

Supplemental Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum

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Subject:	Supplemental Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum, ,

This memorandum addresses potential impacts on visual resources from the Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Replacement Project. The San Bernardino County Transportation Agency (SBCTA), in cooperation with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), is proposing to replace the existing Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge (Bridge Number 54C-066) over the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail yard in the City of San Bernardino, San Bernardino County, California.

Preparation of a Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum (VIAM) for the project was originally completed and approved in June 2009 (Caltrans 2009). A National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was adopted for the project in June 2011 (Caltrans 2011). The project, which involves a road/railroad grade separation, is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Since the NEPA document was adopted, it has been noted that additional project improvements/refinements are needed that were not included in the 2009 VIAM and adopted 2011 NEPA document. The project and these additional improvements are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Project Setting

The project would occur at Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge in the City of San Bernardino, San Bernardino County, California (Figures 1 and 2) (54C-066), in Section 7, Township 1 South, and Range 4 West on the U.S. Geological Survey San Bernardino South 7.5-minute quadrangle map. The

project setting has remained largely unchanged since the VIAM was adopted in 2009 and the NEPA FONSI was adopted in 2011. The study area is relatively flat and open, with minimal vegetation. Adjacent urban development and the BNSF Railroad Intermodal Facility buildings and tracks create an urban environment with mostly paved surfaces and minimal open areas that support landscaping or ruderal vegetation. Scenic vista views are available from the existing Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge to the surrounding mountain ranges in the background when not obscured by atmospheric haze. However, the foreground views associated with the vistas are dominated by the industrialized landscape associated with the rail facilities, vertical utility poles, and a BNSF smokestack. The bridge itself is most visible in areas west of the project site because of the slightly elevated topography, minimal development, and sparse vegetation. Areas southeast of the project site have the most limited views because of dense residential and commercial development, topography, and heavy vegetation. Views of the bridge are relatively unobstructed from the eastern and western ends of the rail yard.

Land uses in the study area include industrial, commercial, residential, and public facilities. The majority of the study area incorporates the industrial uses surrounding and within the BNSF rail yard. A Metrolink station, parking facilities, and a historical Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe passenger and freight depot is adjacent to the project site, within the southeast quadrant of the study area. Commercial uses are situated along Mount Vernon Avenue and 5th Street, north of the rail yard, between Mount Vernon Avenue and Interstate 215. Residential areas are located mainly within the northwest, northeast, and southeast quadrants of the study area, with a small pocket of residential uses within the southwest quadrant. Public facilities near the study area include Lytle Creek Wash and Channel and Nunez Park, which are west of the project site, and La Plaza Park, which is adjacent to Mount Vernon Avenue and north of the project site.

The primary visual change since the 2009 VIAM and 2011 NEPA document is a two-story parking garage, which is now located between West 2nd and 3rd Streets and between Mount Vernon Avenue and Metrolink Way. In addition, south of the West 4th Street cul-de-sac, the location of one crane repair lift has been shifted. One additional crane has been added so that two crane repair lifts are visible from Kingman Street instead of one. Lastly, the west side of the 500 block of Mount Vernon Avenue, north of the BNSF rail yard and between Route 66 and Spruce Street, has undergone redevelopment, including an ampm gas station, which has improved the quality of views along this portion of Mount Vernon Avenue by replacing poorly maintained buildings with well-maintained structures and site landscaping.

Project Effects

The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3 – Bridge Replacement) identified in the adopted NEPA document extended from just south of 5th Street to just north of Kingman Street. Given the identified project improvements/refinements, the project would now extend from just south of 5th Street to Rialto Avenue (see Figure 3).

The proposed project would result in the following improvements/refinements:

- A portion of the BNSF intermodal operations/parking area east of the bridge, on the north side of the existing tracks, would be removed, and a new paved area between Kingman Street and West 4th Street from Cabrera Avenue to Mount Vernon Avenue would be constructed (this would involve acquisition and removal of existing residences/businesses within these limits). A

12-foot-tall block wall and a 20-foot-wide landscape buffer would be constructed along Kingman Street and Cabrera Avenue to shield this area from surrounding uses.

- Just west of Mount Vernon Avenue, West 4th Street will form an intersection with Cabrera Avenue.
- The existing Eagle Building and four associated buildings would be relocated from the east side of Mount Vernon Avenue to the west side of Mount Vernon Avenue.
- The two existing crane repair pads would be relocated north of their current location (one on either side of Mount Vernon Avenue).
- Temporary Tracks 218 identified in the adopted NEPA document, would now be a permanent rail track. A new permanent track (Track 219) would be constructed.
- Tracks 216 and 217 would be realigned in the immediate vicinity of the new bridge.
- The structures at the southwest end of the bridge, bordered by Mount Vernon Avenue to the east, the alley behind the structures to the west, West 3rd Street to the north, and West 2nd Street to the south, would be acquired and removed.
- The access associated with structures fronting Mount Vernon Avenue south of West 2nd Street and north of Kingman Street would be reconstructed as needed to match the new road/sidewalk grade.

