p43d>.





Figure 9-1b. Area of Visual Effect and Photo Key for Renderings: 60th Street

60th Street - Western Portion



60th Street - Eastern Portion



-  Manhattan Central Business District (as defined by the MTA Reform and Traffic Mobility Act)
-  Area of Visual Effect (AVE) for Tolling Infrastructure and Tolling System Equipment
-  Photograph View Direction and Reference Number (see Figures 9-2 through 9-9 and 9-16 through 9-18)
-  Park or Recreational Resource

Source: Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications. NYC Open Data, NYC Planimetrics. <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Transportation/NYC-Planimetrics/wt4d-p43d>.

Figure 9-2. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Broadway at West 60th Street



No Action Alternative, view northwest at Broadway



CBD Tolling Alternative, view northwest at Broadway

Figure 9-3. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Central Park West at West 60th Street Near Columbus Circle



No Action Alternative, view north

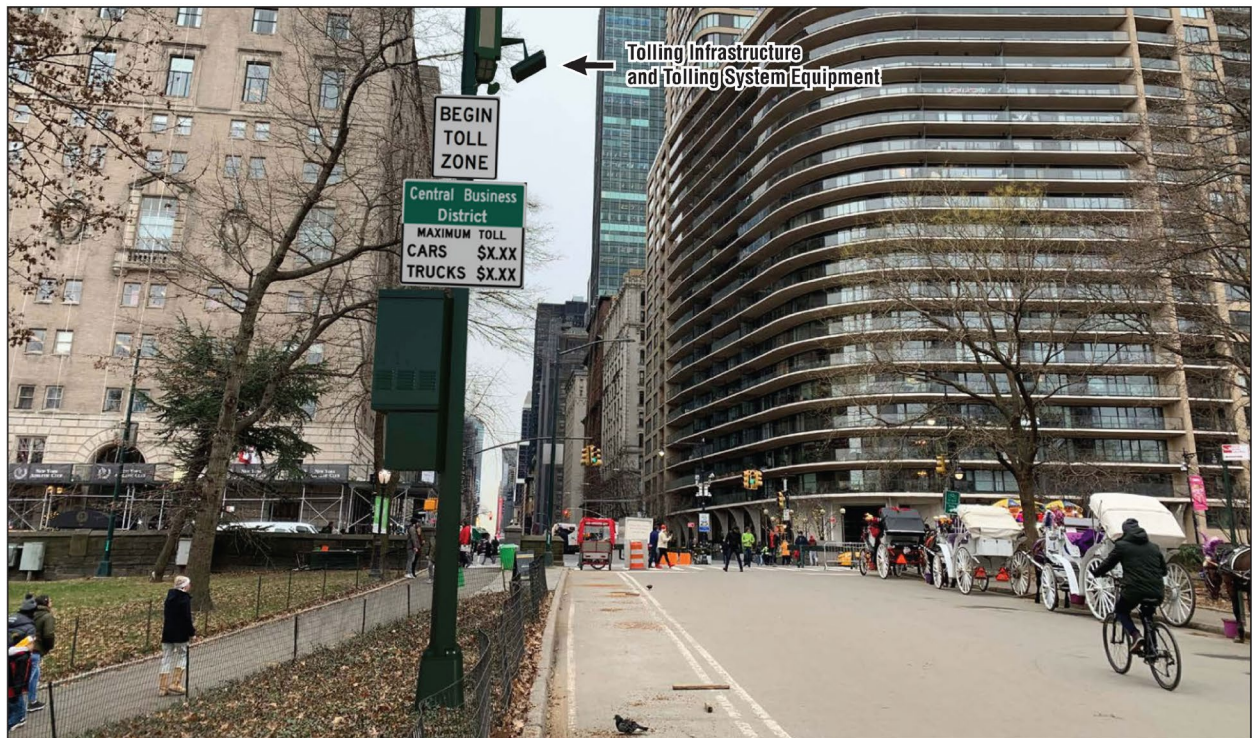


CBD Tolling Alternative, view north

Figure 9-4a. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Central Park West Drive near Seventh Avenue



