



News Clip

From: *Miami Herald*, Monday, June 30, 2008
Subject: **HOT lanes taking shape along I-95**

HOT lanes taking shape along I-95

BY LARRY LEBOWITZ

Somebody forgot to tell the folks in the South Florida transportation business that these are supposed to be the slow, lazy days of summer.

Crews are furiously working to finish the first phase of a high-profile experiment that will transform the old, underused HOV lanes on Interstate 95 into the first variably priced High Occupancy Toll (HOT) facility in Florida.

Mammoth new signs, warning drivers of an upcoming tolling area, are up. Cameras and new electronic SunPass readers will be installed in the next couple of weeks.

[Speaking of SunPass -- the new \$5 mini-tag transponders will go on sale Tuesday. A media event with Florida's Turnpike Executive Director Jim Ely is tentatively set for 11 a.m. Tuesday in Pompano Beach.]

By the second week of July, crews will be installing orange candlestick lane delineators that will create the barrier between the two "express" lanes and the four "free" general purpose ones.

A kickoff date is still to be determined. But Debora Rivera, who is managing the Miami-Dade portion of the project for the Florida Department of Transportation, says they are still aiming for late July to mid-August.

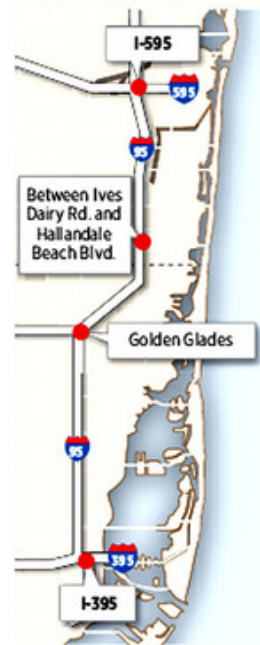
Here's how it will work: SunPass customers will have an option -- four lanes of "free" traffic or two "express" toll lanes with prices that vary depending on traffic.

The state will guarantee a 50 mph trip in the special lanes. If traffic is light, expect a 25-cent toll between downtown and the Golden Glades.

FDOT engineers are guessing it will probably rise as high as \$2.50 during the peak of the p.m. weekday rush hours -- but it could go much higher if traffic

Congestion pricing

Tolls will vary on the new I-95 express lanes depending on how many cars choose to use them. The first phase, northbound between downtown Miami and the Golden Glades interchange, will open in late July or early August. Southbound, from the Golden Glades to downtown, will open in late 2009. The Broward County segments are tentatively set for 2010, but may be delayed.



SOURCE: Florida Department of Transportation
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isn't moving.

Owners of registered hybrids, carpools with three or more passengers, van pools, plus motorcycles, buses and emergency vehicles will be allowed to use the lanes for free.

Cameras will snap the license plates of vehicles that enter the tolling area without a SunPass transponder. Violations will be mailed to the registered owner.

Besides covering the construction costs, part of the toll revenue will be used to pay for additional Florida Highway Patrol and Road Ranger coverage on the corridor.

Phase 2 of the 95 Express program, which will create two express lanes on the southbound side between the Golden Glades and downtown Miami, is set to open in late 2009.

It will create a lot more headaches for commuters.

Crews are going to have to lift and elevate two bridges -- from westbound I-195 to southbound I-95, and from northbound I-95 to westbound State Road 112 (the Airport Expressway) -- and replace some support piers to create extra space on I-95.

UGLY PERIOD

Expect an ugly four-to-six-week period next spring of road closures and detours.

The work was originally scheduled for February and March, but Miami Beach leaders, in their typically measured, calm manner, threatened to tar and feather FDOT employees and contractors.

The folks on the beach had a valid point -- this time. Why create more bottlenecks at the height of the snowbird and tourist-fleecing season?

THIRD PHASE

The third phase of the project, which will create the express lanes in both directions from the Golden Glades up to I-595 in Broward, was set for 2010.

But that is now up in the air, thanks to politics.

Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed the Legislature's omnibus transportation bill earlier this month because it contained a tiny provision aimed at helping a constituent of House Speaker Rubio's who wants a shot at a lucrative turnpike service area contract.

Unfortunately for the hundreds of thousands of us who actually use I-95 every day, the bill also gave the FDOT permission to sell bonds to pay for the Broward portion of 95 Express.

John Olson, who is managing the Broward segment of the project for FDOT, said the state is looking at several options.

"We're still trying to figure out what we're going to do," Olson said. ``The project isn't dead. We just need to look at all the different ways we might be able to create a funding source for it."



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RAMP METERS

The other bit of "Life as You Know It Is About to Change" news involves the ramp meters at the end of the I-95 entrance ramps.

Most of them have been sitting, with plastic bag coverings, since 2004 as FDOT dithered about rolling them out to a skeptical public.

FDOT will be putting a handful of these traffic signals into effect, only on the northbound ramps to I-95 from Northwest 62nd Street up to Northwest Second Avenue at the Golden Glades.

The signals are supposed to regulate the flow of traffic entering the expressway, making it safer to merge and reducing the number of accidents. Similar programs have proven effective on high-volume, congested expressways in places as varied as Chicago, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Seattle and Minneapolis.

Still, most South Floridians -- who've grown used to a community where red lights are treated as optional annoyances -- don't believe they will ever work.

But driver beware. The highway patrol will be watching. Run a red light, and pay the price. Traffic cameras will NOT be used to enforce the ramp meters for now.