Consistent with the updated project layout, the following would be incorporated:

- Utilities would be relocated as needed to accommodate the proposed improvements.
- Best management practices for water quality treatment would be provided as part of the proposed project where feasible.
- Signage would be incorporated within the project's limits of disturbance where necessary.
- Pedestrian facilities would be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act standards.
- Geotechnical borings would be conducted within the project's limits of disturbance as needed for the design of the project.
- Temporary advanced signage would be required during construction, which would involve portable changeable message signs or other temporary signage that would not require ground disturbance.

As described in the 2009 VIAM and 2011 NEPA document, no state or local scenic routes would be affected by the proposed project; this is consistent with the current proposed changes. Many of these changes would not result in notable changes to the visual landscape.

Relocating the Eagle Building and ancillary buildings to the east side of Mount Vernon Avenue; the two existing crane repair pads north of their current location, on the west side of Mount Vernon Avenue; and utility lines to accommodate proposed improvements would only shift the location of existing features in the visual landscape and would not add or remove any features. Realignment of Tracks 216 and 217 would occur along an existing vehicular travel way in the rail yard. Permanent Tracks 218 and 219 would be built in areas that are currently used for freight storage. These areas are in proximity to the existing tracks and would not result in a notable change to the visual

landscape. The historic depot is south of where Tracks 218 and 219 would be built and outside the 2017 limits of disturbance. Views from the depot toward Tracks 218 and 219 would be available when rail cars are not parked on the sidings. Views from the depot would not be affected by the proposed changes because the new tracks would not stand out within the existing setting, an area where there are already many tracks within view.

Reconstructing street access along both sides of Mount Vernon Avenue to match the new road/sidewalk grades between West 2nd Street and Kingman Street would require temporary easements for construction and staging, which would result in minor changes to the visual landscape if landscaping and site features such as fencing, retaining walls, or mailboxes are affected. Access along both sides of Mount Vernon Avenue would need to be reconstructed to comply with Deputy Directive-64-R1, *Complete Streets - Integrating the Transportation System*, which directs that projects provide for the safety and mobility needs of all users with legal access to a transportation facility; implement current design standards that meet the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users; and ensure that bicycle, pedestrian, and transit travel elements are included in plans (Caltrans 2008). Implementation of Avoidance and Minimization Measure VIS-1 would relocate or replace affected landscaping, fencing, and other landscape features to the degree possible, reducing visual impacts. In addition, Avoidance and Minimization Measure VIS-2 would ensure that staging areas would be screened from residences, minimizing the amount of visual disruption caused by construction staging.

It is anticipated that project construction would begin in the fall of 2019 and be completed by the fall of 2021. Project construction would occur year-round. In addition, the potential exists for some nighttime construction to occur. This would create the need for high-intensity lighting. However, such lighting would not result in adverse impacts at most locations because residential receptors, which have high viewer sensitivity, would be some distance away or not within sight of the construction area. Furthermore, roadway travelers would be exposed to such lighting very briefly as they pass by. However, if construction activities occur at night in locations that are directly adjacent to residences, then this lighting could shine into residences and disturb residents in their homes. Implementation of Avoidance and Minimization Measures VIS-3 and VIS-4 would ensure that nighttime construction would not occur directly adjacent to residences and that the construction contractor would minimize project-related light and glare to the maximum extent feasible during nighttime construction activities.

The only notable visual change resulting from the proposed improvements/refinements would be related to the acquisition and removal of existing residences and businesses located northwest of the rail yard on the block bordered by Kingman Street, West 4th Street, Cabrera Avenue, and Mount Vernon Avenue and southwest of the rail yard on a half block bordered by Mount Vernon Avenue, an alley behind the structures, West 3rd Street, and West 2nd Street. The removals on the block located northwest of the rail yard would accommodate the proposed BNSF intermodal operations area, which would include a 12-foot-high block wall and a 20-foot-wide landscape buffer along Cabrera Avenue and Kingman Street to obstruct views of the area from adjacent residential locations. The removal of residential dwellings and businesses on the northwest block would expand the view of facilities associated with the rail yard in the vicinity. However, many of the affected parcels are vacant lots with little aesthetic value. The remainder of the affected parcels are occupied properties with residential or small business uses. Many of the occupied properties have well-kept structures and landscaping. However, some of the occupied properties show signs of years of deferred maintenance, with buildings and site features (e.g., fencing, parking areas) that are deteriorated. The properties have degraded visual conditions and little or no landscaping. Similarly, the properties on

