

Governor DeSantis (00:00):

In places. But today I'm happy to report that starting at 11:00 AM the causeway will be reopened for the citizens of Lee County.

Governor DeSantis (00:16):

We have had, um, after search and rescue and some of those things were going, there was a talk about how do we get more people back onto Sanibel we were helicoptering in power people, boating people in, but at the end of the day, you really need to make it work. You need to be able to get people over there on vehicles. And so we worked with, um, F D O T to develop a plan and implement a plan to make the temporary repairs necessary to the sanibel causeway to get people back over there. As many of you seen, uh, this was, uh, really significant damage, more significant, and even the Pine Island Bridge, we, uh, had an ambitious agenda and an ambitious, uh, roadmap to get this done by the end of October. Uh, but I'm happy today by, uh, opening it today. We're way ahead of schedule.

Governor DeSantis (01:10):

And even when we got ahead of schedule, uh, initially saying October 21st, we've been able to beat that as well. Uh, so delivering results, and we had over a hundred crews working round the clock, 36,000 work hours to make repairs. And as you see, there's multiple points across this causeway and you're talking about bridge approaches, uh, roadway restoration. You have to do analysis to make sure, uh, the bridge is stable. We had 70 pieces of heavy equipment operating daily, four barges, seven cranes, two dredges, five boats, heavy duty dump trucks, dive teams with underwater survey equipment. They use 8,200 loads of dirt, a filled dirt, 2,400 loads of rock, and 4,000 tons of asphalt. Uh, so those, these repairs while temporary are really gonna help, uh, get the residents, uh, of this island, uh, back on track. They're gonna be able to go and, and be at their property.

Governor DeSantis (02:11):

They're gonna be able to help with the restoration efforts. Of course, we did a one time massive convoy last week to be able to get the power trucks out there, and it was something that's been good. I'll tell you, being out on that island yesterday when we did the checks for the firefighters, there's been huge progress made, particularly with the power infrastructure. You know, there's more that needs to be done, but man, some of that stuff was really, really bad. And if we had not done that one time convoy, we wouldn't have made even a fraction of the progress. Now that you have this, you're gonna, it's gonna be easier to get more people on there. So, uh, we are gonna continue to work with the county on plans for permanent repairs to the causeway. How it's operated is, this is not something the state is controlling, so you talk to your local folks about that, but we're happy to be able to take the lead on the restoration.

Governor DeSantis (03:01):

And so we appreciate, uh, secretary Jared Perdue, uh, for being down here, really ensuring that we cut through red tape and that we understood that time is of the essence. When you have real significant damage like that, you can't let it toil for, for months without attention. We needed to get people back as soon as possible. And so that's what we've been able to do. And this is really the second big success after the restoration of the Pine Island Bridge, that was something people thought weren't, wasn't gonna be able to fix for a long time. Uh, some of the residents there reach out to me, asked if we could help at the state, and I said, Yeah, we want to be helpful. What, what are our options? FDOT came in, looked, we said we thought we'd be able to do it in a week, and I think we finished it in three days and

people have been now pine island, They have restoration of the services because you've gotten massive trucks.

Governor DeSantis (03:53):

Publix was going in opening, and so, you know, they suffered significant damage, but this is huge for them to be able to bounce back. So we were happy to be able to do that. And what happened was after the bridge got restored, uh, we had Duke Energy who sent a lot of trucks down here to help assist with LCEC with the restoration. So there was significant damage. There were pole snapped, there were power lines down. They initially thought that it would probably take until October 25th, but it was actually completed nine days before that on Sunday. And so that was a real rapid restoration, but that would not have been possible without the temporary repairs to the Pine Island Bridge. And so it's really instrumental in breathing life back into the Pine Island community. And you had, um, uh, Duke Energy had 641 Pine Island personnel.

Governor DeSantis (04:47):

They replaced 645 poles, straightened, 365 other poles installed, 284 transformers and 328 cross arms, and picked up 1,655 spans of wire from the ground, uh, to do this full restoration. And so we're really excited that, that, that's been done. Now, they're still working. Of course, repairs on Sanibel are ongoing. Uh, they were, um, we had barges going to the island. We, we did helicopter people in. Of course, doing the convoy over the causeway was huge. Uh, these trucks, you got a lot of trucks, you got a lot of people working there. Uh, you have 600 restoration crew members from both L C E C and fpl as well as some others. And they are laying the groundwork to full restoration of Sanibel, but that requires repairing transmission lines, rebuilding the island substation, removing vegetation and setting poles. Um, restoration is ongoing. Obviously, we want it to be as quick as possible.

