

# Some utility work begins for Sawgrass-I95 link

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Some utility groundwork has begun to prepare for linking the Sawgrass Expressway to Interstate 95 — a years-in-the-making expansion that aims to help thousands of South Floridians get to work faster each day, officials say.

Commuters typically face a series of traffic tie-ups when they exit the Sawgrass Expressway and hit several intersections along Southwest 10th Street while also merging with additional traffic before reaching Interstate 95.

The “missing link” will make it easier for local and highway traffic, and it would help during hurricane-related evacuations, too, said Department of Transportation spokesman Guillermo Canedo.

Florida Power & Light has “now started utility relocation,” Canedo said. “They are currently working along the south side of Southwest 10th Street between Powerline Road and Military Trail.”

Neither the state’s transportation department nor Florida Power & Light on Wednesday would provide additional details about the utility relocation work.

In January, Gov. Ron DeSantis pitched a \$7 billion proposal to speed completion of 20 highway projects — including the Sawgrass Expressway project. The “Moving Florida Forward” proposal, which would use borrowed money and draw funding from reserves, are “things we’re going to have to do anyways,” he said at the time.

It has been a long-discussed project.

In 2018, then-Gov. Rick Scott touted the plan to unite the Sawgrass Expressway and Interstate 95, saying it would ease congestion and speed things up for people who opt to evacuate when a hurricane threatens Florida. Construction could have started in 2022.

Then a year later, in 2019, state planners adjusted the estimate, expecting work would begin in 2023. Part of the idea was to add express lanes to connect the two highways to ensure that thousands of South Floridians make it to work faster, finally relieving the routine bottlenecks that tie up Southwest 10th Street.

Originally, the Southwest 10th Street project was not funded for construction, it was only funded for right-of-way and design services, Canedo said. The “Moving Florida Forward” initiative supports the construction of the project with additional funding, he said.

Now, with some work underway, the state is “looking at advertising the project in a few weeks to initiate the process for the selection of a design build contractor,” Canedo said. The company awarded the contract will start with detailed design work and “major roadway construction” won’t start until late 2024 “at the earliest.”

Parkland Mayor Rich Walker said his residents will welcome the improvements.

“Any time you get to expand, whether it’s the interstate or other roads, it makes it much smoother for all the residents,” he said.

But don’t expect an easy ride: “During construction it’s always a headache but that’s part of progress,” he said. “Sometimes there’s some bumps in the road to take a few steps ahead.”

Construction alone generally takes two to three years, weather permitting, but no time frame has been given for this project, officials said.

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