No Action Alternative, view south



CBD Tolling Alternative, view south

Figure 9-4b. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Central Park Center Drive near Sixth Avenue



No Action Alternative, view southeast



CBD Tolling Alternative, view southeast

Figure 9-4c. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Central Park East Drive Near Grand Army Plaza



No Action Alternative, view northeast



CBD Tolling Alternative, view northeast

Figure 9-5. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Fifth Avenue at East 60th Street



No Action Alternative, view south



CBD Tolling Alternative, view south

Figure 9-6. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Madison Avenue at East 60th Street



No Action Alternative, view north



CBD Tolling Alternative, view north

Figure 9-7. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative, Park Avenue at East 60th Street



No Action Alternative, view south from East 60th Street crosswalk



CBD Tolling Alternative, view south from East 60th Street crosswalk

Figure 9-8. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: First Avenue at East 60th Street



No Action Alternative, view southwest



CBD Tolling Alternative, view southwest

Figure 9-9a. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative:
Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge Lower Level Westbound and Eastbound

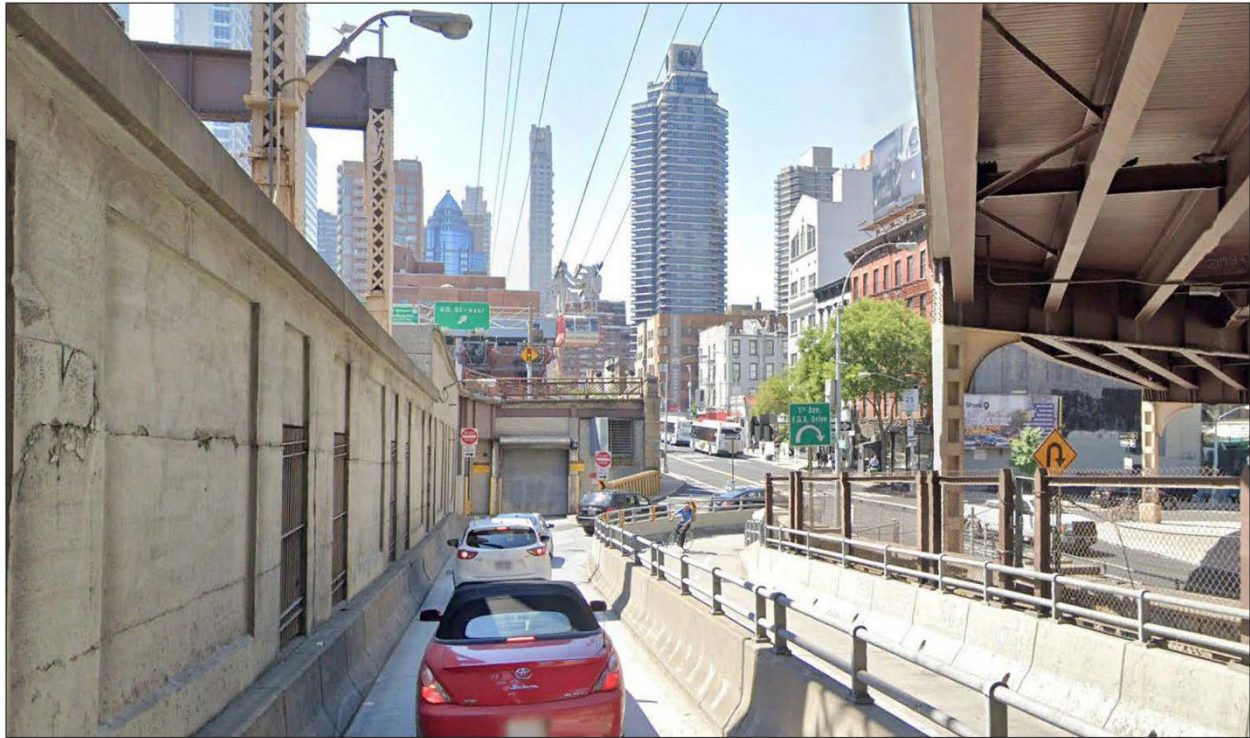


No Action Alternative

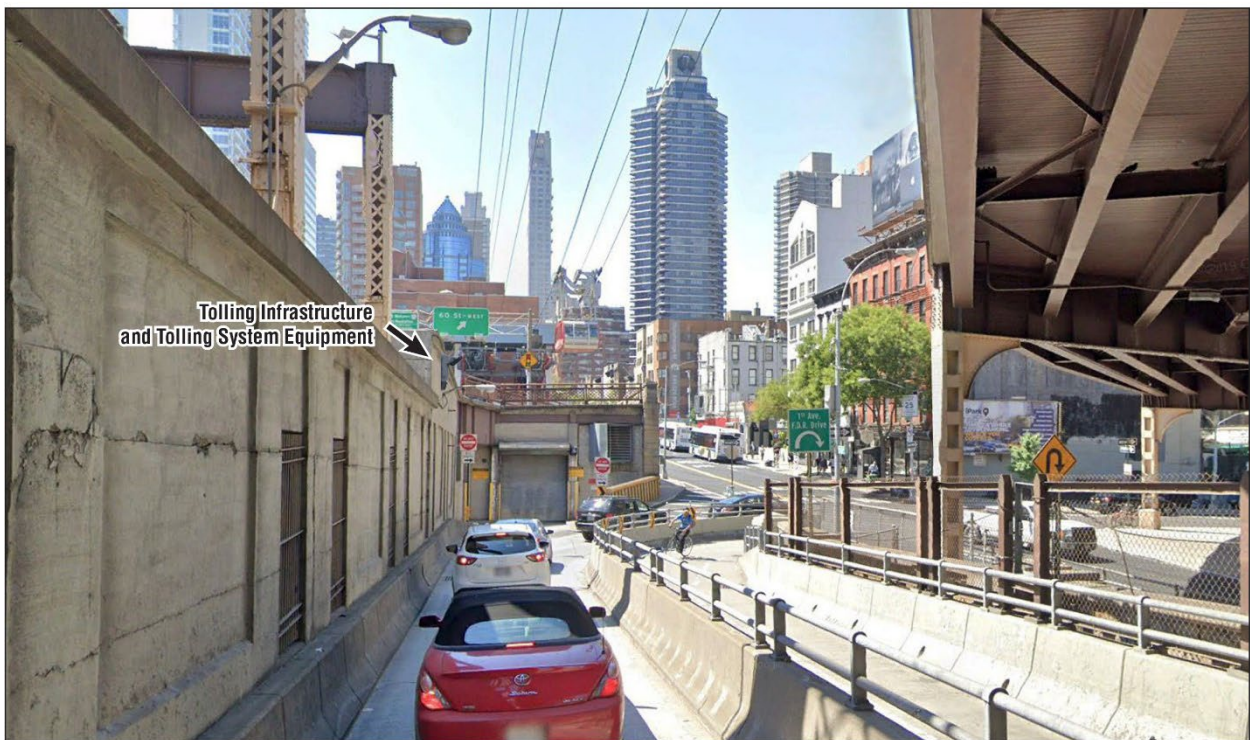


CBD Tolling Alternative

Figure 9-9b. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative:
Ed Koch Queensboro Bridge Lower Level, Westbound Approaching East 60th Street

