

I-4 Ultimate Update: \$2.3B Job Passes Two-Year Mark

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FDOT? photo “The large Liebherr crawler cranes can be seen at almost every interchange, and are being used for pile driving and structure work when the work space allows,” said Jon Walker, SGL program project manager.



A more than \$2.3 billion dollar project that will rebuild Interstate 4 through central Florida has officially passed the two-year mark of the nearly seven years slated for construction. I-4 Ultimate calls for the reconstruction of 21 mi. of roadway infrastructure from west of Kirkman Road in Orange County through Downtown Orlando, extending to the east of state Road 434 in Seminole County.

“The I-4 Ultimate project is changing the landscape of central Florida,” said Loren Bobo, P.E., Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) I-4 Ultimate construction program manager. “Not only is the project adding capacity, but the aging infrastructure is being replaced and being designed to the latest design standards. It's an exciting project that, due to the public private partnership, FDOT is able to make happen and complete twenty years earlier than traditional funding mechanisms.”

Having surpassed the first third of the project, those involved in the construction efforts are pleased to be moving forward on the signature corridor, which continues to make headlines.

“For most of our 65 million annual visitors, the drive on I-4 is their first impression of what Orlando has to offer,” said Bobo. “Enhanced bridge and roadway architecture, functional accent lighting and bold landscape designs complement central Florida's rich history and community character. By building more than just concrete and asphalt, I-4 can be a point of pride for our 2.1 million residents.

“There are more than 1,660 people working on I-4 Ultimate today, with 65 percent of those workers local to the area. That's a big benefit to our community. Not only are we improving the way people travel in and around central Florida, but we're also putting a lot of people to work. The contractor has plans to hire an additional 600 to 700 craft workers in 2017. We are also committed to filling 250 on-the-job trainee positions, providing not only a job, but a good foundation to a lifelong career.”

The high-profile makeover was designed to better connect communities, invigorate the local economy and improve overall quality of life.

“It's extremely satisfying to see work progressing daily. With so many structures and new lanes being built, even casual observers notice the differences. I-4 is literally transforming right before our eyes.”

Bobo said to keep workers from becoming overwhelmed, the contractor split the enormous project into four areas.

“It's like having four projects within one. This helps with allocation of resources and coordinating work zones. Plus, each of the four areas is unique in its location. We have the attractions area with out-of-town visitors coming in from all over the world daily, the urban downtown Orlando area and bustling suburb communities further to the north. Each present their own individual challenges. Keeping 30,000 plus line items on schedule is a daunting task, but organization and flexibility is key to keeping it all together.”

As for how area motorists are coping with detours and delays, “The contract requires us to keep the same number of lanes open during the day that we had prior to the start of construction,” Bobo said. “All I-4 lane closures occur at night, to keep I-4 on the go and cut down on delays.

“We developed a custom notification system through I4Ultimate.com that allows motorists to receive text and email alerts specific to the areas of the 21-mile project they drive through.

A number of industry leaders formed the I-4 Mobility Partners (I-4MP) team to design, build, finance and operate the project through a 40-year P3 concession agreement. The team includes Skanska Infrastructure Development, John Laing Investments Limited, SGL Constructors, Skanska, lead joint venture partner, Granite Construction Company, the Lane Construction Corporation, HDR, Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. and Infrastructure Corporation of America. Support for the I-4 Ultimate project comes from a variety of sources.

“If you take the full funding needed over the 40 years of the contract, the Central Florida Expressway Authority is paying five percent, 21 percent comes from federal dollars and the state of Florida is contributing 23 percent,” said Bobo. “The remaining 51 percent is paid through dynamic tolls collected for access to express lanes.”

One of I-4 Ultimate's main goals is to improve traffic flow by easing congestion through the addition of four new variable toll express lanes and the reconstruction of 15 major interchanges. This includes widening 13 bridges, replacing 74 bridges and adding 53 new bridges, along with a pedestrian overpass on Kirkman Road and a signature pedestrian bridge at Maitland interchange. The completed signature corridor will feature dramatic landscaping, accent lighting and enhanced bridge architecture.

As part of its overall mission, the project team developed a comprehensive contamination management plan and spill prevention, control and countermeasure plan to prevent pollutants from contaminating soils, surface water and groundwater.

Officials also are remediating areas of contamination within the project's right-of-way to prevent future contamination. Four underground storage tanks and 145 tons of petroleum impacted soils and debris have been removed from the project site.

In January, the project received recognition from the Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure (ISI) for its sustainability efforts of environmental, social and economic impact. I-4 Ultimate becomes the first project in the state to do so.

"We are so excited to receive the Envision Platinum recognition for the efforts of the entire I-4 Ultimate Improvement team to protect the environment from water to wildlife to air quality, while creating a signature corridor for the entire region," said Bobo. "The Envision award shows that sustainability goals are achievable alongside other primary missions of our agency to enhance the economic prosperity and preserve the quality of our environment and communities."

The project earned the award for its ongoing programs to minimize environmental impacts, including relocating protected wildlife, using efficient machinery, controlling stormwater runoff, planting non-invasive vegetation, and recycling 99 percent of the concrete and steel removed from roads and bridges.

