

South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

I-595 work halfway done

By [Robert Nolin](#), Sun Sentinel

8:47 PM EST, December 15, 2011

New ramps, a road, barriers and even a park are among the milestones that should make the ride smoother for commuters as construction on Interstate 595 is just about 50 percent complete.

"We're approximately halfway through in terms of construction," project spokeswoman Laila Haddad said Thursday as officials paused to congratulate themselves on the progress they had made. Drivers should already reap the benefit of the work completed so far.

"We're going to be able to move people faster," Haddad said. "The travel times are the same, if not better, than they were pre-construction."

The massive project is costing a total of \$1.8 billion, with about \$30 million spent a month. It started in February 2010 and is scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2014. More than 150 companies with some 2,500 workers have been laboring to streamline the over-capacity interstate, which hits a westbound gridlock nearly every afternoon rush hour.

That gridlock is concentrated around the Davie Road area, where in a half-mile stretch westbound commuters must endure a barrage of traffic entering the interstate from S.R. 84 and S.R. 7, as well as Florida's Turnpike.

This section of I-595 is where the project has focused its efforts so far. By reducing the number of vehicles entering and exiting the area, project officials can remove the need for westbound drivers to duel with competing motorists converging on I-595 from other highways.

"The driver will have a much easier westbound commute because we're not bringing additional traffic onto the interstate," Department of Transportation project manager Paul Lampley said. "With the improvements that we've made, it's going to relieve a lot of congestion in the afternoon rush hour."

Those improvements include:

The completion of westbound S.R. 84 from Davie Road to S.R. 7. That section of S.R. 84 was eliminated in 1989 when I-595 opened. With the rebuilt road — it wasn't scheduled to be completed until a year from now, but officials shifted priorities — drivers may now cruise west on S.R. 84 while avoiding I-595. S.R. 84, in effect, acts as an expressway alongside I-595 to relieve crowding on the interstate.

"Now anyone traveling out west, say to Markham Park, you no longer have to get on I-595," Lampley said.

"It helps ease congestion," Haddad said.

Braided ramps. A pair of new ramps between Pine Island and Nob Hill roads and Davie Road and University Drive have opened that should eliminate the dangerous weaving that occurred when drivers entered the interstate at the same time other motorists cut over to make the next exit.

The ramps are called "braided" because the exit ramps are built over entrance ramps, in a design like braided hair. Drivers enter and exit on different levels.

"The braided ramps make it easier to get on and off," Haddad said. "The traffic is separated, they're not vying for the same lanes."

A new ramp system. The previously dangerous interchange between westbound I-595 and the northbound turnpike, the site of deadly crashes, has been streamlined, with a more direct ramp that replaces the dizzying loop that formerly led to the turnpike.

That loop was the scene of a fiery crash in 2005 when a gasoline tanker overturned onto an adjacent car, killing its four occupants.

Sound barriers. While heavy traffic has been reduced on the interstate, the noise such traffic produces has been reduced along the highway. The project has erected three sections of noise walls, 22 feet high from Hiatus to Nob Hill roads, and either 8 or 14 feet high in two stretches: from Nob Hill to Pine Island Road, and Davie Road to University Drive. A 22-foot-tall sound barrier has been erected along the turnpike from I-595 to Peters Road.

Homes will benefit from the reduction of noise, Haddad said.

The whole of the I-595 reconstruction project will see the erection of about 11 miles worth of sound barriers at a cost of about \$28 million.

Greenway park. A 10-mile linear park has been completed along the north side of the New River Canal from Marina Mile to 136th Avenue. The greenway is part of a bicycle and pedestrian system envisioned by [Broward County](#) officials that would ultimately link all county parks.

Typically, public projects come in late and over cost. But officials said that had not been the case so far with the I-595 project.

"We've hit all our target dates in our schedule," Lampley said.

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