the southwest half of the block range from being well kept to poorly repaired. The existing visual conditions on the affected blocks are the same as on the surrounding blocks. The removal of residences and businesses on the northwest block and southwest half block would not greatly alter the visual character of the study area because rail facilities and local roadways already dominate the landscape. The conversion of these blocks constitutes a relatively small expansion compared with the overall scale of the existing facilities. However, residential and commercial receptors would see these changes and would most likely view them negatively. The 12-foot-high block wall and 20-foot-wide landscape buffer along Kingman Street and Cabrera Avenue would improve project aesthetics by providing a vegetative buffer and visual relief from the rail yard for adjacent residents. However, the block wall would introduce a tall, stark vertical surface that detracts from the visual landscape if not properly designed, especially until the landscape buffer matures. In addition, the flat wall surface could be used for graffiti, which would further detract from and degrade views. Similarly, if not properly designed, the proposed landscape buffer may not achieve the desired effect to screen the wall and improve aesthetics. Implementation of Avoidance and Minimization Measures VIS-5 and VIS-7 would ensure that the wall is designed with aesthetic considerations and that the landscape buffer achieves intended goals to improve project aesthetics and wall screening.

Conclusion

There would be no substantial impacts on scenic highways, scenic vistas, or eligible or listed historic structures beyond the changes described in the 2009 VIAM and 2011 NEPA document. Project construction activities would result in only temporary visual changes, lasting no longer than approximately 2.5 years, which would not negatively affect viewers. The removal of residences and businesses would most likely be perceived negatively by remaining residents, but the proposed 12-foot-high block wall and 20-foot-wide landscape buffer would provide aesthetic relief for adjacent viewers by blocking views of the rail yard. Implementation of the avoidance and minimization measures would ensure that project impacts would be minimized.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures have been identified to ensure that visual impacts are minimized. This section provides additional avoidance and/or minimization measures to address specific visual impacts, beyond those specified in the 2009 VIAM and 2011 NEPA document. These will be designed and implemented with concurrence from the District Landscape Architect. The following measures to avoid or minimize visual impacts will be incorporated into the project:

VIS-1 Replace or Relocate Site Features and Landscaping Affected by the Project.

Landscaping and related appurtenances (e.g., fencing, driveway gates, similar features) associated with private properties that are unaffected by relocations will be relocated or replaced where appropriate to the degree possible to reduce visual impacts.

VIS-2 Install Visual Barriers between Construction Work Areas and Residential Receptors.

Residential receptors have high viewer sensitivity. Therefore, the contractor shall install and maintain temporary visual barriers to obstruct undesirable views of construction activities for residential viewers that are located directly adjacent to or abutting the construction site. The visual barrier may be chain link fencing with privacy slats, fencing with windscreen material, wood, or other similar barriers. The visual barrier shall be a minimum of six feet high to help maintain the privacy of residents and block ground-level views toward

construction activities. Although this visual barrier would introduce a visual intrusion, it would greatly reduce visual effects associated with visible construction activities and screen construction staging areas where the protection of privacy is deemed desirable.

- VIS-3 Limit Construction Directly Adjacent to Residences to Daylight Hours.** Construction activities that are located directly adjacent to residences will not take place before or past daylight hours (which vary according to season). This would reduce the amount of construction experienced by residential viewers, because most construction activities would occur during business hours (when most residents are at work), and eliminate the need to introduce high-wattage lighting sources to operate in the dark near residences during construction.
- VIS-4 Minimize Fugitive Light from Portable Sources Used for Construction.** The construction contractor shall minimize project-related light and glare to the maximum extent feasible, given safety considerations. Color-corrected halide lights will be used. Portable lights will be operated at the lowest allowable wattage and height. For construction occurring on the ground, portable lights will be raised to a height no greater than 20 feet. All lights will be screened and directed downward, toward work activities, and away from the night sky and nearby residents to the maximum extent possible. The number of nighttime lights used will be minimized to the greatest extent possible.
- VIS-5 Apply Aesthetic Design Treatments to Wall.** Aesthetic design treatments shall be applied to the block wall located along Cabrera Avenue and Kingman Street. Design of the block wall shall evaluate similar, local structures with historic value or that are well-designed and be developed to match and transition to the Mt. Vernon Avenue Streetscape Design Guidelines, detailed within the City's *Paseo Las Placitas Specific Plan and EIR for the Mt. Vernon Corridor* plan document from 1992, to ensure that the wall does not create further visual discordance in the landscape. Following the Mt. Vernon Avenue Streetscape Design Guidelines, the wall shall implement aesthetic design features such as mimicking natural material (e.g., stone or rock surfacing) or architectural stylings (e.g., stucco or plaster over adobe brick) and integral color to reduce visibility and to better blend with the landscape. Wall color will be chosen from the *Paseo Las Placitas Specific Plan and EIR for the Mt. Vernon Corridor*. If the color selection is between 2 or 3 colors, then it is suggested that one of the darker shades be selected. Choosing a shade that is darker will allow the surface to recede and blend within the visual landscape whereas lighter colors advance and are more apparent within the visual landscape. Aesthetic treatments for the wall will be submitted to the Caltrans District 8, District Landscape Architect for review and approval. Regardless of the design treatment applied, SBCTA or its contractor will inspect the wall quarterly and perform graffiti abatement to avoid creating a visual nuisance. However, if notified that graffiti is present, graffiti abatement will occur within one week of being notified.
- VIS-6 Apply Best Management Practices to the Landscaping Plan.** Vegetative accents and screening will be installed to aid in a perceived reduction in the scale and mass of the block wall along Cabrera Avenue and Kingman Street, while accentuating the design treatment that will be applied to the wall surface (refer to Measure VIS-5). Plant selection will be based on its ability to screen the wall and provide aesthetic accents and will include evergreen and deciduous tree and shrub species that would provide multi layering, seasonal variety, and be visually pleasing to improve aesthetics. The design shall be developed to match and transition to the Mt. Vernon Avenue Streetscape Design Guidelines detailed

