

Flagler Drive in Fort Lauderdale getting overhaul

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A popular shortcut for downtown commuters is getting a facelift that people on foot and bicycles will be able to enjoy. Drivers also will get a smoother ride.

But expect some short-term inconveniences until about mid-March while Northeast Flagler Drive is closed to through traffic for construction.

The street, which parallels the east side of the Florida East Coast Railway between Andrews Avenue and Sunrise Boulevard, is a speedy alternative to U.S. 1 and Sunrise Boulevard for residents in the city's Lake Ridge and Poinsettia Heights neighborhoods.

Two years ago, the four-lane road was narrowed to two through lanes and a turn lane to accommodate a new greenway, a paved path along the west side of the road.

The city received a \$800,000 state grant to add solar powered lights along the path and new bio-swales on the east side of the road. The swales are narrow strips lined with vegetation and porous material to suck more water quickly below the surface.

The entire street will be repaved and re-striped before the project is completed in mid-March. That's good news for drivers who've complained about potholes and rough pavement in some stretches.

The city's plan is part of what's called Complete Streets, a program that rebuilds roads to make it easier for pedestrians to cross, walk to shops, bike to work or catch a bus.

Nearby, Sistrunk Boulevard was recently redesigned with narrower lanes and widened sidewalks. Even redeveloped stretches of U.S. 1 north of Broward Boulevard now lined with luxury apartments boast wider sidewalks, a sign of what's to come in the rest of the neighborhood.

"The city envisions roadways that safely move people, rather than just vehicles," said city spokesman Matt Little.

Future phases will connect the greenway to Broward Boulevard, the county bus terminal, All Aboard Florida's planned station and a planned streetcar called the Wave.

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