Governor DeSantis (05:53):

Uh, but there was significant damage and I would say probably more damage to, uh, the power infrastructure on Captiva Sanibel than on Pine Island and even on Fort Myers Beach. Um, it's so, so they're working hard on it. Uh, remember there's, um, crews are working. So as the citizens go back over to the island, uh, just be cognizant of the folks that are working, um, and do your part to make sure that they have the ability, uh, to, to continue to work without delay. Uh, they do think that they're gonna have, uh, a significant percentage, maybe, uh, over 25% of customers that can receive power, uh, have the lights on this week, maybe as early as tomorrow. Uh, and this will be things like fire stations, that'll include things like fire stations, the elementary school, and then portions of neighborhoods in the central portion of Sanibel and Captiva.

Governor DeSantis (06:46):

And they're gonna continue to do that. Uh, obviously the customers need to be restorable. If you're not restorable, then you're gonna have to have an electrician go in there and fix some of the things that were destroyed. Now, upper and North Captiva, uh, should expect the restoration efforts to take a little bit longer. They had an underground grid and, you know, the underground actually performed very well in many parts of Florida. The problem is, you know, this was basically ground zero, so a lot of that got torn up and is requiring a complete rebuild, so they're working hard on it. Uh, but that is likely going to take, um, some that, that will likely be done sometime in, in November. So we've had a great effort from the FDOT team, first responders, power companies to make repairs, remove debris, rebuild infrastructure, uh, for areas that have been impacted severely by Hurricane Ian.

Governor DeSantis ([07:41](#)):

And I want to thank the crews for F D O E. They did cut and toss operations, not just in this area, but throughout the entire state. And that has really helped paved the way for folks to come in here and work. Uh, and I also want to thank the, the folks that were involved in this effort, uh, who were, who, uh, were contracted out to do it. Uh, they're gonna be, uh, talking about this for a long time. I mean, I just, I think like people in other parts of the country instinctively know if this had happened in some of their tape, it would taken six months just to get through the red tape. I mean, there is no way they would've built, rebuilt a causeway in three weeks. So, uh, I think it's great for the residents here to be able to get back.

Governor DeSantis ([08:23](#)):

I also think it's something that shows a little bit of a can-do spirit for a change, and maybe we should just focus on getting things done and not be mired in bureaucracy all the time. So we're gonna continue to work, uh, really hard on all these efforts. I'm excited about the progress. I understand that there's a lot of days ahead, but, uh, the camaraderie and the teamwork and, uh, the unity has been fantastic. And I think that that's a testament to the folks down here and the folks that have been working on this effort. So, all right, we're gonna hear from a number of people, uh, starting with our FDOT secretary, Jared Perdue.

Sec Perdue ([09:03](#)):

Thank you Governor. And again, thank you for your leadership. It's incredibly gratifying to be here today and have been part of this historic partnership. Getting the Sanibel Causeway opened so quickly, as we have just done is due to Governor DeSantis unconditional support and leadership that brought all these pieces together. Um, it's, it's really incredible what you can accomplish when you cut through the red tape, as the governor mentioned, and you align behind a common set of goals, a common mission to help people. And people on this project truly have worked together day in and day out, many sleepless nights. What many thought would take six months. The Governor pushed us to do it faster and we delivered and incredibly proud to be part of this team. Governor, thank you. Operations at this project site have literally been 24 7 for the past 15 days to get the work done.

Sec Perdue ([09:56](#)):

Today marks 10 days ahead of our originally planned schedule. And as you heard the resources and people that it took to do this that the governor mentioned, it truly is amazing. I can't mention enough how proud I am of our F D O T team and our contractors. And a huge thanks is also owed to all of our partners to name a few. Lee County Ajax Pavings, Superior Construction, Des Moya Construction and Vulcan Materials helped deliver this project director Kevin Guthrie with DEM has been an incredible support mechanism. Through this entire response, the Florida Highway Patrol has been there with us day in and day out. Lee County Sheriff's Office has been incredible support. The city of Sanibel and the Federal Highway Administration, who's actually been at the table with us, the the whole time working through solutions. While work here has been underway, F D O T and Lee County have also been performing temporary repairs on four other county on bridges in Lee County on the south side of Fort Myers Beach.

