

9. Visual Resources

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the potential effects of implementation of the CBD Tolling Alternative on visual resources and aesthetic conditions in the local study area for tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment.¹ FHWA provides procedures for assessing the impact of roadway projects on prominent visual resources and aesthetic conditions of the surrounding communities. FHWA’s Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) guidance begins with a decision tree, a process that determines whether a VIA is required for a project and, if so, the appropriate level of documentation. The guidance calls for a scoping tool—the VIA Scoping Questionnaire—to help determine first if a VIA is necessary, and if so, the level of detail needed to fulfill regulatory and judicial requirements.² The Project Sponsors completed the VIA Scoping Questionnaire, and the resulting score for the Project determined that no VIA is required (see **Appendix 9, “Visual Resources”**). Nonetheless, the Project Sponsors prepared a detailed study to describe the physical elements of the CBD Tolling Alternative that could affect the visual environment (see **Appendix 9**). The chapter summarizes the results and demonstrates that the effects of the Project would be neutral and not adverse.

9.2 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

For the CBD Tolling Alternative, the area of visual effect is a cultural environment, as defined by FHWA guidance, 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 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 FHWA guidance.

¹ FHWA. 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.

9.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The proposed tolling infrastructure, tolling system equipment, and signage associated with the CBD Tolling Alternative would be similar to existing infrastructure and signage present along the roadways throughout the Manhattan CBD and nearby areas. The tolling infrastructure would include the following:

- Poles and mast arms similar to those used for streetlights and traffic lights today
- Cameras, detectors, and other equipment mounted from tolling infrastructure
- Signage similar in size and character to signs already present throughout Manhattan

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.

The tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment has been designed to minimize its visual impact, by using existing infrastructure as much as practicable and coordinating the appearance of new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment with the existing street furniture palette. The proposed tolling system equipment would be clustered into single enclosures to minimize the visual impact. 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.

9.4 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. **Table 9-1** summarizes the effects of the Project.

Table 9-1. Summary of Effects of the CBD Tolling Alternative on Visual Resources

SUMMARY OF EFFECTS	EFFECT FOR ALL TOLLING SCENARIOS	POTENTIAL ADVERSE EFFECT	MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENTS
Changes in visual environment resulting from new tolling infrastructure and tolling system equipment	Infrastructure and equipment would be similar in form to streetlight poles, sign poles, or similar structures already in use throughout New York City. 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 Project would have a neutral effect on viewer groups and no adverse effect on visual resources.	No	No mitigation needed. No adverse effects.