within the City's *Paseo Las Placitas Specific Plan and EIR for the Mt. Vernon Corridor* plan document from 1992. Plant species will be selected from the plant palette identified within the *Landscape Materials* section of the *Paseo Las Placitas Specific Plan and EIR for the Mt. Vernon Corridor*. The landscaping plan will be submitted to the Caltrans District 8, District Landscape Architect for review and approval. Under no circumstances will any invasive plant species be used at any location. Vegetation shall be planted within the first six months following Project completion. An irrigation and maintenance program shall be implemented during the plant establishment period. The irrigation and maintenance program will be submitted to the Caltrans District 8, District Landscape Architect for review and approval.

- VIS-7:** The aesthetic treatments for the new wall and buffer area in the northwest quadrant of the project site will be developed through workshops and coordination with San Bernardino County Transportation Authority, Caltrans District 8, District Landscape Architect and the City of San Bernardino

In addition to the measures listed above, mitigation measures MOA CR-6 through MOA CR-8 identified in the 2011 Memorandum of Agreement between Caltrans and the California State Historic Preservation Officer are still applicable and include additional design and landscape requirements for the replacement of the Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge.

Citations

California Department of Transportation. 2008. *Deputy Directive DD-64-R1: Complete Streets - Integrating the Transportation System*. Sacramento, CA. October.

California Department of Transportation. 2009. *Visual Impact Memorandum – Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project, City of San Bernardino, Caltrans District 8*. San Bernardino, CA. June.

California Department of Transportation. 2011. *Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project, Environmental Assessment and Programmatic Section 4(f) Evaluation*. June.

