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I-595 reconstruction: So where are the jobs?

Michael Turnbell TRANSPORTATION COLUMNIST

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Q: Earlier this year, the Sun Sentinel reported that the \$1.2 billion Interstate 595 reconstruction was going to create 30,000 to 35,000 jobs in the area. I have yet to see one job announced for this project. Can you explain why no jobs are being announced if construction started as advertised in February and when they may be hiring?

Craig Howard, Parkland

A: The Federal Highway Administration uses a formula to make such job projections, roughly 30,000 to 35,000 jobs created or supported for every \$1.25 billion invested in transportation projects.

The jobs supported includes, for example, the employee at a convenience store whose job went from part-time to full-time because of increased business from construction workers or the worker whose job was not lost at the nearby asphalt plant because business picked up as a direct result of the project, said Laila Haddad, a Florida Department of Transportation spokeswoman.

The department produces a report every month that tracks the number of jobs by contractor working on the project. In June, a total of 1,182 jobs, including 754 full-time and 428 part-time, were reported working on the project.

More than 70 companies are under contract. The list can be found at <http://www.i-595.com>. Click on the "I-595 job opportunities" on the right side of the page, then go to "Doing Business with I 595 Express." Click on click "Current Solicitations." At the bottom of the page is a link to the document.

The number employed directly by the project should rise as the design phase winds down and construction picks up.

Right now, only one of the project's five segments is under major construction – the stretch between Nob Hill and Davie roads. But work on the other four segments is expected to begin between now and the end of the year.

Q: Why has there been no attempt made to extend Lyons Road from Lake Worth Road to Forest Hill Boulevard in the Lake Worth/Wellington area? There are so few north-south roads in western Palm Beach County besides U.S. 441 or Florida's Turnpike. It's seems like a no-brainer to complete this section of Lyons so that one could go from Okeechobee Boulevard to Boynton Beach Boulevard without getting on a toll road.

Anneleen Phillips, Lake Worth

A: Palm Beach County is preparing for the time when the extension will become necessary by buying up land for the road that will go through the Palm Beach Ranchettes neighborhood.

But for now, there isn't enough traffic to warrant its construction.

In 1998, Palm Beach County commissioners agreed not to build Lyons Road through Palm Beach Ranchettes until neighboring U.S. 441 was overcapacity at eight lanes.

It came close in 2007 when U.S. 441 carried 5,092 vehicles during peak hours – just shy of its capacity of 6,060 vehicles.

But traffic dropped with the recession, with only 4,000 vehicles traveling on U.S. 441 at peak hours. So the Ranchettes is safe – for now.