

Developer to fund \$17M bridge over I-4 in popular tourist corridor

Overpass would connect Apopka-Vineland Road with I-Drive between Lake Buena Vista and SeaWorld.

BY DAN PING | STAFF WRITER

The commute for motorists in southwest Orange County will get a bit easier once a privately funded new \$17 million bridge over Interstate 4 is completed.

Orange County officials are working with property owner Daryl Carter to create Wildwood Avenue, a four-lane boulevard that eventually will connect International Drive and Apopka-Vineland Road by a planned bridge over the interstate.

Carter owns an 80-acre parcel — known as Vineland Pointe — on the east

side of I-4, just north of the now-closed Dixie Stampede dinner theater. He also bought 97.6 acres west of the interstate in April for \$26 million.

Carter is funding the project, though the county most likely will do the actual construction.

The engineering, right-of-way agreements and permitting for the first phase of the project — from International Drive to I-4 — are nearing completion. A date for construction has not been set.

The project's second phase will involve building the bridge over I-4 to connect with Palm Parkway.

The Federal Highway Administration has approved plans to build a bridge over the interstate, but a formal permit has not been issued, says



Homan

Florida Department of Transportation spokesman Steve Homan.

Though the planned bridge will not have access to or from I-4, it eventually will be converted into a full interchange.

Tony Polanco, manager of Havana's Cuban Cafe on Palm Parkway, thinks once the road is done, it will provide better east-west access to businesses on both sides of the interstate. "A bridge over the interstate there would make it easier for the people in the hotels to get to the outlet mall."

The main way to get east-west movement from Apopka-Vineland to I-Drive right now is Sand Lake Road, which

typically is jammed with traffic. "This new road will make a lot of things possible," says Carter.

For example, besides adding a new east-west boulevard, the road will allow several large land owners like Carter to develop their property by providing a transportation master plan and easier access to infrastructure like stormwater and sewer.

Meanwhile, Carter says it's too early to determine how he'll develop the property, other than to say it likely will be commercial development consistent with what's already in the Lake Buena Vista area.

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