

Mayor Demings' State of I-Drive Address

Then and Now

A Brief History

[Video: [Highlights of I-Drive](#)]

Welcome to the 2020 State of International Drive!

Let me begin by telling you a brief bit of history about the area.

In the 1960s, attorney Finley Hamilton developed the first section of road to serve his Hilton Inn South. Hamilton figured that once Disney World opened, he would make lots of money. Critics called the hotel, "Finley's Folly."

In the words of Hamilton, I quote, "Everyone, all of my friends said it was in the boondocks."

But, they couldn't have been more wrong.

It turned out to be highly successful. Hamilton came up with the name International Drive for the road, because he said, "...it sounded big and important."

As a lifelong resident of Orange County, I can remember when there was no International Drive.

International Drive

Hamilton nailed it – it is indeed big and important!

International Drive or I-Drive is an 11-mile area, which stretches from South Orlando to the tourism corridor of unincorporated Orange County. It is vital to the overall economic success of our region, as it hosts more than 75,000 workers.

In 2018, the total visitation to I-Drive was more than 14.8 million. To put that into perspective, that is about 20 percent of the total Central Florida area visitation of 75 million.

These millions of guests, families and residents of all ages come to I-Drive for an exciting experience they can find nowhere else.

Visit Orlando, which currently receives 25 percent of each year's total tourist tax collections, will have that percentage incrementally increased to 30 percent by 2023. This measure will provide significant additional funding to market the destination, connect with travelers, and position Orange County attractions at the forefront of global media.

All of this will continue to grow the local entertainment and travel options that support so many businesses and jobs.

Let's see what travelers today have to say about their experience on I-Drive.

[Video: [Testimonials about the I-Drive Experience](#)]

Synergy and Collaboration

Orange County Convention Center

We all should be proud of the fact that Orange County is the top destination for more than 75 million visitors from around the world.

I-Drive is part of the “magic” we have to offer, with the second-largest convention center in North America.

Sustainability is an important element of the Orange County Convention Center.

Not only is the facility Gold LEED certified with solar panels on the rooftop, its hydroponic garden in the West Concourse produces many of the vegetables and herbs served at the Center, including the hydro-salad you are eating today.

Last year, through our Corporate Social Responsibility Program, the Orange County Convention Center donated more than \$2.3 million to community organizations.

To continue our Corporate Social Responsibility and expand our state-of-the-art facility, we have hired Mark Tester, our new executive director. He comes to us with a long history of convention center experience, including tenures at McCormick Place in Chicago and the Austin Convention Center. Mark will begin work next month.

Additionally, we have appointed a construction oversight committee for the Center’s expansion project. I would like them to stand and be recognized.

Yes, we are growing!

In 2019, the center hosted 1.5 million attendees with an economic impact of \$3 billion. That represents approximately \$2,200 in economic impact per attendee.

Design plans are underway for a \$605-million expansion of the convention Center’s North-South Building. Here's a first look at what the new expansion will look like.

[Video: [Orange County Convention Center Design Concept](#)]

The new Convention Way Grand Concourse and the Multipurpose Venue expansion will bring total exhibit space at the Convention Center to 2.3 million square feet.

The Grand Concourse expansion includes an additional 60,000 square feet of meeting space and an 80,000-square-foot ballroom, along with a new signature entry to the North-South Building along Convention Way.

The Multipurpose Venue brings an additional 200,000 square feet of contiguous exhibit space in the South Building, and will also incorporate connectivity between the North and South Concourses.

This expansion will sharpen our competitive edge as we maintain our position as a dynamic location for conventions, tradeshow and for guests from around the globe. The expected completion of both projects is the fourth quarter of 2023, with the groundbreaking in fall 2020.

The I-Drive experience

Part of that “I-Drive experience” is to ensure that visitors feel welcome and safe.

In 2018, an ambassador program was created through a partnership between the I-Drive Business Improvement District and the Orange County Sheriff’s Office.

District Engagement Officers or DEOs were deployed who wear bright green uniforms and can be seen on bicycles and foot. They provide visitor information, direct traffic and augment services provided by local law enforcement.

I offer my thanks to the Orange County Sheriff's Office and the Orlando Police Department for keeping us safe.

UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management

Also in the area, the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management is located on Universal Boulevard. It is renowned as one of the finest schools of hospitality in the United States and it is making a lasting impact on I-Drive.

Take a listen to students who are achieving success in hospitality.

[Video: [UCF Rosen Center for Hospitality Success Story](#)]

Propelling into the Future

A Ready Workforce

So that businesses can continue to be successful in the District, we must ensure that they have a ready workforce. That means workers must live closer to where they work and have access to housing that is affordable.

When I took office as Orange County Mayor, one of my top priorities was addressing the affordable housing crisis in our community. The Housing for All Task Force was launched in April of last year, and members delivered a thoughtful and thorough 10-year action plan. As the Task Force was working to come up with a plan, I began a series of meetings with some of Orlando’s top employers to ask them to become part of the affordable housing solution.

