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. Erie Canalway National Historic Landmark
The Erie Canalway is recognized for its role in shaping the American economy and settlement, as an embodiment of the Progressive Era emphasis on public works, and as a nationally significant work of early 20th century engineering and construction. Its navigation channels, locks, lift bridges, dams, power houses, and maintenance shops together represent a significant, distinctive, and exceptional entity. Currently, it is maintained for public recreation enjoyment as the NYS Canal System, with 524 miles of waterway and 365 miles of trails.

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. The Erie Canalway National Historic Landmark is one of several highly significant scenic resources that it would impact. The applicant's simulation is shown in Figure 2; a view from a parking area that focuses on a bright yellow access gate that gives no indication that the transmission line is crossing a national landmark at this location. In contrast, the community's simulation is from a viewpoint 250 ft to the east on the Erie Canalway Trail beside a railroad bridge that provides pedestrian path over the canal. This view of the transmission line is similar to the applicant's, but it clearly shows the relation of the transmission line to the Erie Canalway.

Discussion

Key observation points (KOPs) are selected to represent a particular scenic resource or landscape type. A simulation viewpoint must be selected to represent a "worst-case" view from the KOP. In this case, the KOP is a national landmark — the Erie Canalway — that is a significant recreation destination. A worst-case viewpoint needs to communicate why a KOP is important as well as provide a clear view of a project.

FIGURE 1. This map shows the location of the NYRI crossing of the Erie Canalway National Historic Landmark and the viewpoint locations for the simulations in Figures 2 and 3.



FIGURE 2. The applicant's simulation is from a parking area focusing on a bright yellow access gate and without a view of the Erie Canalway.



FIGURE 3. The community's simulation from the Erie Canalway Trail beside the railroad bridge that provides a pedestrian path over the canal.



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.