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Work begins for I-4 Ultimate makeover project

By Amanda McKenzie, Reporter

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MAITLAND -- It's already a work in progress for the I-4 Ultimate Makeover. Crews can be spotted in safety vests on the side of the road, digging up holes.

But you can't see much now and that's because the work is being done underground. Crews are traveling along I-4, taking soil samples to find out just how much the ground can handle when the real heavy work begins.



(GRAPHIC/I-4 Ultimate Project) A 3-D rendering of how an expanded I-4 would look at State Road 408, in downtown Orlando, with four new express toll lanes.

"The soil sampling is part of a geotechnical investigation," FDOT spokeswoman Jessica Keane said. "They're investigating the soil condition to make sure whether it's clay or really sandy. They're doing that type of investigation so we know where a pile could go and things like that to help with design."

It's a lengthy process that will determine how the 21-mile I-4 expansion will come together, spanning from Kirkman Road in **Orange County** to east of State Road 434 in **Seminole County**.

While each section of the project will begin at the same time, much of the focus will be in downtown near the 408 interchange.

"We wanted to make sure that the express lanes would have a direct connect onto the 408," Keane said. "It's a huge interchange, there's a lot going on."

And speaking of express lanes, FDOT said that is their solution to manage traffic congestion, but it comes at a price - a price that could change on the hour depending on that traffic. I-4 will institute variable toll pricing just like the I-95 Express in Miami. Those drivers pay a minimum of 50 cents to a maximum of \$10.50.

"Of course the same amount of lanes will be in the general use for free traffic," Keane said.

But one new element facing the general downtown traffic in the coming years are the UCF students. Four years from now, the new campus is expected to bring in 10,000 students into the area. Adding more traffic to some potentially congested construction.

FDOT said the design phase will kick off in the next few days. FDOT hopes to break ground by February 2015.

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