

New southern beltway set to reinvent car travel around Orlando



With shimmering waves of heat on a hot summer afternoon, traffic crawls on eastbound Interstate 4 at the Osceola Parkway, Thursday, June 27, 2024.



By **Natalia Jaramillo** | najaramillo@orlandosentinel.com | Orlando Sentinel

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One big vision is vying to shape the future of travel by car in southern Central Florida.

The Central Florida Expressway Authority hopes to transform the region's highway infrastructure by creating a southern beltway, a 60-plus-mile loop that could shorten commute times for Osceola County residents and streamline travel across the region as its population booms.

The beltway would connect a series of road projects, two contentious expressways and a new state-funded road to the road agency's existing 125-mile infrastructure, at a likely cost of billions of dollars.

Completion is still years away, with an estimated 2050 timeframe, but will build upon decades of planning dating back to the 1980s that foretold the region's growth.

"Some of the roads considered controversial now were planned 20 years ago, 30 years ago, as a system," Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, who sits on the CFX board, said at the Aug. 14

meeting where the southern beltway plan was unveiled. “We are going to continue to grow and we’ve got to figure out how to handle that growth appropriately.”

Central Florida has repeatedly ranked among the nation’s fastest growing areas. By mid-2024, the Orlando metro had ballooned to nearly 3 million people, placing it in the top 20 most populous regions in the country, census data showed.

“Growth is happening with or without us, and if we are not successful in delivering results today and into the future, economic development will be stifled by inhibiting the efficient movement of people, goods and services,” said Will Hawthorne, director of transportation planning and policy for CFX.

The massive project is likely CFX’s largest undertaking, even larger than its western beltway, State Road 429, that extends nearly 23 miles from Apopka south to I-4 in Osceola County. The Wekiva Parkway was the toll agency’s last step in a northern beltway, a 25-mile project completed in 2023.

“Reading through the numerous plans that have been done in the area, the first idea and discussion of a beltway [around Orlando] dates back to 1950,” Hawthorne said. “What was a vision 40 years ago is now a reality and ... this is what good planning looks like.”

The first part of the new southern beltway is the Poinciana Parkway Extension, which will stretch from Ronald Reagan Parkway to County Road 532. It will connect to the Poinciana Connector, a new 3.5-mile road project currently under construction by the Florida Department of Transportation that aims to join with Interstate 4.

Those roads will link to the Southport Connector, a 15-mile elevated tolled expressway that will cross through southern Osceola County from the Poinciana Parkway to Florida’s Turnpike.



The entrance to Disney Wilderness Preserve leads into 3,500 acres of restored wetlands in Poinciana on Aug. 7, 2025. Environmentalists are concerned about the effect a planned road project would have on wildlife in the area. (Rich Pope/Orlando Sentinel)

That road project has already faced years of pushback from Poinciana residents, who argued the elevated section above Cypress Parkway would create a [“Great Wall of Poinciana”](#) and divide the largely minority community. Conservation experts are also concerned about the road’s [proximity to environmentally sensitive](#) lands. But it appears to be moving ahead nonetheless.

The next link in the beltway is the Northeast Connector Expressway, or State Road 515, a proposed 15- to 20-mile expressway linking Florida’s Turnpike northeast to US 192 and extending north toward the future Osceola Parkway Extension.

That project has been [divisive for years](#) amid CFX’s now-approved plan to pave the road through a portion of protected Split Oak Forest. The extension totals roughly 9 miles and would connect State Road 417 near Boggy Creek in Orange County to Cyrils Drive in Osceola County.

Many of these projects are only in Project Development & Environment, a study phase required before the CFX board can vote to move forward with a proposed expressway. Years of design and construction still stand in the way.

CFX is funded by tolls, but with just [one segment of the Southport Connector](#) alone estimated to total \$1.12 billion, it may need local and state help as it has in the past.

“We weren’t alone in getting to this point,” Hawthorne said. “If it weren’t for our regional partners like FDOT, the MPO [Metro Plan Orlando] and Florida’s Turnpike enterprise we simply would not have been able to accomplish what we’ve done in just a few decades.”

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