Attachments

Figure 1, Regional Vicinity Map

Figure 2, Project Location Map

Figure 3, Project Layout Map

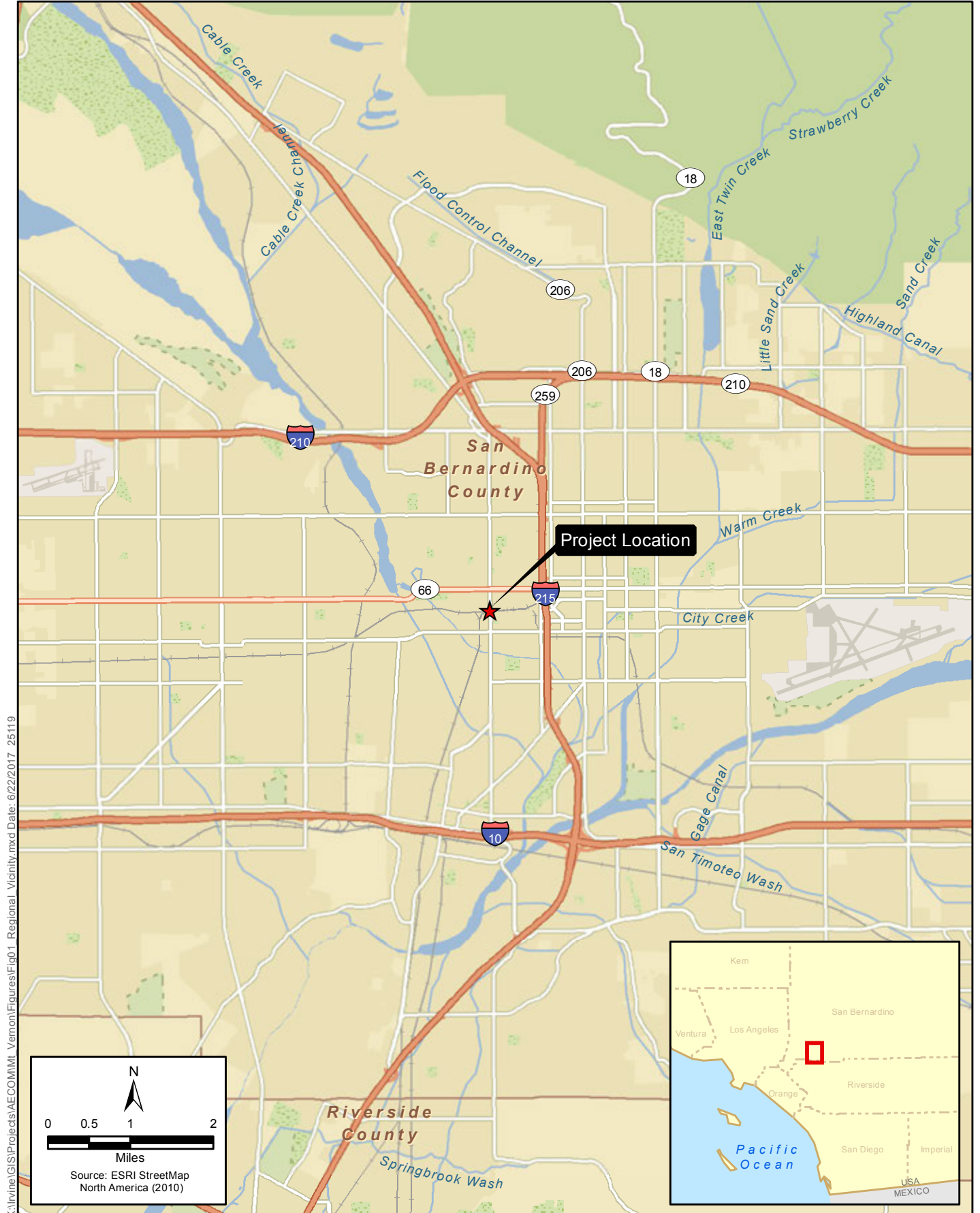


Figure 1
Regional Vicinity Map
Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project

