



Orlando, Fla (June 15, 2005) - Orange County commissioners have voted to spend another \$1.5 million synchronizing stoplights around International Drive, hoping to smooth out the traffic along the tourist-choked strip.

"Traffic down there is one of the worst problems we have," Commissioner Homer Hartage said moments before the unanimous vote.

The popular stretch of hotels, theme parks, shops and other tourist spots has struggled with gridlock for years, often looking more like a parking lot than a boulevard. The section of I-Drive north of Sand Lake Road carries 37,000 cars each day -- 50 percent more than it was designed to handle. The stretch south of Sand Lake, meanwhile, should be over capacity in two years.

The \$1.5 million will allow county officials to expand a system that aims to keep traffic lights green -- and cars moving.

Called the SCOOT system, engineers install sensors at different intersections. When cars pass through one of those intersections, the sensor sends messages to other intersections to ensure the light is green by the time the traffic arrives, said Frank Irons, the transportation-management officer at the Orange County Convention Center.

County officials already have installed the system at 26 area intersections. Tuesday's vote authorizes them to add 14 more, including along Sand Lake Road, John Young Parkway and Universal Boulevard.

"It makes a huge difference," said Luann Brooks, executive director of the International Drive Master Transit and Improvement District. "The brain that this thing has is phenomenal."