Sec Perdue ([10:56](#)):

Temporary repairs at Big Carlos Pass, Big Hickory, Little Carlos Pass and New Pass are also complete and now open to residents and again, speaks to the governor's leadership in tearing down barriers and

getting things done so people can recover quicker. As you can see, our team is no stranger to a challenge. And when these challenges impact the very wellbeing of our fellow Floridians and some of their most difficult moments in life, our team has stepped up and plans to be here every step of the way. Thank you Governor. Proud to be on this team. Okay,

Governor DeSantis ([11:26](#)):

Mayor Holly Smith.

Mayor Holly Smith ([11:30](#)):

Good morning everyone, and thank you for being here on what will prove to be one of our days in history for Lee County and for the city of Sanibel. I'm glad you're a part of it. On September 28th, Hurricane Ian cut a swath of destruction throughout our beautiful sanctuary island that was unprecedented. The storm surge raging from eight to 12 feet pushed homes from their foundations while winds broke through structures and stripped the foliage from our lush vegetation. The combination of wind and storm surge cut off Sanibel's lifeline to the mainland when it breached the causeway in five places. As we assess the damage from boats and photographs, the sheer magnitude of the repairs settled in and we prepared ourselves for many months of reconstruction as we began to plan for barge and ferry service. But on October 4th, Governor Ron DeSantis charged the Florida Department of Transportation with making temporary repairs to the causeway by the end of October.

Mayor Holly Smith ([12:33](#)):

Because of the governor's leadership and determination and because of the technical and project management expertise within D O T, we will within minutes reconnect Sanibel Island to the shores of Lee County and expedite our recovery from this hurricane. I wanna thank Governor DeSantis for being a man of action and delivering not only the repairs to this causeway in record time, but also for directing all of the state's agencies to assist Sanibel and Southwest Florida in the most expeditious and comprehensive response effort ever undertaken. I also wanna thank F D O T Secretary Perdue, F D O T, District Secretary Ik Natum and project ended year Katie Sheard, as well as the army of men and women who rebuilt this causeway working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to ensure Sanibel's transportation and economic network was revived. I thank my friend Lee County, Commissioner Chair Cecil Pendergrass, the entire county commission, the staff of the ma, then the county manager's office, and the Lee d o t for their close work and collaboration with Governor DeSantis and F D O T to eliminate any barriers, float barges, and literally build bridges.

Mayor Holly Smith ([13:55](#)):

Finally, I wanna thank Governor DeSantis and Kevin Guthrie, Director of the Florida Division of Management Emergency Management for quickly providing Sanibel with people, generators, food technical expertise services, boats and barges that were so critical to the initial search and rescue operations and response efforts that our island community required. Today is a day where our sunrises are gonna be a little bit brighter and our sky will become a little bit bluer as it's a day that transforms and accelerates the recovery for each and every sandal resident business and property owner. On behalf of the Sandoval community, my colleagues on our city council, our city manager, Dana Suza, and all of our dedicated staff, I wanna extend a heartfelt thank you to Governor DeSantis for showing us that actions do speak louder than

Speaker 4 ([14:50](#)):

Words. Thank you. Thank you, Governor. Thank, thank you very much. All right, thanks. All right. Cecil Pendergraph.

Speaker 5 ([14:55](#)):

Thank you. Uh, good morning Cecil Paragraph chair. The, we've got Board of County commissioners and a lifelong resident here in Lee County. I'll first like, think the governor and all his staff for the determination to get this done, this gateway to Sanibel is known worldwide. No matter where you go in the world, everybody knows Sanibel Captiva. And this gives the residents of Lee County Hope three weeks ago. This storm devastated Lee Counties and will be further remembered for that. But as we stay here today, this shows the residents, Lee County, there is hope. We really will build. We'll remember the ones we lost, and we will be better after all this. So again, thank you to Lee County. Thank you all the workers here this morning for getting this job done for we're coming across the country again. Thank you. All

Speaker 4 ([15:30](#)):

Right, thanks. All right, Troy Thompson, very much. Of course.