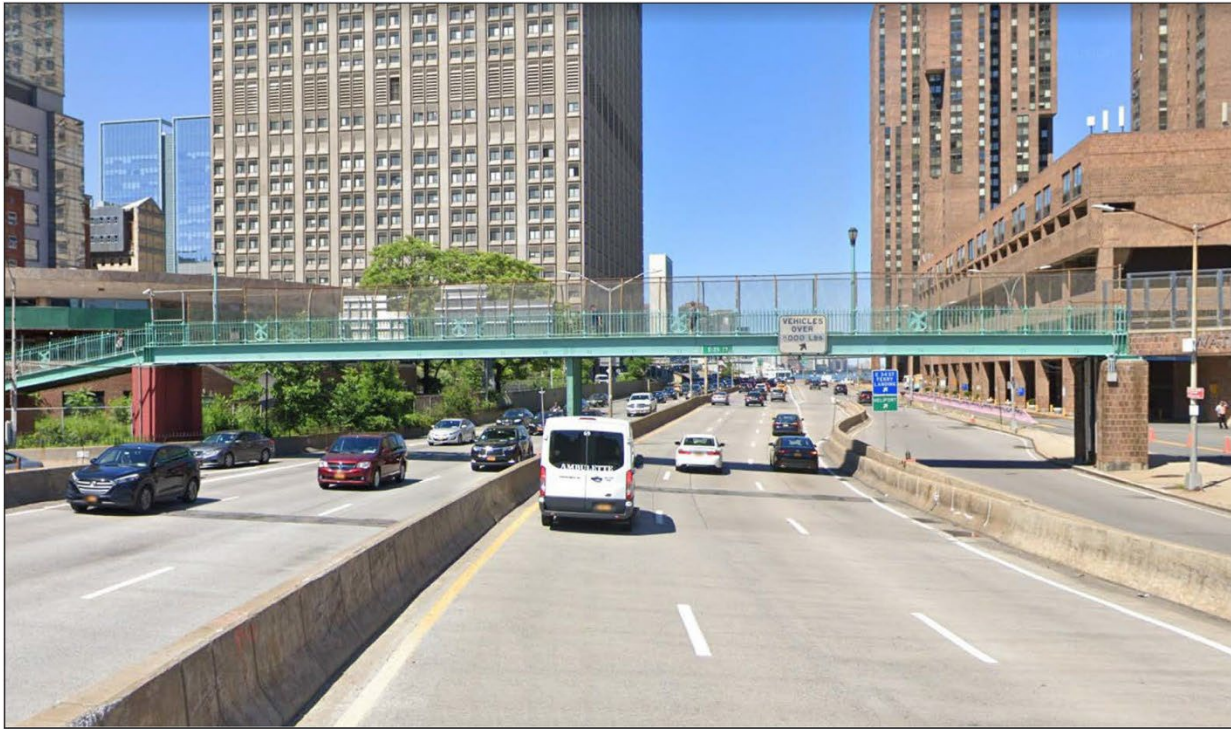


No Action Alternative, view west

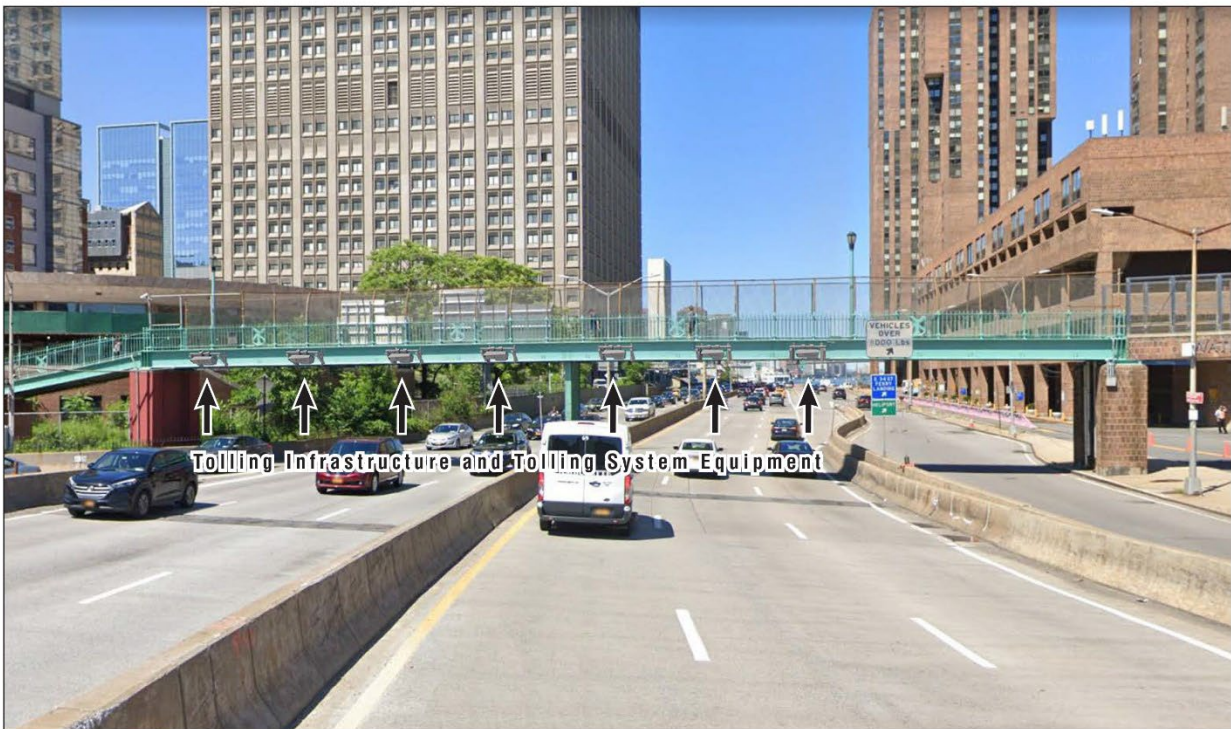


CBD Tolling Alternative, view west

Figure 9-10. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: FDR Drive at East 5th Street



No Action Alternative, view north



CBD Tolling Alternative, view north

Figure 9-11. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Manhattan Bridge Westbound Center Lanes



