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Interstate 595 project to create jobs

How many jobs? At least 35,000 over the project's life, according to a federal estimate

By Michael Turnbull

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The planned rebuilding of Interstate 595 is giving renewed hope to unemployed South Floridians who covet the thousands of jobs the \$1.79 billion project is expected to generate.

The state expects to sign a contract with Spanish construction conglomerate ACS Infrastructure Development within the next week.

Once that happens, the frenzied task of filling jobs will begin.

Florida's jobless rate topped 8 percent in December, the highest level in 16 years, according to the latest figures available. The biggest job losses continue to be in construction, which is why the I-595 project is so attractive to anyone who has worked in the industry — in management or operating heavy equipment.

For Charles Barber, 41, who has worked in housing construction about 20 years, the flood of new jobs couldn't come soon enough. His work lately — a few days here and there — hasn't been steady.

"I've been down here my whole life, and I've never seen it this bad," he said. "I'd do anything to find something steady right now."

Barber moved back with his parents in Lake Worth a year ago because he no longer could afford the apartment he shared with his girlfriend.

"I'm sure we're not the only parents taking in their sons or daughters," said his father, Thomas Barber. "This 595 project is just what this country needs — a good shot in the arm."

Mary Giovanini hopes her 27 years of experience in the construction industry will give her an edge.

As of today, she's out of work. Her administrative job on a petroleum expansion project for a contractor that supplies oil companies was cut short by a year-and-a-half.

"I thought I was secure. It turned out not to be true," said Giovanini, 51, of Fort Lauderdale. "It just snowballs. If I lose my job, then I'm not going to be buying gas. I'm going to be cutting back

on my cable bill, my grocery bill. I'm not going to be using the dry cleaner to clean my clothes. I won't be going to the movies. If there are 100 other people in the same situation, that's 100 people who aren't using those goods and services in the economy."

In December, Palm Beach County's jobless rate rose to 7.8 percent, while Broward — at 6.8 percent — remained below the national rate of 7.2 percent. Florida lost 21,000 jobs that month, bringing the total lost in 2008 to 255,000.

Just how many jobs will be created by the I-595 project is unclear.

The Federal Highway Administration estimates as many as 35,000 jobs are created for every \$1.25 billion invested in transportation projects. The estimate has changed over the years as inflation has eroded the buying power of construction dollars.

State officials say the I-595 jobs will be listed with the Agency for Workforce Innovation, a state agency that oversees unemployment benefits.

Although the contractor, ACS Infrastructure Development, is based in Spain, many of its partners and subcontractors will be local firms.

"The vast majority of the jobs will be local contractors and local people working for local companies," said Barbara Kelleher, a Florida Department of Transportation spokeswoman.

ACS will be required to begin construction 150 days after the contract is signed. That means road work should begin in late July or August, although some activities, such as relocating utilities and building noise walls, could begin in the spring.

"They won't be seeking workers all at once. The jobs will be spread through the life of the construction," Kelleher said.

Andre Eugent has his resume ready.

In April, the 34-year-old Plantation man will graduate with a master's degree in construction management from Florida International University. He moved to South Florida two years ago from Jamaica, where he worked as a construction engineer managing projects for a government agency.

Until he finds something in construction, he's working part-time for Spirit Airlines.

"Despite my years of experience, education and steadfast approach to job hunting, it has been difficult finding full-time work," Eugent said. "Hearing about infrastructure and construction projects like this one lets me know that things are beginning to turn around."

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Job hunting?

Get a job on the I-595 construction project

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- **Hiring for the massive rebuilding** of Interstate 595 hasn't begun yet but, once it does, it will continue through the five-year life of the project. The first hires could be signed up this spring.
- **Most construction jobs** will be posted this summer and continue until the project's completion in 2014. Some office jobs will be listed in April and May.
- **Job seekers can** view postings on the Web site of the state [Agency for Workforce Innovation](#).

