

Loreen Bobo on building Central Florida's \$2.3B I-4 Ultimate project

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Central Florida's construction world is about to embark on one of the region's biggest roadway projects this decade: the \$2.3 billion revamp of Interstate 4.

And at the center of that massive project is [Florida Department of Transportation's Loreen Bobo](#), who quickly has become the go-to person for the project known as the I-4 Ultimate.

Bobo, construction program manager for the I-4 Ultimate, is heading up the project that involves tearing up, rebuilding and improving — including adding tolled express lanes — 21 miles of I-4 from west of Kirkman Road in Orange County to east of State Road 434 in Seminole County. The project is being designed, built, financed, operated and maintained as a public-private partnership, or P3, which means that concessionaire I-4 Mobility Partners will share in much of the responsibility for designing and building the roadway, as well as making sure it operates correctly and is well maintained for 40 years.

Construction will start in February and continue through 2021, and while commuters may feel some pain during construction, the roadway will remain open during that time. Once completed, it will make for a smoother, more efficient and prettier drive.

What made you decide to lead the I-4 Ultimate project? This is one of those projects that comes along once in a career. Central Florida won't see another mega project like this for a long time. It's the project you want to be part of — you want to say you had a hand in this.

The biggest challenge so far? The procurement process was very confidential. We had four teams made up of firms from around the world spending millions to pursue the contract. We couldn't share any of the cool ideas the teams had. Even the meetings were very confidential, where your name had to be on a list to get in and we had to put our cellphones down. We couldn't take anything out of the room, even if we wanted to read up on things after hours. We had about nine months like that.



Loreen Bobo, I-4 Ultimate construction program manager, at the FDOT District 5 office where the project plans currently cover the walls.

How have you gained respect in a male-dominated industry? They can trust me. I'm very honest — I lay it all out there. I'll let you know if there's a problem or if something is bothering me. And I've proved myself over the years. I didn't start with a \$2.3 billion project — my first job was a turn lane.

What you liked about your first construction job with FDOT? I had to build a small turning lane in Sanford. I was going through the professional engineer training program at the department, where you rotate through the different divisions. So, I had surveyed this same project, worked on the design and then ended up building it. It gave me a good sense of how a project is born and developed and I got to see how the process works.

Your most notable project thus far? I got to work on the I-4 at State Road 408 interchange. Since then, I've done several along I-4.

Most surprising thing about your experience at FDOT? There was a period where there weren't a lot of big construction projects, so I became an assistant maintenance engineer working on things like resurfacing roads. I didn't know at the time why I was going into maintenance because I'm a construction girl. But now I know: It was to prepare me for this project, which is design, build, maintain and operate.

Favorite thing to listen to while driving? NPR, but typically it's my kids' stuff. I know my head is on straight if I remember to switch from the DVD to the radio before leaving the preschool parking lot.

Favorite thing to do while stuck in traffic? Writing my to-do list.

What's in the trunk of your car? A stroller, hard hat and safety vest.

In the center console of your car? Garage door opener, CDs for my kids, cellphone charger and a notepad.

In your glovebox? Maglite flashlight, \$20 in cash in case my credit cards don't work and a Leatherman pocket tool.

What's after the I-4 Ultimate? I think I'll continue on the construction management side.

Loreen Bobo, P.E.

Age: 38

Title: I-4 Ultimate construction program manager

Her role: Overseeing everything on the project and leading teams focused on right of way, design, public information and more

Background: She got her bachelor's in civil engineering from the University of Florida in 1999 and started working with the Florida Department of Transportation District 5. She headed up her first construction job in 2001 and became a project manager. She also spent time as assistant maintenance engineer with the department before being asked to become program manager for the I-4 Ultimate.

Employees managed: 20, which is expected to grow to 50 once construction starts

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