No Action Alternative, view northwest

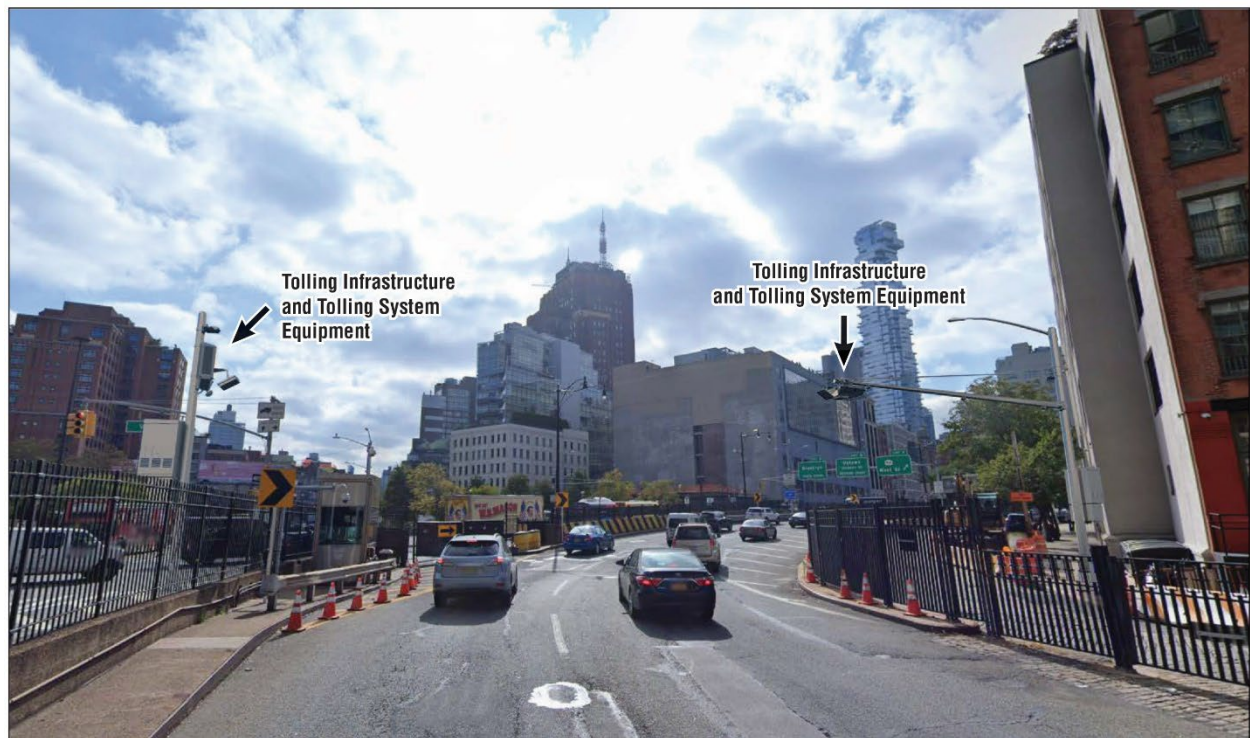


CBD Tolling Alternative, view northwest

Figure 9-12. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Vestry Street at Holland Tunnel Exit



No Action Alternative, view south



CBD Tolling Alternative, view south

Figure 9-13. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: High Line at Tenth Avenue and West 30th Street



No Action Alternative, view north on Tenth Avenue



CBD Tolling Alternative, view north on Tenth Avenue

Figure 9-14a. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Lincoln Tunnel North Tube



No Action Alternative

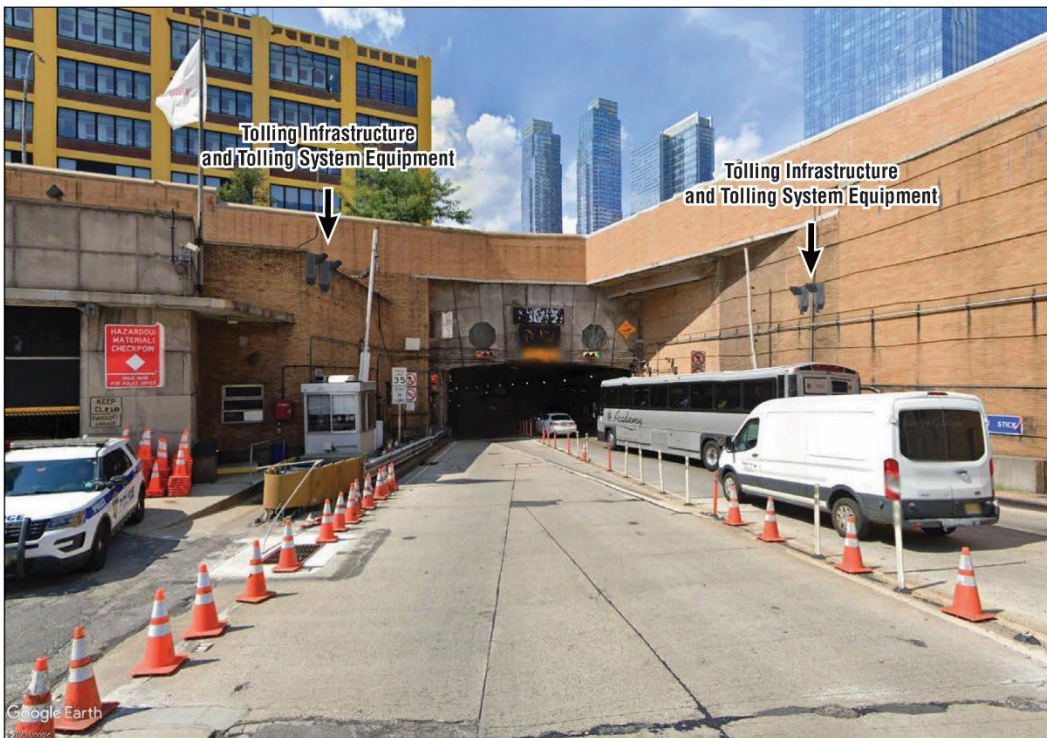


CBD Tolling Alternative

Figure 9-14b. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: Lincoln Tunnel Center Tube



