

## New Web site keeps drivers on right road

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By the end of the year, motorists will be able to get better and more timely information to help them avoid the crashes and congestion that delay the daily commute.

They can sign up to receive e-mails and text messages on lane-blocking and road-closing wrecks. And an enhanced Web site will display more detailed reports to help drivers choose an unimpeded route before leaving home or work.

The upgrades are part of the state's new SunGuide software, which will link traffic management centers around Florida. SunGuide is Florida's intelligent transportation system: a high-tech network of closed-circuit television cameras, message signs and vehicle detectors that save lives and time for motorists on major roadways.

The Palm Beach County center, which oversees Interstate 95 and its feeder roads, will come online this month. Once the kinks are worked out, it will be ready for public use.

"For us, this is a huge step," said Steve Corbin, the state's district intelligent transportation operations manager. "The software really takes traffic management to the next level."

### **Messaging system improved**

One of the main benefits of the new software is to speed warnings to motorists about incidents that slow travel across county lines or on the other side of the state. Regional messaging is nothing new. The Palm Beach center posted alerts last summer about the wildfires that closed I-95 in northern Florida. The new software will make it faster and better.

Once an incident is entered into the system, the computer will automatically sort out what message signs will be lit and what the warning will say. Traffic center operators now handle those tasks.

"We have the Super Bowl coming up in February," said Bob Murphy, the local center's project manager, about the extravaganza at Dolphin Stadium in Miami Gardens that will attract hundreds of thousands of people. "That's reason to have regional communication."

The new system will allow text messages and e-mails to be customized, depending on where commuters travel. Drivers can receive alerts on incidents in only Palm Beach County or both Palm Beach and Broward counties. Soon, the reports will include Miami-Dade County.

The "real-time" map on the Web site will let motorists zoom in to smaller neighborhoods or zoom out for a regional view of roadway conditions. By moving a mouse over icons of cameras and message signs on the map, information will pop up on the screen and be refreshed every few seconds.

"As the system develops over the next six months, we'll be able to get more information out of it," Corbin said.

### **Construction delaying upgrades**

Broward County has 45 message signs along I-95 and I-595. In 2008, intelligent transportation improvements will be coming to Martin, St. Lucie and Indian River counties.

Palm Beach County will continue to use portable cameras and signs until construction on I-95 is completed. There are 30 "smart zones" for 40 miles of highway, leaving some areas uncovered.

To fill in the gaps, the state is thinking about starting a road-watchers' program. A phone line would be set up for commuters to phone in crashes and other problems.

The calls still would have to be confirmed before alerts are sent out, but it would speed up the flow of information, Murphy said.

Another feature of SunGuide is its ability to collect more data on crashes, such as how long lanes were closed and when emergency crews were notified and when they got to the scene.

The documents will show the value of the system in saving drivers time and money and set measures for improvements, Corbin said.

Even with the advancements in technology, roadway managers will always struggle to keep pace with increased traffic on the highways. Congestion is here to stay.

"If we can just keep it equal every year, we've done a good job," Corbin said.

To see what the new Palm Beach County traffic map will look like, go to [www.smartsunguide.com](http://www.smartsunguide.com) and click on "real-time map."