Troy Thompson ([15:41](#)):

My name is Troy Thompson, Sanibel Island, Born and raised. I came over the causeway the first day I was born.

Speaker 7 ([15:49](#)):

Living

Troy Thompson ([15:49](#)):

And working on sandal means everything to me. It's something that I'm most proud of. My father started the Lazy Flamingo 35 years ago at Blind Pass. Later on, he met my mother in the same restaurant and until the hurricane I lived upstairs, It has been our way of life since I was born, since he had started the restaurant. This is how we make a living. It's not a vacation spot for us, but it's our home. This is where I'm now raising my own daughter, my own family. The causeway is our lifeline, and without it, we have no opportunity to get back to the island to get back to our homes. We've been stranded in town for three weeks now, and it means everything to get back. Our lives have literally stopped with the causeway falling. Hearing the causeway fell was like hearing a family member had died. It was a punch in the face. You just can't get home. It did not seem real at all. I could never imagine seeing my hometown the way it is now, while I know the island has a long way to go to recover. Opening the causeway is a monumental step to returning us to our way of life and getting us back home.

Troy Thompson ([17:08](#)):

I want to thank Governor DeSantis and every single person that has helped us get home. I'd like to say thank the council, our city manager as well. And just thank you Governor for taking out all the stops and doing everything you possibly can to get us home and returning us to our way of life. I will never, ever take a ride over the causeway for granted again. Thank you. All

Speaker 4 ([17:32](#)):

Right, thanks. Great.

Kevin Guthrie ([17:38](#)):

Thank you Governor. I appreciate your leadership and your continued support of the division and the state emergency response team to Jared and all of our responders. Thank you so much for serving the residents here in Sanibel. Under Governor DeSantis leadership, we have all hands on deck to support survivors and the opening of the Sanibel Cowell to the public. And this is a perfect example of that dedication. Now residents and businesses can return to their properties and begin their road to recovery. As you return, know that the division in all of the state emergency response team resources are ready to support you. At the heart of this on Sanibel Island is the state's logistical staging area located at the Sanibel Community Church. And we will be there until the job is done. While many responders have been on Sanibel Island, working tirelessly to bring back the power, what are in other necessities?

Kevin Guthrie ([18:33](#)):

Opening the island to residents allows us to address your unmet needs directly. As infrastructure inspections continue on the island, we are filling requests for generators so that critical facilities can reopen. Those generators are here now on Sanibel Island. The state has nearly 300 debris management sites to reduce debris and remove it from impacted areas. As the bridge reopens, we are still conducting barge missions to ensure that all the resources and personnel could continue their hard work on the barrier islands. I do want to let you know that we will have challenges, for instance, cable services. The fiber network has been severed underneath the bay here. It is going to take a long time to do that. However, the governor and his leadership has already told me. Kevin, let's get it figured out. Let's get with Jamie Grant, get starlink over here and see how we get things done.

Kevin Guthrie ([19:34](#)):

So you'll be seeing starlink units deployed to the island. I am proud of the quick and efficient work that has been done underneath the governor's leadership and for the partnership between our agencies. I've never seen anything like the partnership that we have with our agencies as we continue to collaborate with our residents in their time of need. Today is day 31 of the state emergency response teams and the divisions activation, and to the personnel of the state emergency Response team and the division of Emergency Management. I thank you very much for your lead, for your support to help the residents of Lee County and the residents across the state. The division will continue to be present every step of the way. We are not a flash of the Pan Agency. We will be here for years to come. The Division of Emergency Management, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Environmental Protection, and many, many more. We'll be here with you until this job is completely done. And yes, that will be years from now. Governor, we do this because of your leadership and thank you. All right,

Governor DeSantis ([20:39](#)):

Thank you. Okay, well, uh, starting at 11:00 AM uh, this is gonna be, uh, restore the access for residents. And so we look forward to everybody being out. But I think we do have a preview, so I think we could go ahead and, uh, start letting the, letting the folks go ahead and get across there. There, there they go. All right. All right. Enjoy everybody. We look forward to seeing the residents get back in where they need to be.