No Action Alternative



CBD Tolling Alternative

Figure 9-15. Comparison Views of No Action Alternative and CBD Tolling Alternative: West 40th Street West of Ninth Avenue



No Action Alternative, view northeast



CBD Tolling Alternative, view northeast

Figure 9-16. Rendering of Proposed New Signage, Fifth Avenue between East 66th and 67th Streets



Figure 9-17. Rendering of Proposed New Signage, Fifth Avenue between East 62nd and 63rd Streets



Figure 9-18. Rendering of Proposed New Signage, Fifth Avenue at East 60th Street



Attachment 1

Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidance, *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects* (January 2015),⁸ provides procedures for assessing the impact of roadway projects on prominent visual resources and aesthetic conditions of the surrounding communities. The guidance begins with a “visual impact assessment (VIA) decision tree,” a process to determine whether a VIA is required for a project and, if so, the appropriate level of documentation, ranging from a VIA memorandum, to an abbreviated VIA, a standard VIA, or an expanded VIA. The appropriate level of analysis is based on the potential visual effects of a project. The guidance calls for a scoping tool, the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) Scoping Questionnaire, to help determine first if a visual impact assessment is necessary, and if so, the level of detail needed to fulfill regulatory and judicial requirements.⁹ Noting that “the assessment of visual impacts should not place an undue burden on the government entities providing those transportation services and improvements necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of the communities they serve,” the guidance recommends that no assessment be prepared if there would be no noticeable visible changes to visual resources, viewers, or visual quality and that if there would be a visual change, the level of assessment be tailored to the potential level of visual change.¹⁰

The Project Sponsors completed the Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire for the Central Business District (CBD) Tolling Program (the Project), and based on the resulting score for the Project, determined that no visual impact assessment is required. This appendix provides the Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire that the Project Sponsors completed for the Project.

The FHWA guidance notes that producing a Visual Impact Assessment can be complicated and it describes recommended skills, training, and experience for authors of a Visual Impact Assessment. The Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire provided in this appendix was prepared, as noted, by Christopher M. Calvert, AICP, a Senior Vice President at AKRF, Inc. Mr. Calvert is an urban planner with 25 years of experience in preparing environmental assessments for large-scale FHWA transportation projects. Given that the Scoping Questionnaire demonstrates that no Visual Impact Assessment is needed for the Project, a practitioner with the recommended skills, training, and experience for authors of such an assessment is not necessary.

⁸ Federal Highway Administration. January 2015. *Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects*. FHWA-HEP-15-029. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx.

⁹ Refer to FHWA’s *Visual Impact Assessment Guidelines of Highway Projects*, Chapter 3, for more information. https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/other_topics/VIA_Guidelines_for_Highway_Projects.aspx#chap3.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 3–5.

Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire

Project Name: **Central Business District Tolling Program**

Site Visit Date: **Various, 2019, 2020, 2021**

Location: **New York County (Manhattan), New York**

Time: **9 AM - 3 PM**

Special Conditions/Notes: **The area of visual effect is the area where proposed tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment would be installed, in Manhattan generally south of 61st Street.**

Environmental Compatibility

1. *Will the project result in a noticeable change in the physical characteristics of the existing environment? (Consider all project components and construction impacts - both permanent and temporary, including landform changes, structures, noise barriers, vegetation removal, railing, signage, and contractor activities.)*

- High level of permanent change (3) Moderate level of permanent change (2)
 Low level of permanent or temporary change (1) No Noticeable Change (0)

2. *Will the project complement or contrast with the visual character desired by the community? (Evaluate the scale and extent of the 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 change will be viewed by the public as positive or negative? Research planning documents, or talk with local planners and community representatives to understand the type of visual environment local residents envision for their community.)*

- Low Compatibility (3) Moderate Compatibility (2)
 High compatibility (1)

3. *What level of local concern is there for the types of project features (e.g., bridge structures, large excavations, sound barriers, or median planting removal) and construction impacts that are proposed? (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.)*

- High concern (3) Moderate concern (2)
 Low concern (1) Negligible Project Features (0)

