

Ultimate I-4 Project set to begin, Commissioner Stuart notes

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Having lived in College Park for 61 years, Commissioner Robert Stuart can remember when the state embarked on a major road project that had a huge impact on the region's growth.

That project was a highway that became known as Interstate 4, and the construction work began in 1957. The first segment opened to traffic in 1959, and the highway got completed by the late 1960s.

"Some of us remember when I-4 was built, what a hassle that was," Stuart said.

Now, he added, the Florida Department of Transportation is about to start work on another major road project, Stuart said, and it will take six years to complete – but, most likely, not much more than that, he added.

"This project is done differently than any time they've done any other project," Stuart said. "We're pretty confident this will be a six-year project."

On Monday, Stuart met with the members of the College Park Neighborhood Association for their first meeting of the new year. He said the project known as the Ultimate I-4 is set to begin construction in February, with the goal of expanding I-4 and creating new toll lanes in the middle.

As Stuart noted, it will take six years to complete, although FDOT is determined to stick rigorously to that schedule and not allow any delays to slow it down.

The construction work will impact not just those who rely on I-4 for their daily commute, Stuart noted, but also all of the communities – College Park included – that the interstate cuts through.

But that may be true even after the Ultimate I-4 project gets completed, Stuart added.

"I-4 is probably going to be under construction for the rest of our lives, that's how many people are here now," he said.

The construction work, he said, will begin around the exits in downtown Orlando.

"They actually can start anywhere in the process, but they are staging in downtown," he said. "We always wanted them to start downtown and work out, and downtown has the best options for detours."

That's where the construction crews' staging area will be as well, Stuart said.

As crews begin working on I-4, Stuart said FDOT has promised that lanes would stay open for motorists on their daily commute.

"We were told there would be two lanes open at all times," he said.

Stuart said he's working with FDOT so that motorists who need to take detours will be sent to U.S. 441, instead of

Westmoreland Drive, which cuts directly through College Park.

“We want everyone to go by (U.S.) 441 and Mills (Avenue),” he said.

Dena Wild, a member of the CPNA, said it’s important to remember that the project is designed to improve the flow of traffic on I-4, even if the short-term construction work creates hassles for drivers.

“To some extent,” she said, “ we just have to be patient.”

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