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Broward County officials want proof I-595 work will create local jobs

By Michael Turnbell

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When the state signed a contract with a giant Spanish construction conglomerate to rebuild Interstate 595, some questioned whether the \$1.2 billion project would truly benefit the local economy.

Suzanne Brewer, of Davie, counts herself among those who want the economic impact to stay right here.

"After being in the construction business for over 25 years, I know there are plenty of businesses that would have been able to support this project without going to another country or even another state," said Brewer, an office manager for a local excavating company.

"It will bring jobs and money here, but imagine how much profit will be taken out of this country that could have also remained here."

County officials are listening.

The Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization on Thursday passed a resolution directing the state to make a "reasonable effort" to hire [Broward County](#) firms, suppliers and workers for the project, and to track how many I-595 jobs are filled locally. The resolution is non-binding.

State bidding requirements bar giving local firms preferential treatment when awarding contracts.

To do so would decrease competition and drive up the cost of projects, said Hesham Ali, the DOT's transportation operations director for the Florida Department of Transportation.

I-595 Express, a consortium led by ACS Infrastructure Development of Madrid, will finance, design and rebuild I-595 over the next five years, then maintain the highway until 2044.

State officials insist most of the jobs created will be local and that the consortium will partner with local firms for design and construction work. Broward planners want proof to back up those claims.

"The data is the only way to know for sure," said [Broward County](#) Commissioner Kristin Jacobs.

Elected officials and residents have expressed a common complaint: Why didn't the state award the I-595 job



to an American company? Some also wonder whether the contract signed last week runs counter to the "Buy American" provisions in the \$787 billion federal economic stimulus program.

"I won't want to seem isolationist or nationalistic, but it seems that with the economy being in the shape it is, we need to worry about U.S. firms, perhaps even Florida companies," said Alan Rothman, of [Boca Raton](#).

The other bidder was a consortium led by American companies, but Ali said its bid was more than \$700 million higher than ACS' bid.

As part of a public-private partnership, the ACS-led consortium is financing the cost of the project up front to speed completion. No economic stimulus money is being used for I-595.

The financing method is common in Europe but has yet to take root here. Analysts said t the federal government is encouraging more public-private partnerships to fund critical transportation projects that would otherwise take much longer to build.

The consortium won't receive any money from the state until the project is finished. Then it will receive \$685 million over seven years, and as much as \$63.98 million a year for 30 years as long as the road meets the state's expectations. The other bidder had wanted up to \$144 million a year for 30 years.

The amount of money the consortium will get from the state will depend on how well it maintains the road.

The state will set rates and retain revenue from tolls collected in the new reversible express lanes that will be built in I-595's median. Officials think that in 20 years, the express lanes could bring in enough revenue to cover the annual payment to the consortium and turn a profit for the state.

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View our interactive presentation to get more details on the project, and see photos of the building of I-595 at *SunSentinel*

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