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By Greg

B10

# Will toll lanes make a difference on your commute?

## I-4 Ultimate reconstruction scheduled to be finished in 2021

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**ORLANDO, Fla. —** Traffic lanes on I-4 near Ivanhoe Boulevard have been narrowed with the I-4 reconstruction project now in full swing.

The lengthy project brings the promise of a better and faster road, but it comes at a price. Many drivers say they are willing to pay the tolls to ride in the planned express lanes.

After a full year of I-4 Ultimate construction, however, many drivers also say they are discovering it can be an "ultimate pain" during their daily commute: Lane shifting, drivers suddenly braking, barricades, drivers suddenly stopping and big trucks getting uncomfortably close are among the irritations.

WESH 2 News looked into whether the toll lanes will improve traffic conditions.

"Express toll" lanes are planned for the future of I-4, similar to those currently on I-95 in South Florida. The lanes go from downtown Miami, north to the interstate and Florida Turnpike split. The maximum cost will be \$10.50 at rush hour, which most Miami drivers told WESH 2 News was very expensive.

"Very, very expensive at times," said Tammy Stokes, a Miami driver.

Once a driver is on the express lanes on I-95, there is no way to get off. But I-4 will be different; it will have half a dozen places to get in and out of express lanes and they will be separated by

barriers instead of the plastic slats that are in place on I-95.

The minimum cost in Orlando will be the same as in Miami, 50 cents. During rush hour, commuters must decide if they'll pay to save time, an average of four to seven minutes each way off their commute.

"I personally don't think it's worth it, no," said Charles Burke, a Melbourne businessman.

"Absolutely," said Randy Stockton, a Miami driver.

"If you're willing to pay a toll, you can get a more reliable trip in the peak period," said John Easterling, the Florida Department of Transportation's express toll expert.

Easterling says I-4's new toll lanes will provide a faster trip to all, because those willing to pay for Lexus lanes will take vehicles from the Chevy lanes.

"So it's going to be a better trip for everyone," Easterling said.

The state of Florida says that on average, the afternoon rush northbound gets drivers through the 8-mile stretch of I-95 in 11 minutes.

The free lanes? Eighteen.

"I think it will be a pleasure to those who drive I-4 every day," Easterling said.

The I-4 Ultimate reconstruction is scheduled to be finished in 2021 if it stays on schedule.

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