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Reconstruction constantly changing I-595 in Broward

For now, all existing lanes of Interstate 595 are kept open during the day as a massive makeover of the highway is under way.

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SUN SENTINEL

It's hard to drive Interstate 595 these days and not be engrossed in the view.

But keep your eyes on the road. It's changing constantly.

Commuters have a front-row seat as a massive production of concrete, steel, dirt, earth-movers and cranes is choreographed with precision.

Giant cranes drive concrete logs called piles into the ground to provide a foundation for new bridges and ramps. The pinging and thumping sound is unmistakable to motorists or anyone who lives or works along the highway.

It's all happening while the existing number of lanes -- three in each direction -- are kept open to traffic during the day. Just wait until one of the University Drive flyovers is closed for two weeks this summer, the first in a series of long-term ramp closures planned, some lasting more than 200 days.

"We've got to keep the heart pumping while essentially we build a new heart," said Ed Perez of the Corradino Group, the engineering firm coordinating the design and construction.

MILESTONES

By year's end, drivers will be riding over short sections of the new, modern I-595. It's the first major reconstruction of the highway since it opened in 1989, opening up what had been cow pastures and swamps in western Broward County to explosive development.

Several new bridges and crisscrossing ramps will spring out of the ground, and miles of new pavement will fill in the missing link of westbound State Road 84 and a stretch of the new express lanes from University Drive to Southwest 136th Avenue.

Project concessionaire I-595 Express, headed by Spanish construction giant ACS Infrastructure Development, can pocket up to \$18.5 million in bonuses if workers complete several milestones by Sept. 28.

The bonuses, intended as an incentive to keep the massive rebuild on track, include:

- \$10 million for completion of a new direct ramp from westbound I-595 to the northbound Florida's Turnpike.
- \$8 million for completion of braided ramps, which keep traffic trying to exit I-595 from crossing paths with traffic entering. The ramp braids will carry a new westbound exit to Nob Hill Road over a new westbound entrance from State Road 84 west of Pine Island Road, and a new westbound exit to University Drive over a new westbound entrance from State Road 84 west of Davie Road.

\$500,000 for completion of noise walls along the turnpike north of I-595 and along westbound State Road 84 near the turnpike.

QUICK CONSTRUCTION

About 1,268 full-time and 500 part-time workers are toiling in some capacity on I-595.

It's a mix of construction workers laboring mostly during the day, though the nighttime work might be more noticeable because that's when crews are allowed to close lanes. Meanwhile, out of public view, engineers, designers and state highway officials work elbow to elbow in an office building on the south side of I-595 near Nob Hill Road.

The number of workers will triple later this year as a 10-mile stretch of I-595 -- from east of U.S. 441 to the Interstate 75 and turnpike approaches to I-595 -- becomes one giant work zone.

If traditional design and construction methods were used, the entire project would take more than 15 years. Instead, it is expected to take just five years.

The \$1.79 billion contract is "design-build," in which designers and builders work together under one contract, and construction often begins before the ink on the drawings is dry. Proponents of the method, which is now used by most states, say less time is wasted.

If you're a driver, there's an upside and a downside to the build-it-all-at-once approach.

When Interstate 95 was widened between Delray Beach and Palm Beach Gardens in Palm Beach County, the work was done in stages over a decade so it wasn't white-knuckle driving the entire way.

But to get I-595 done in half the time, much of the entire highway will be torn up at the same time. Officials say drivers have told them repeatedly in surveys that they prefer construction be done sooner rather than strung out.

BIGGER AND BETTER

In less than four years, I-595 will have reversible express lanes in the median that will separate long-distance commuters from those traveling only a few exits.

From west of University Drive to Nob Hill Road, the new express lanes are starting to take shape in the old grassy strip between the eastbound and westbound lanes.

Most of I-595's entrance and exit ramps, which are too close to each other, will be relocated to end the high-stakes game of chicken that drivers now play trying to get on and off the highway.

Some exits will be combined. For instance, on eastbound I-595, Hiatus Road and Nob Hill Road will share the same exit ramp. Once drivers get on the ramp, they will have a choice of going to Hiatus or continuing on a "bypass bridge" over Hiatus to Nob Hill.

The missing pieces of State Road 84, which now force drivers to get onto I-595, will be completed between U.S. 441 and Davie Road.

The new State Road 84 running parallel to I-595 will be designed to move local traffic and minimize the points where traffic merges onto the interstate.

SAFER INTERCHANGE

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