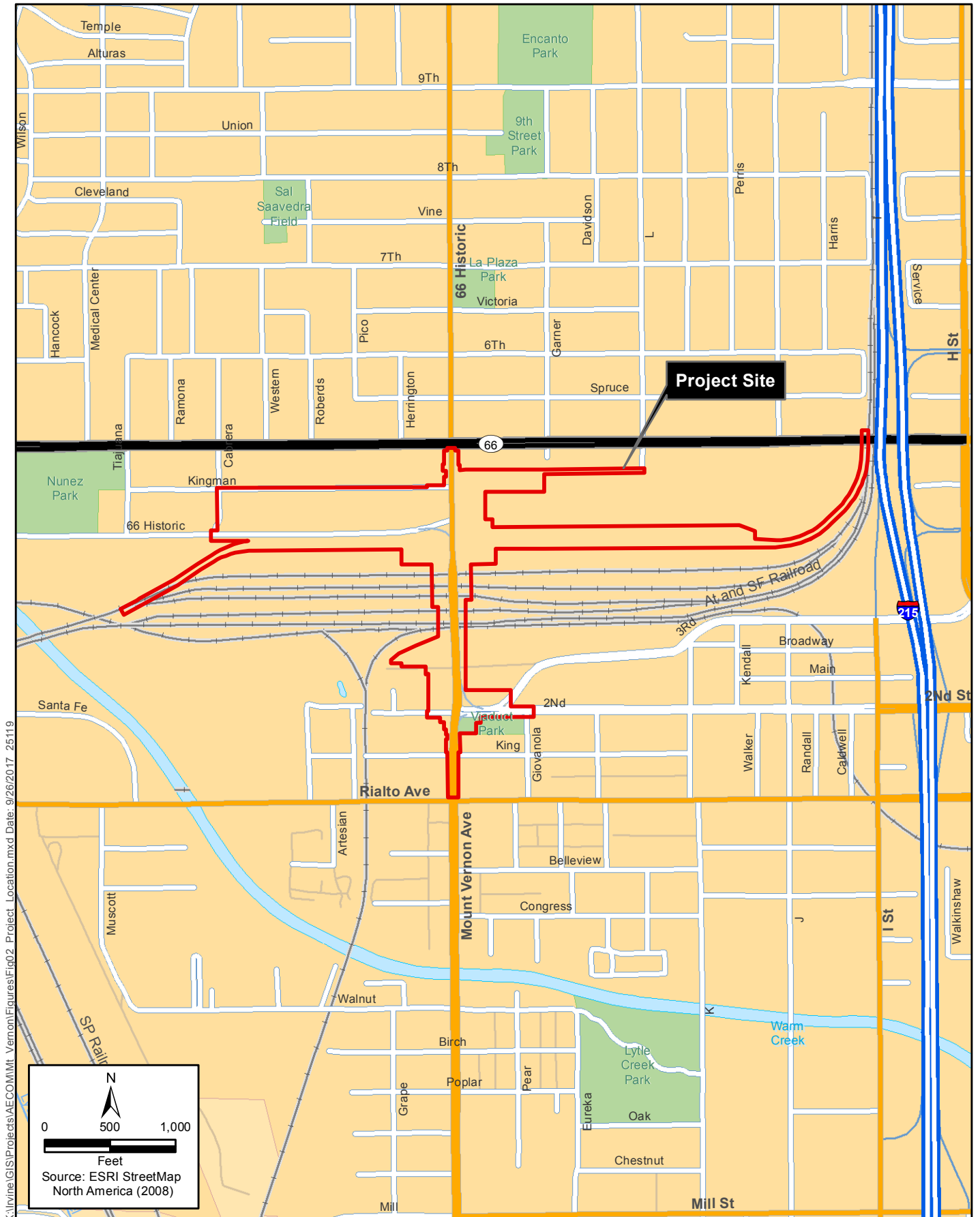


Figure 2
Project Location
Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project

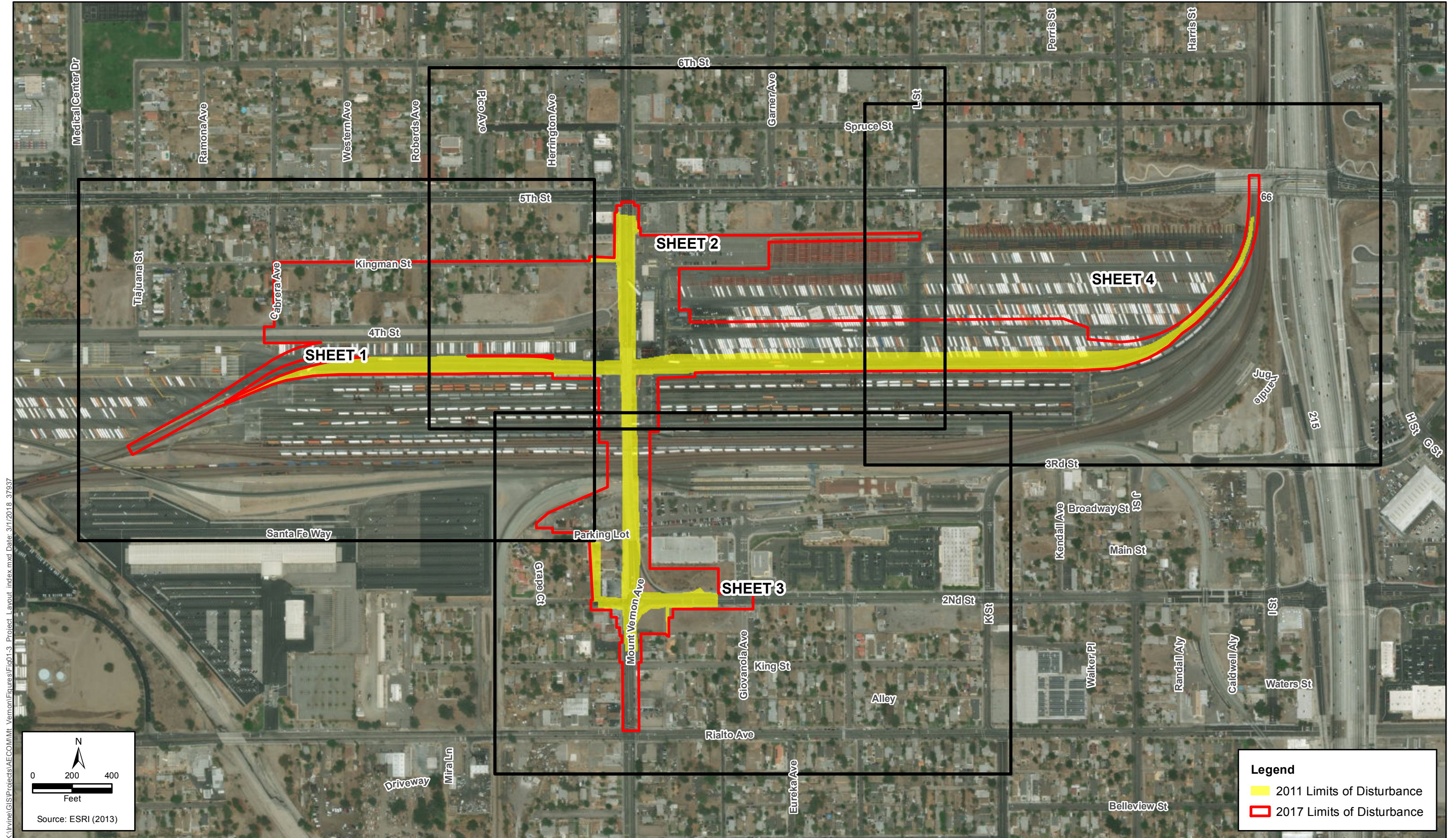


Figure 3
Project Layout Map Sheet Index
Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project

