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Road work ahead: Interstate 595 construction around the corner

State to hold public meeting on Jan. 28 in Davie to explain project, answer questions

By Michael Turnbull, Sun Sentinel

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Where's the construction?

That's what many commuters are wondering, nearly a year after the Florida Department of Transportation signed a \$1.2 billion contract with Spanish construction giant ACS Infrastructure Development to rebuild Interstate 595.

"After a lot of initial hoopla, nothing seems to be happening," said Sy Syslo of Plantation. "Having done a lot of highway construction myself in the past I don't see any way this project will be done [on time]. What was all the fuss about?"

Although work on noise walls and a new recreational trail along the canal next to I-595 began last year, drivers haven't seen any actual road construction. Officials say that will change in the next two months, starting at I-595 and Pine Island Road.

First, engineers had a lot prep work to accomplish over the past 11 months before the cranes and bulldozers could be brought in for the largest road construction project in Florida history.

They had to draw up plans for a 10.5-mile stretch of I-595 that will be rebuilt, including 63 bridges. They had to come up with a plan to keep traffic moving during construction. They had to move overhead electrical lines and underground gas lines.

"This is no ordinary road project," said Laila Haddad, a DOT spokeswoman.

The DOT is hosting a community meeting from 4 to 8 p.m. Thursday at the Signature Grand, 6900 State Road 84 (eastbound), Davie, to explain the project to the public and answer questions about the construction schedule. No formal presentations are planned.

ACS Infrastructure Development got the contract in part because it promised to finish the job by 2014. Now calling itself I-595 Express, the concessionaire must not only design and build the new I-595, but also provide the financing, and operate and maintain the road for 35 years.

About 500 full-time and 375 part-time professional workers already are employed and thousands more full-time workers will be added during construction.

Plans call for three reversible express toll lanes in I-595's median. Most ramps will be rebuilt with a new "braided" design that takes exiting traffic over drivers entering the highway. S.R. 84 will be completed between Davie Road and State Road 7 to serve as a frontage road for local traffic.

About two miles of Florida's Turnpike, north and south of I-595, also will be rebuilt along with some of the ramps that connect the two highways.

The original plans handed off by the state have been refined. Designers have decided to incorporate some existing bridges and pavement into the construction, rather than rebuild everything.

The University Drive flyovers, for instance, won't be demolished. "They are going to be modified and jacked up, but they are not coming down," Haddad said.

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