

Busch Boulevard Makeover Begins

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NORTH TAMPA - Work has begun on the Busch Boulevard beautification project, with completion scheduled for fall 2009.

State highway officials hired Pepper Contracting Services of Clearwater to repave the six-lane road, landscape the medians and reconfigure numerous intersections, Florida Department of Transportation spokeswoman Kris Carson said.

Pepper Contracting's bid of \$9.5 million to do most of the improvement work was the lowest submitted by five construction companies.

Road construction workers began ripping up the raised medians on Busch Boulevard on Sept. 22, Carson said. Work is under way from the CSX Transportation railroad tracks to 20th Street, east of Nebraska Avenue.

Construction barriers have been placed along the innermost lanes of Busch in both directions, forcing traffic to merge and causing slowdowns.

State transportation officials have budgeted \$12.5 million for the improvement project. The road is getting a facelift along a 4-mile stretch of Busch from Florida Avenue to 56th Street.

The project will feature new traffic lights and upgraded sidewalks for wheelchair accessibility. Other safety improvements include closing or changing left-turn openings at more than 25 intersections along Busch to reduce the risk of accidents.

State officials received federal grant money to use specifically for beautification, so the boulevard's extreme makeover will include a landscaped median adorned with crepe myrtles, date palms and colorful white flower beds. Water lines will be installed for irrigation use.

The contractor also will add decorative lighting, new traffic signals and bricked crosswalks at Busch Boulevard and 56th Street in Temple Terrace.