4. *Is it anticipated that to mitigate visual impacts, it may be necessary to develop extensive or novel mitigation strategies to avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse impacts or will using conventional mitigation strategies, such as landscape or architectural treatment adequately mitigate adverse visual impacts?*
- Extensive Non-Conventional Mitigation Likely (3) Some non-conventional Mitigation Likely (2)
- Only Conventional Mitigation Likely (1) No Mitigation Likely (0)
5. Will this project, when seen collectively with other projects, result in an aggregate adverse change (cumulative impacts) in overall visual quality or character? (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.)
- Cumulative Impacts likely: 0-5 years (3) Cumulative Impacts likely: 6-10 years (2)
- Cumulative Impacts unlikely (1)

Viewer Sensitivity

1. *What is the potential that the project proposal may be controversial within the community, or opposed by any organized group? (This can be researched initially by talking with the state DOT and local agency management and staff familiar with the affected community's sentiments as evidenced by past projects and/or current information.)*
- High Potential (3) Moderate Potential (2)
- Low Potential (1) No Potential (0)
2. *How sensitive are potential viewer-groups likely to be regarding visible changes proposed by the project? (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.)*
- High Sensitivity (3) Moderate Sensitivity (2)
- Low Sensitivity (1)

3. *To what degree does the project's aesthetic approach appear to be consistent with applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, policies or standards?*

Low Compatibility (3)

Moderate Compatibility (2)

High compatibility (1)

4. *Are permits going to be required by outside regulatory agencies (i.e., Federal, State, or local)?* (Permit requirements can have an unintended consequence on the visual environment. Anticipated permits, as well as specific permit requirements - which are defined by the permitter, may be determined by talking with the project environmental planner and project engineer. Note: coordinate with the state DOT representative responsible for obtaining the permit prior to communicating directly with any permitting agency. Permits that may benefit from additional analysis include permits that may result in visible built features, such as infiltration basins or devices under a storm water permit or a retaining wall for wetland avoidance or permits for work in sensitive areas such as coastal development permits or on Federal lands, such as impacts to Wild and Scenic Rivers.)

Yes (3)

Maybe (2)

No (1)

5. *Will the project sponsor or public benefit from a more detailed visual analysis in order to help reach consensus on a course of action to address potential visual impacts?* (Consider the proposed project features, possible visual impacts, and probable mitigation recommendations.)

Yes (3)

Maybe (2)

No (1)

Determining the Level of Visual Impact Assessment

Total the scores of the answers to all ten questions on the Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire. Use the total score from the questionnaire as an indicator of the appropriate level of VIA to perform for the project. Confirm that the level suggested by the checklist is consistent with the project teams' professional judgments. If there remains doubt about whether a VIA needs to be completed, it may be prudent to conduct an Abbreviated VIA. If there remains doubt about the level of the VIA, begin with the simpler VIA process. If visual impacts emerge as a more substantial concern than anticipated, the level of VIA documentation can always be increased.

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

Score 25-30

An *Expanded VIA* is probably necessary. It is recommended that it should be preceded by a formal visual scoping study prior to beginning the VIA to alert the project team to potential highly adverse impacts and to develop new project alternatives to avoid those impacts. These technical studies will likely receive state-wide, even national, public review. Extensive use of visual simulations and a comprehensive public involvement program would be typical.

Score 20-24

A *Standard VIA* is recommended. This technical study will likely receive extensive local, perhaps state-wide, 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 processes to determine visual preferences.

Score 15-19

An *Abbreviated VIA* would briefly describe project features, impacts and mitigation requirements. Visual simulations would be optional. An Abbreviated VIA would receive little direct public interest beyond a summary of its findings in the project's environmental documents. Visual preferences would be based on observation and review of planning and policy documents by local jurisdictions.

Score 10-14

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

Score 6-9

No noticeable physical changes to the environment are proposed and no further analysis is required. Print out a copy of this completed questionnaire for your project file to document that there is no effect. A *VIA Memorandum* may be used to document that there is no effect and to explain the approach used for the determination.