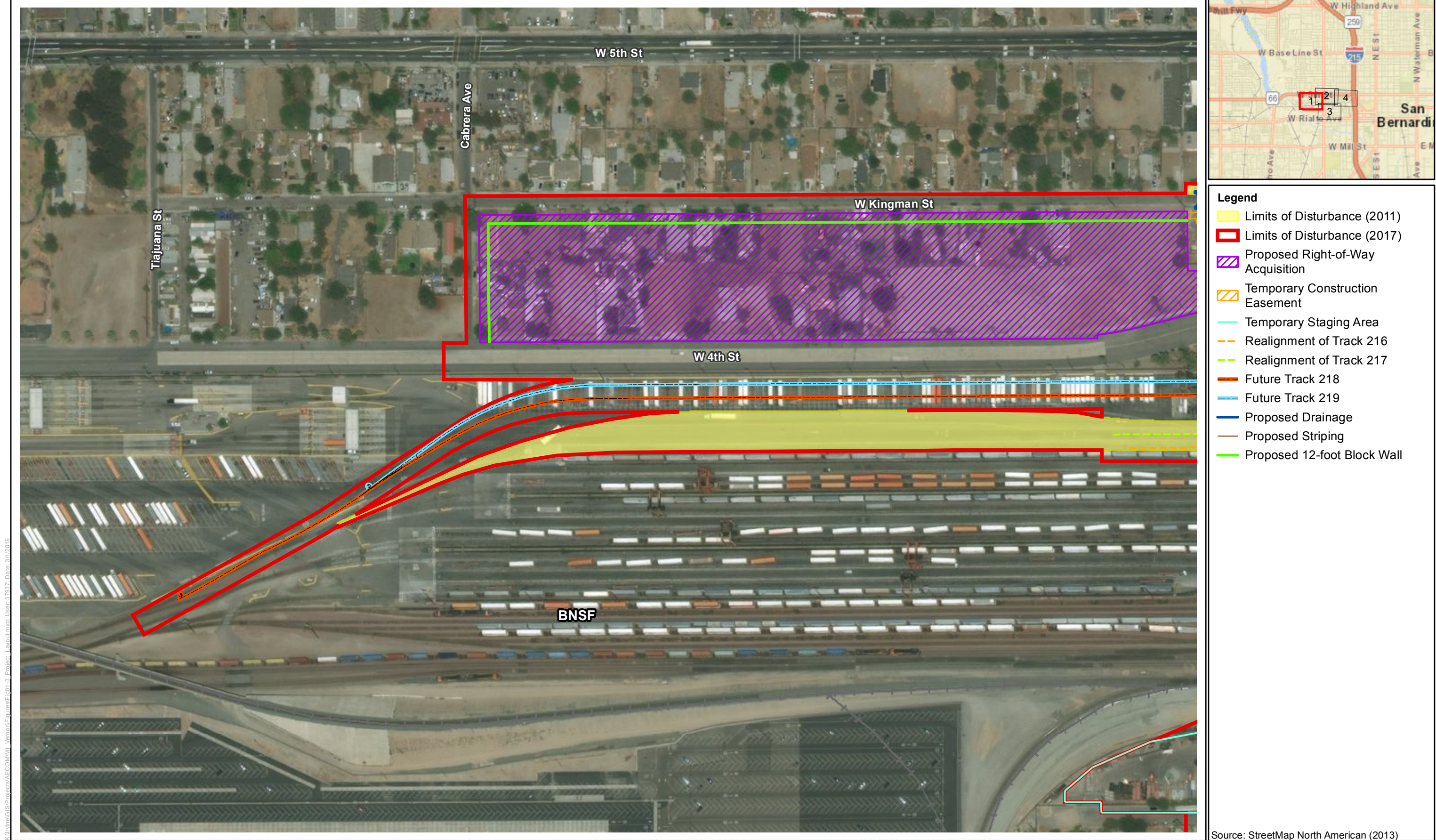
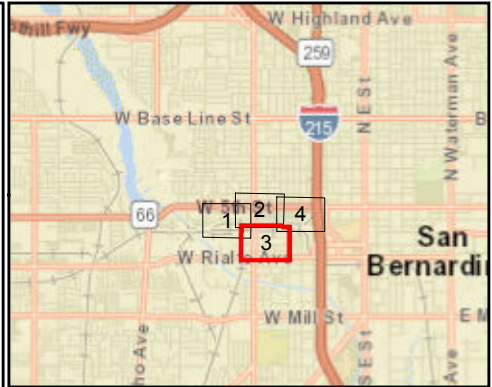
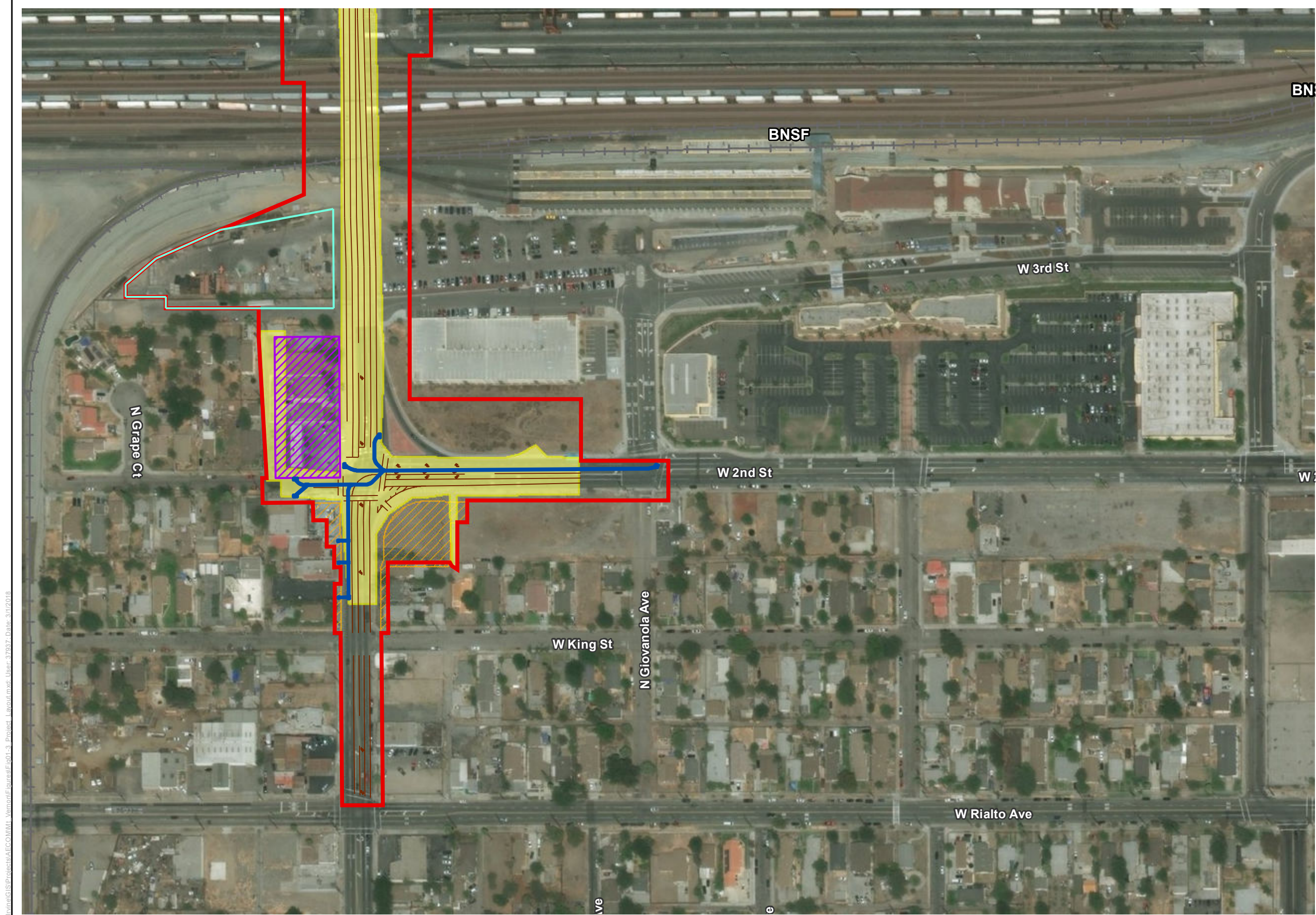


Figure 3 - Sheet 1
Project Layout Map
Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project



- Legend**
- Limits of Disturbance (2011)
 - Limits of Disturbance (2017)
 - Proposed Right-of-Way Acquisition
 - Temporary Construction Easement
 - Temporary Staging Area
 - Realignment of Track 216
 - Realignment of Track 217
 - Future Track 218
 - Future Track 219
 - Proposed Drainage
 - Proposed Striping
 - Proposed 12-foot Block Wall

Source: StreetMap North American (2013)



0 100 200
1:2,400 Feet

Figure 3 - Sheet 3
Project Layout Map
Mount Vernon Avenue Bridge Project



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1:2,400 Feet