Universal Orlando was one of the major employers I met with. Universal leaders were so receptive that they asked for time to formulate a plan.

That plan is now a reality.

Last month, Universal Orlando announced that they will make 20 acres of land available to Orange County for roughly 1,000 future workforce, Housing for All units. Universal will also make an additional three acres available for mass transit. We couldn’t be more excited!

While details are being worked out, this will enhance our Affordable Housing Plan to give residents the options they need to live and work near their employment.

Permitting and the I-Drive Service Center

In order to keep pace with land development and construction demands, it is necessary for Orange County to reengineer and update land use permitting processes to make them more user-friendly.

Our Fast Track Online Services allows customers to submit electronic plans, pay fees, schedule inspections and manage their project from their home or office. More than 70 percent of our building permits are now done completely online, saving our customers' time and money.

This spring, we will be opening our I-Drive Service Center to provide enhanced support and service delivery. The Service Center will allow our site work, building and life safety inspectors direct access to the projects within our growing District.

I am confident that this new office will be a valuable resource.

Transportation Improvements

We also have several road and transportation updates in the I-Drive area that are necessitated by new development.

You will be happy to know that the International Drive Transit Lanes design phase is 90 percent complete. It will extend from Destination Parkway, north to Sand Lake Road. The ultimate goal will be to move tourists and residents more efficiently, reducing traffic congestion and the dependency on single automobiles. This road construction will begin in early 2021, and shortly thereafter, we will see improvements on surrounding roads.

The Sand Lake and I-4 Interchange is being designed by the Florida Department of Transportation. In collaboration with the County, an enhanced interchange design is being finalized. It will implement unique design features and enhanced landscaping to create an iconic signature entrance to the District from the north.

The County is also coordinating with the Turnpike Enterprise to implement enhanced landscaping along the BeachLine, with emphasis at the Universal Boulevard and I-Drive Interchanges.

We are finalizing negotiations with Universal Studios for the extension of Kirkman Road, a six-lane roadway with an additional two transit lanes. The project is planned to be completed in 2023.

Additionally, the County is finalizing plans for a major pedestrian bridge at the Intersection of I-Drive and Sand Lake Road.

Coming Soon!

And now, let's buckle up and go for a ride down I-Drive to see some new attractions and developments planned for the area.

In May of last year, Universal Orlando announced plans to build "Epic Universe," a multi-billion-dollar project that will employ more than 14,000 workers at a starting wage of \$15 per hour.

The park is projected to open in 2023 and will showcase new state-of-the-art experiences, including the recently announced "Super Nintendo World", as well as hotels, specialty restaurants, retail and much more. It will also serve as the company's headquarters for Universal Worldwide Creative Services.

There are several other incredible attractions and expansions planned for the area.

Coming soon to SeaWorld – the Ice Breaker! This multi-directional launch coaster, with a 93-foot-tall spike and a 100-degree angle, is scheduled to open this spring.

Opening this year at ICON Park, the Orlando Slingshot, a 300-foot-high thrill ride that will catapult riders up to 450 feet into the air. I know that all of you are looking forward to being catapulted! Then, there is the Orlando Gyro Drop Tower, a 400-foot-high tower with a 350-foot freefall going 75-miles per hour. And, the 15,000-square-foot "Ole Red" will be a place for live country music, Southern food and hospitality. All opening this spring.

Pointe Orlando is completing a \$32-million redevelopment and renovation of the complex, projected to be completed this summer!

At Vineland Pointe, a three-phase retail shopping complex on South I-Drive near the Daryl Carter Parkway, is underway with more than 69 acres and 447,000 square feet of retail space with construction costs of more than \$48 million.

The SKYPLEX Entertainment Complex will include the world's tallest pole-coaster at 500 feet high, along with many other thrill rides, entertainment venues, shopping and restaurants.

There are 18 new hotel projects underway with completion dates between now and 2024. This includes projects by Rosen Hotels and Resorts, as well as the 2,050-room Dockside Inn and Suites at the Endless Summer Resort by Universal Orlando.

The nightlife entertainment available on I-Drive is as vibrant as ever, providing a breadth of options for our residents and visitors to enjoy fine dining, top-notch dancing, and family-friendly venues. Thanks to the variety of established businesses and flourishing, innovative concepts, guests have a chance to participate in unparalleled culinary, entertainment, and cultural experiences. Popular I-Drive staples include, BB Kings, Tin Roof and Mango's, as well as music venues like Howl at the Moon, and family-friendly businesses like Dave and Busters, Fun Spot, and Andretti's.

Closing

[Video: [Additional Highlights of I-Drive](#)]

For groups big or small and of all ages, I-Drive offers a superb experience, yet to be matched by any other region in the country.

So, whether someone is attending a conference, visiting theme parks or just looking to have dinner at one of the outstanding restaurants in the area, our goal is to make their visit to I-Drive a memorable and a safe experience. This would not be possible without you, and all the people who work in the I-Drive Area.

Thank you for your efforts. You are doing a great job.

And this ladies and gentlemen, is the State of I-Drive 2020!