"Since day one, our entire team has been committed to achieving the highest standards for sustainable infrastructure under Envision," said Sal Taddeo, chief operating officer east, Skanska USA Civil. "Our goal is to deliver one of the country's most complex roadway projects, while reaching a top level of sustainable infrastructure performance that can serve as a role model for other projects of its kind." "Designing sustainable infrastructure is not achieved by accident," said Charles O'Reilly, HDR transportation group president. "It cannot be an afterthought, especially on a project as complex and far-reaching as I-4 Ultimate. FDOT's commitment to sustainably connected communities, improved economies and enhanced livability has been there since the beginning. This Envision Platinum rating is the result. We are proud to be a part of the team that made it possible and to add a sixth Envision-verified project to our portfolio."

A \$750,000 incentive has also been established to promote alternative modes of transportation during construction. In addition, the project team is including an Alternative Technical Concept to build an extra pedestrian overpass bridge over Kirkman Road at the major intersection entrance to Universal Studios.

According to Jon Walker, SGL program project manager, "SGL Constructors is making major progress every day on the critical path work in downtown Orlando, as well as the entire 21-mile I-4 Ultimate corridor. We are pleased with our progress, and look forward to continuing to advance the project in 2017 to deliver an improved and safer driving experience along I-4 for the residents and visitors of Central Florida."

Walker noted that crews are making significant headway at the I-4/Kirkman Road interchange near Universal Orlando Resort.

"This includes three new bridges that will eliminate the existing left-hand exit ramp off of westbound I-4 and replace it with the preferred right-hand ramp, while maintaining free flow of traffic to the popular International Drive destinations. Just north of the Kirkman interchange, SGL is constructing the new Grand National Drive overpass that is planned to open in 2017. It will provide a new gateway across I-4 between International Drive and Major Boulevard at the Universal Resort area. Grand National Drive will become one of the direct connect access points to the future express lanes in 2021 when the I-4 Ultimate project is completed.

Walker said phased construction work is under way at the I-4/Florida Turnpike interchange to accommodate a direct connect ramp between these two facilities. New ramps at the I-4/Conroy Road interchange are being constructed in conjunction with new westbound I-4 bridges over Radebaugh Way and Shingle Creek. Just south of downtown Orlando, SGL has started drainage work, mechanically stabilized earth (MSE), retaining walls and bridge work along I-4 at Rio Grande Avenue, Orange Blossom Trail and Kaley Avenue.

In downtown Orlando, the critical path work at the I-4/SR 408 interchange continues to take shape, with progress on the foundations and substructure work for the SR 408 bridges and the new flyover ramps. SGL is also performing the westbound SR 408 widening work, including bridges over Westmoreland Drive, Orange Blossom Trail, Rio Grande Avenue and S. Tampa Avenue.

Just north of downtown, the permanent eastbound lanes of I-4 are being constructed between Colonial Drive and Maitland Boulevard with drainage work, MSE retaining walls and mainline bridges under construction along this 5-mi. stretch of the project. Bridge work in this area includes the Ivanhoe Boulevard interchange, New Hampshire Street, Princeton Street, Winter Park Street, Par Street, Formosa Avenue, Minnesota Avenue, Fairbanks Avenue, Riddle Drive, Wymore Road, Lee Road and Kennedy Boulevard.

"At the I-4/Maitland Boulevard interchange, SGL Constructors continues to make progress along this complex interchange that includes reconstruction of a major arterial utilized by commuters and residents," said Walker. "SGL is creating three grade-separated intersections to replace the existing at-grade signalized intersections at Lake Destiny Road, Keller Road and Maitland Summit Boulevard. Many of the permanent ponds and ramps have already been put in service to make way for phased construction."

As far as the addition of four new variable toll express lanes and the reconstruction of 15 major interchanges, said Walker, “The tolled express lanes are typically built in the last phase of construction. In most locations along the corridor, SGL Constructors chose to phase the final express lane construction in the median after the general use lanes are completed. The express lanes have unique access ramps and tolling facilities that must be completed and tested prior to opening these tolled lanes.”

The project remains on schedule, despite weather delays. In October 2016, crews were forced to halt construction due to Hurricane Matthew.

“The storm did result in a brief shutdown, as an emergency order by the Florida governor. Once the brunt of the storm passed our area, SGL was able to quickly clean up and return to full construction mode, with little delay,” said Walker.

Equipment being used on the project includes Volvo excavators, Volvo rollers, Cat loaders, Cat paving equipment, John Deere dozers and graders, Grove R/T cranes and Liebherr crawler cranes.

“The large Liebherr crawler cranes can be seen at almost every interchange, and are being used for pile driving and structure work when the work space allows,” said Walker. “A few of the more nimble and maneuverable Tadano mantis cranes are being used in the downtown area where the larger crawler cranes simply will not fit. The SGL cranes are inspected by our operators on a daily basis with thorough monthly and annual examinations by certified inspectors. Before the crane can lift objects, detailed lift plans are reviewed by engineers and inspectors, for safety.”

Officials anticipate final completion and acceptance for I-4 Ultimate in 2021. For Walker and the others involved in the massive project, working on the corridor is a unique opportunity.

“One of the challenges of a mega project is pulling together and developing the workforce needed, and teaching and training the new employees about our culture, our processes and our procedures. SGL is proud of the team of workers we’re developing to successfully build the I-4 Ultimate project for the residents and visitors of central Florida.

“Our current work force of 850 craft workers, 320 staff employees and over 350 subcontractor employees take pride in the safety and quality of our work every day. We look forward to looking back one day and telling our grandkids that we were part of building this signature corridor.”—CEG

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