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Gov.: Outer Beltway Project To Move Forward

Beltway To Provide Direct Connection Between I-95, I-10

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ORANGE PARK, Fla. -- In an effort to strengthen Florida's economy, during a site visit to Clay County, Gov. Charlie Crist announced Thursday the First Coast Outer Beltway project competitive bidding process will move forward.

The project is expected to create thousands of jobs when construction begins. The \$1.8 billion project will be competitively bid as a Public Private Partnership opportunity for private sector businesses, Crist said.

"After decades of discussion, it is exciting that this project will enter a new phase," Crist said in a press release. "Connecting businesses and regions through better infrastructure ensures that goods are transported more quickly and consumers can have access to more businesses. The Department of Transportation has set the pace for the next generation of Florida transportation improvement projects, improving the quality of life for the residents and visitors."

The First Coast Outer Beltway is formed by the St. Johns River Crossing and Branan Field-Chaffee Road around the Jacksonville metropolitan area. The beltway will provide a direct connection, outside of the Interstate 295 loop, between Interstate 95 and Interstate 10 at minimal cost to the Florida Department of Transportation or the state. It will connect Duval, Clay and St. Johns counties.

The beltway will also open new avenues for moving commercial traffic to the Cecil Field area without adding congestion to existing roadways and provide additional capacity across the St. Johns River.

When the construction commences, the \$1.8 billion improvements project will be the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken by the Florida Department of Transportation. Currently, the Interstate 595 Express Corridor project in south Florida is the largest project at \$1.25 billion.

By using a PPP and innovative contracting solutions, the project will be built years earlier than with traditional contracting methods. The awarded contractor(s) will serve as the concessionaire to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the beltway.

The governor said the road could wind up being a toll road, but that would depend on the bids that came in for the project.

The Florida Department of Transportation is currently engaging private contractors in a competitive bidding process. The I-595 Corridor Express PPP, with I-595 Express LLC, was the first of its kind in Florida, opening years ahead of schedule.

The governor was joined at the event by FDOT Secretary Stephanie C. Kopelousos; Commissioner Richard Clark, president of the Jacksonville City Commission; Commissioner Travis Cummings of the Clay County Commission; and Commissioner Ron Sanchez of the St. Johns County Commission.

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