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GROWING GAINS & PAINS

Alternates to I-4 Ultimate

by Debra Wood

Anyone recently driving on Interstate 4 realizes the bottlenecks that develop when construction crews are nearby. It's going to be a way of life for the next six years as the **Florida Department of Transportation** widens the road to include two variable toll lanes in each direction.

The \$2.3 billion **I-4 Ultimate** improvement project began this spring and is scheduled to wrap up in 2021. Construction begins at Kirkman Road and extends north (east) 21 miles to State Road 434. Tree removal has also started in several areas, including Kirkman Road. The project is being built through a 40-year public-private partnership between the state and **I-4 Mobility Partners**, composed of Skanska Infrastructure Development of Sweden and John Laing Investments Ltd. of London. Tolls on the express lanes will fund more than one-half of the project. A

construction joint venture among Skanska USA Civil Southeast, Granite Construction Co. and The Lane Construction Corp. was established to build the project.

Grand National Drive from Fun Spot Way to West Oak Ridge Road has closed to make improvements on the I-4 overpass. It will remain closed until summer 2017. When completed, the new overpass will connect Grand National Drive to Caravan Court and will feature Express Lane direct access in the eastbound and westbound directions with Grand National Drive.

The downtown exit eastbound at Ivanhoe Boulevard has permanently closed, as will the eastbound entrance ramp at South Street. The interchanges at Amelia Street, Colonial Drive, Florida's Turnpike, Kirkman Road, Orange Blossom Trail and State Road 408 will be redesigned. All together, 15 interchanges and 140 bridges will be rebuilt. The construction makes a

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trip from Southwest Orlando to downtown or further north now much longer than commuters have come to expect.

Alternative Routes to I-4

From Southwest Orlando:

- State Road 429 to State Road 408 to downtown
- State Road 429 to Apopka
- State Road 417 to Sanford, east Orange County and UCF

CFX Responds With Solutions

Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX) was created by the state about a year ago, and it took over the operations of the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority. CFX officials hope to make that commute easier on drivers and their pocketbooks by offering a 5 percent beltway discount to travel on the highways that it manages. That's on top of a 5 to 10 percent frequent-traveler discount.



Central Florida Expressway Authority

▲ Several community leaders participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new **State Road 429** and **Schofield Road** interchange.

"We have a number of roads that go around Orlando and get you there efficiently and quickly," said Orange County Commissioner **Scott Boyd**, vice chairman of the CFX. "By lowering tolls, we hope residents and commuters [will] be able to use the system and bypass some of the traffic."

The discount is expected to cost the agency about \$14 million. Additionally, the expressway authority dropped the price of an E-pass to \$15. An E-pass can save drivers 23 percent compared to cash toll payers. The reduced cost to purchase an E-pass and the discounts are aimed at encouraging more drivers to choose the expressways.

"The route may be a little farther but they can get there quicker," said Boyd, explaining how he

takes state roads 429 and 408 to reach downtown from his home in west Orange County.

Mayor **Buddy Dyer** and the city of Orlando are encouraging motorists to consider alternative modes of transportation, including Carshare, Juice Bike Share, Lynx, Lymmo and SunRail, as well as carpooling and adjusting schedules when possible to avoid traffic delays.

Additional Changes

CFX is responsible for the planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of 109 miles of expressways in the area. The board is made up of representatives

from Lake, Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties; the mayors of Orange County and Orlando; and three citizens appointed by the governor.

"You see a good collaborative effort among the board members," Boyd said. "We have a lot of great new opportunities, including transit and improvements, there."

The expressway authority recently opened a \$10 million interchange, with four ramps and two plazas, at State Road 429 and Schofield Road in the south area of Town Center in **Horizon West**, near

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◀ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25



Florida Department of Transportation

▲ A rendering of the **Interstate 4/Kirkman Road** interchange, but the final design may change.

West Orange National Golf Center. It is located about 13 miles from Walt Disney World. More than 60,000 single-family homes are planned for that area, along with new shopping centers.

"It's going to provide opportunities for folks to get on and off [State Road 429] and for some economic development," Boyd said.

The authority also is considering improvements to the ramp system at State Road 429 and Daniels Road. **Winter Garden** is partnering in the initiative. The authority plans to add a single-exit deceleration lane at the southbound State Road 429 offramp at **Stoneybrook West Parkway**. It is in the process of soliciting contractor bids and expects the work to begin sometime later this year. ♥

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