



Florida lawmakers approve tolls on I-4 to help pay for new construction

'I-4 Ultimate Project' to affect traffic in Orange County, Seminole County

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ORLANDO, Fla. -

Florida Gov. Rick Scott and the state legislature gave the go-ahead to new toll lanes on Interstate 4 on Friday, which is expected help pay for a massive overhaul of the interstate.

The "I-4 Ultimate Project" calls for improvements to 21 miles of the interstate, stretching from west of Kirkman Road near Universal Orlando through downtown Orlando, Maitland, and into Seminole County east of State Road 434 near Longwood.

The project is expected to cost about \$2 billion with four new toll lanes right down the center of the interstate to help cover the cost.

All of the current free lanes will remain intact, but the four so-called "express lanes" would offer variable pricing. This means during peak times prices go up. In some cases, it would cost over \$13 bucks for a round-trip commute.

The state estimates it could cost someone driving from 434 near Longwood to downtown Orlando up to \$7.70 during morning rush. A trip home: \$5.60. That's \$13.30 a day.

"That's ridiculous. I think it's ridiculous," said Melisa Arriaga, who drives I-4 every day.

"Like a couple bucks I'm fine with, but \$13 is a bit much," said driver Laura Ferguson. "I mean sometimes you just have to do what you got to do, but yeah, \$13 is a lot."

Meantime, drivers going from Kirkman Road near Universal--- to downtown Orlando would pay as much as \$4.60 in the morning, \$4.30 in the evening for a total of \$8.90 a day.

"I guess if we have the option to use them then that's fine as long as they don't make us pay to use the regular highway," said Arriaga.

The optional toll lanes should help generate some of the \$2 billion needed for all the other planned improvements on I-4, including re-constructing all of the existing free lanes and straightening out the Fairbanks curve.

Fifteen interchanges, including I-4 and 408, will be revamped and there will be 56 new bridges, including a new pedestrian crossing at Maitland Boulevard along with dozens of other bridge improvements.

For drivers we spoke with who describe I-4 as a "parking lot," any improvements -- even if they take tolls -- are welcome.

"Yes, but like I said, I don't think many people will use those lanes," said Arriaga.

Construction is scheduled to start in fall of 2014. It's expected to take six years to complete.

If the state tried to do this work without adding the tolls, officials estimate the work would take 20 years to complete.

To help ease some of the congestion caused by the construction, state officials say Phase 1 of the Sunrail system is expected to be open, which runs from DeBary to Sand Lake Road.

For more information on the I-4 Ultimate Project, visit www.moving-4-ward.com

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