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New I-595 ramps will carry exiting traffic over drivers entering the highway

By [Michael Turnbell](#), Sun Sentinel

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Merging on and off Interstate 595 can challenge even the most seasoned driver — and that was before a \$1.8 billion remake of the highway began last year.

It's a high stakes game of chicken every rush hour as drivers trying to merge left to get on I-595 jockey for position with those trying to merge right to make the next exit.

But traffic engineers say the chaos will be tamed over the next three years as many of I-595's interchanges are remade with an elaborate new ramp system that swaps the location of most exit ramps and puts them before the on-ramps.

The new ramps — called "braided ramps" by engineers — will allow cars to exit I-595 on an elevated bridge without having to weave through traffic attempting to exit the highway.

There are a handful of braided ramps in South Florida — all of them on I-95 between Broward Boulevard and Davie Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale and between Belvedere Road and Southern Boulevard in West Palm Beach.

Braided ramps get their name because they allow one flow of traffic to rise over another without conflict and keep merging to a minimum.

"They will take traffic off the highway before new traffic comes in," said Paul Lampley, I-595 project manager from the Florida Department of Transportation. "The conflicts that occur now where traffic is trying to enter and exit the highway in the same spot will be eliminated."

Accidents also should decrease.

When officials studied I-595 a decade ago, they cited the high number of crashes as one justification for giving the highway a drastic makeover. From 1997 to 2001, there were 1,530 accidents resulting in 19 deaths and more than 1,300 injuries. Those numbers, however, were not high enough to classify I-595 as "high crash location."

About 42 percent of the crashes were rear-end collisions, which were largely attributed to merging conditions on the highway.

When I-595 opened in 1989, most entrance and exit ramps were built closer than the standard of one mile apart. They worked fine when the highway carried less traffic. But I-595 west of University Drive today carries about 175,000 vehicles a day, or more than 60,000 vehicles over the highway's capacity.

Once completed in 2014, the new I-595 — with a combination of reversible express lanes, new entrance and exit ramps and additional travel lanes for commuters who don't opt to take the express lanes — should eliminate the bottlenecks that drivers experience today.

"I see a lot of near misses every day," said Randall Peterson of his daily commute on I-595 from Davie to Fort Lauderdale.

"The existing ramps ramps are confusing," said Robert Lewin, who enters I-595 at Flamingo Road weekdays. "The new ramp system seems very well planned out and I believe will prevent accidents."

The new braided ramps will be in six locations, four eastbound and two westbound.

The first two — both westbound between Davie Road and University Drive and between Pine Island and Nob Hill Road — are scheduled to be completed by the end of September.

Here's how they will work:

Picture yourself heading west on I-595. As you approach Pine Island Road, you'll see a sign for the Nob Hill Road exit ramp much sooner than you do today. The ramp will begin where westbound I-595 crosses Pine Island and pass over a new entrance ramp from State Road 84 west of Pine Island Road.

Instead of looking left for merging traffic, drivers entering westbound I-595 will be able to zoom onto the highway without having to worry about cars trying to cut over to reach Nob Hill Road because that traffic has already exited the highway.

In addition to the braided ramps, the new I-595 will have fewer exit ramps because some exits will be combined with a single ramp, said Eduardo Perez de Morales of The Corradino Group, an engineering firm overseeing the construction.

By decreasing the number of exit points, Perez said traffic should flow better on I-595.

On westbound I-595, the exits for Hiatus and Flamingo road will be combined into a single exit ramp before Hiatus. On eastbound I-595, the exits for Hiatus and Nob Hill roads will share a single exit ramp as will the exits for Pine Island Road and University Drive.

For instance, on eastbound I-595, once drivers exit I-595 approaching Hiatus Road, the ramp will split. One lane will merge on to State Road 84 and head to Hiatus Road. The other lane will continue on a bypass bridge over Hiatus — separate from the main flow of traffic on I-595 —

and over the eastbound entrance ramps from Flamingo and Hiatus before merging onto S.R. 84 just east of of Nob Hill Road.

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