CASE STUDIES FOR EVALUATING PHOTOSIMULATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Principle

"Worst-case" view for a KOP

Statement

All things being equal, the location and direction for a simulation photograph should represent a "worst-case" view.

Explanation

A key observation point (KOP) is a localized area with potential views of a proposed project, selected to represent a particular scenic resource or landscape type.

The selection of a "worst-case" viewpoint within a KOP is based on a consideration of several criteria:

- It is the view where the project is most visible in extent and exposure.
- It is at a time of day and season when the project presents the highest visual contrast with its surroundings.
- It is a publicly accessible location chosen after considering the potential number of viewers and their sensitivity to the visual change.
- It considers the sensitivity of the viewpoint and viewed landscape to viewers and others

The determination of the worst-case view is based on professional judgment. As such, the reasoning of the choice should be explained.

Case Study. Waterville Neighborhood

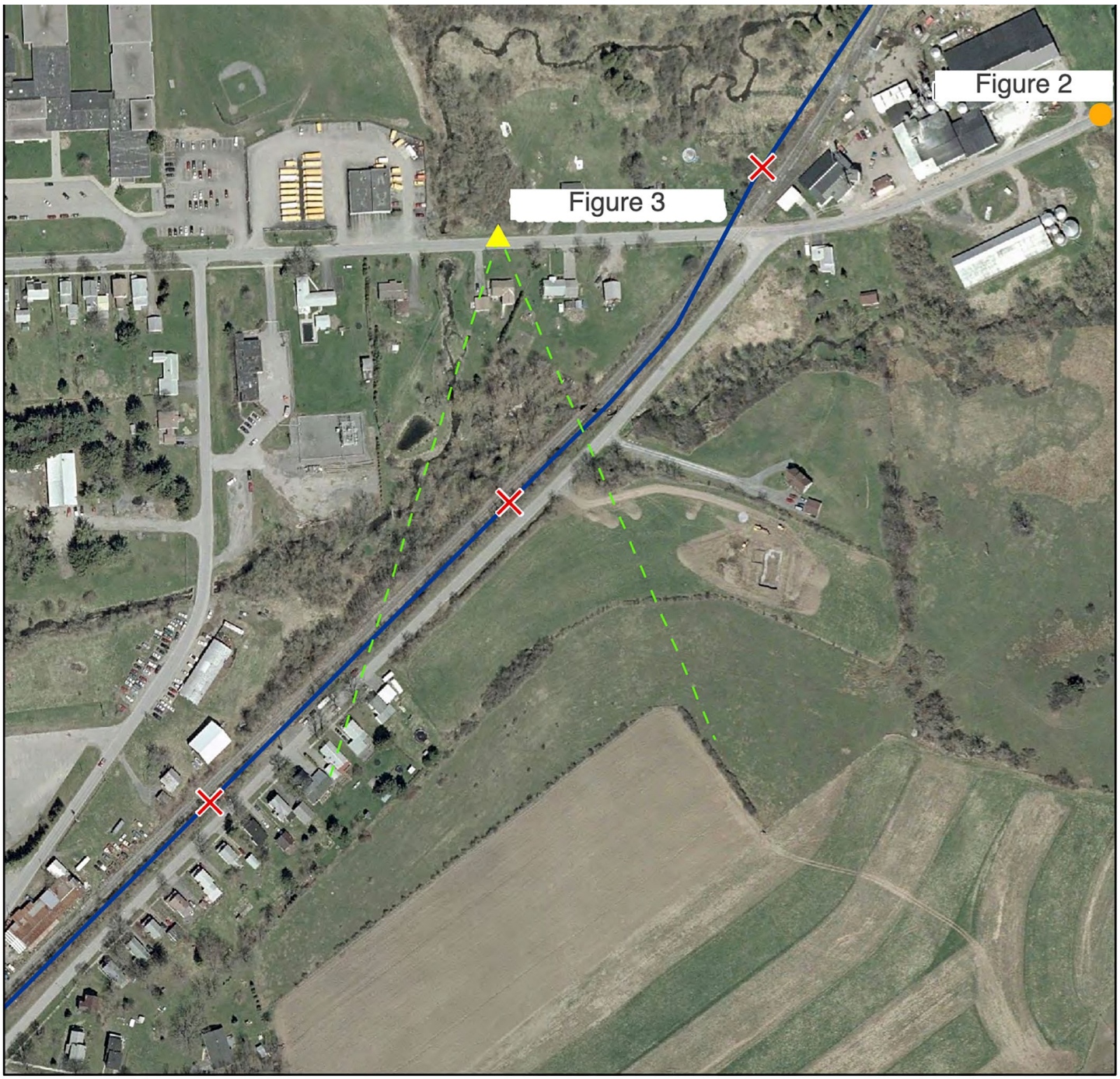
The New York Regional Interconnect was proposed as a 190-mile 1,200 MW high-voltage direct current transmission line from upstate New York to just outside New York City. It proposed to purchase easements within existing railroad rights-of-way, which brought it into conflict with the communities through which the railroad passed.

Waterville, a town with a 2010 population of 1,583 is representative of these communities. Figure 1 is an aerial photo of the northeast corner of the town. The applicant's simulation in Figure 2 shows the transmission line behind the farm and animal feed store on the right. As one continues along the road past the farm store and crosses the railroad tracks, they enter a residential neighborhood with an elementary school on the right and homes on the left. The community's simulation in Figure 3 shows the transmission line behind a house that is typical for the neighborhood. There are similar views throughout the neighborhood, including the school. For instance, at the bottom of the map in Figure 3 there are a dozen homes with the transmission line right across the street.

Discussion

The surrounding landscape's scenic quality affect the perceived visual impact — the higher the scenic quality, the greater the perceived impact. Identifying the worst-case view within a KOP must also consider this context. The farm store is both unattractive and atypical of the surrounding landscape character. It is therefore a poor choice to represent this KOPs.

FIGURE 1. This map shows the location of the NYRI passing through the Marshall neighborhood and the viewpoint locations for the simulations in Figures 2 and 3.



Visual Simulation 3
Context Map

Visual Simulation 3. View from Canning Factory Road, Town of Marshall, Oneida County. Near NYRI Viewpoint 4-7.

Visual Simulation 3
NYRI Viewpoint
Approx. Cone of Vision
Proposed Structure Locations
Preferred Alternative Route

0 300
1 inch = 300 feet
1:3,600

FIGURE 2. This is the applicant's simulation as one enters Waterville from the east. The transmission line follows the railroad tracks behind the farm and animal feed store on the right.



FIGURE 3. This is the community's simulation of the transmission line behind a house that is typical for the neighborhood.



Statement of Limitations: The simulations presented here were entered into the public record as part of a permitting process. They were prepared to be printed on 11-by-17-inch paper. However, in the process of distribution as PDFs they may have been substantially compressed. The figures presented here were clipped from these PDFs, converted to high quality JPGs and their resolution reduced. The original photosimulation has been substantially changed and as presented here should be used only as learning material.

Source: The figures used in this case study are taken from materials submitted to the New York State Public Service Commission.