

News / Orlando Traffic / I-4 makeover

The look of Interstate 4 Ultimate being unveiled in College Park



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Interstate 4 will be 70 percent wider when Ultimate project is complete.

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A unremarkable concrete-panel wall is slowly taking shape alongside Interstate 4 in the College Park neighborhood just north of downtown.

The work shows for the first time just how wide the new highway will be and what is in store for much of the 21-mile length of the \$2.3 billion project.

The road is 70 percent wider, going from 140 feet wide to 240 feet. The extra space largely will be filled with four toll lanes that will be laid down the middle of I-4.

What amounts to a preview of I-4 Ultimate is occurring at the New Hampshire Street overpass because it is one of the places where land was easily accessible and relatively little preparation had to be done to get started.

Article continues below ↓

"It's available space, and we've got the resources to do it," said Chris DuBois, project manager for design/build at SGL Constructors, the construction arm of I-4 Mobility Partners, the consortium overseeing the work.

Article continues below ↓

The walls will be built on both sides of the highway from Lake Ivanhoe to Princeton Street, a stretch of just less than 5 miles.

Right now, the most progress is being made from New Hampshire to the lake on the west side. About 74,500 cubic feet of high-grade sand is being dumped along the highway.

That's the equivalent of 5,000 typical dump-truck loads — or, to put it another way, nearly 4.9 million 40-pound bags full of Halloween candy.

The concrete panels are 5 feet by 5 feet and weigh nearly a ton apiece. Roughly 1,000 panels will be erected from New Hampshire down to the lake. They will be held in place by steel straps that attach to them and then are stretched toward the highway. Sand dumped and compacted over them will hold everything in place.

Eventually, the panels will be painted brown with sand accents. The overpass above New Hampshire will feature 40-foot-high pylons, each affixed with a city of Orlando seal.

"We're putting in a lot of detail," said Deryck Kraft, a design/build coordinator for SGL.

The underside of the New Hampshire overpass will have wider sidewalks than what is there now, and the concrete slope will be replaced with straight walls.

The effect, Kraft said, will be much nicer aesthetically than the run-down, utilitarian approach now greeting motorists and pedestrians.

"It will catch your eye, but you have to drive slow," he said.

Ten construction workers and two supervisors are on site about 18 hours each weekday, going from 7 a.m. to 3 a.m., the second shift relying on stadiumlike field lighting.

DuBois said the section likely will not be complete for a couple of years, which would be about a third of the way into the six-year run of the project dubbed I-4 Ultimate.

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