

Long road ahead for I-95 expansion



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JUPITER, FL -- It's been a long, bumpy road for motorists who have had to endure the many highway-widening projects across Palm Beach County.

And it's not over yet.

The final phase of what seems like a never-ending project is going on now in the Jupiter area.

Just about everywhere you look on I-95, you'll find orange cones, concrete barriers, and construction equipment.

Lots of it.

It's noisy, dusty, and crowded and the work goes on pretty much around the clock.

Some Jupiter residents live just a few feet from all the construction.

A giant wall that's going up is supposed to buffer the sound.

On the other side of the wall, there should be some peace and quiet once it's finished.

At least, that's the idea.

But while the construction is going on, the folks who live here just deal with the noise the best they can.

"It's been a wreck. It's a lot of noise. It's a lot of headaches," said Glenn Rucker, a 10-year resident of North Palm Beach Heights.

He doesn't like his new scenery.

"That traffic doesn't bother me one bit. I can walk inside my house and I don't hear it. But the thing is it's going to be more of an ugly distraction. It looks like we're in prison now."

Rucker's assessment is very different from what the Florida Department of Transportation says it is hearing about the project.

"The residents in The Heights are very happy to get the wall," said Alicia De Fago, public information officer for the DOT. "They understand that the little bit of construction they're

seeing now, impacting them, is going to benefit them in the long run. They're very excited to have the wall."

Other residents we spoke with agree.

They say noise hasn't been the issue.

"As far as the wall goes, it's gonna be better for everybody all along here on 95," said James Oliver, whose front yard faces the wall. "It's going to cut down all the noise and what not."

"I think the wall was a great idea just to cut out the road noise, keep animals from crossing I-95..things like that," said Samantha Palo. "But it's ugly. It's an eyesore and I want some trees."

Like it or not, the wall is here to stay as part of the 43-million dollar, four-and-a-half-mile construction project between Donald Ross Road and Indiantown Road.

I-95 will expand from six to 10 lanes, which should ease traffic congestion, especially during rush hour.

But driver beware.

The end of the noise, and the dust, and the detours is still two-and-a-half years down the road: Spring of 2012.