

GWINNETT COUNTY NEWS 3:40 p.m. Wednesday, July 11, 2012

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Construction to begin soon on "diverging diamond" interchange in Gwinnett

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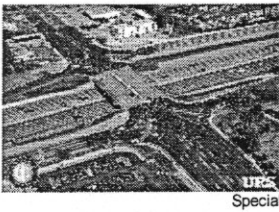
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By Christopher Hong
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Casey Coffee said it's a blessing his commute doesn't take him through the stand-still traffic of the I-85 interchange on Pleasant Hill Road.

Enlarge photo



But potential customers do if they want to shop at his car dealerships. He said the traffic keeps people away from his business at a time when they are already watching their money.

That's why he's looking forward to the upcoming construction of a new "diverging diamond" interchange, similar to the one at Ashford-Dunwoody Road that officials say has reduced congestion.

Gwinnett County plans "diverging diamond" interchanges along I-85 at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road (pictured). Motorists will cross to the left-hand side of the road before crossing the bridge over I-85 and return to the right-hand lanes on the other side of the bridge. Gwinnett officials say the design will make it easier to turn left onto I-85 and will reduce traffic congestion.

"I just know people's general conception is it's congested, and they try to avoid it," Coffee said. "Anything we can do to get traffic moving and keep people coming to our area is going to be good for us."

The new interchange will consist of a series of lights and crossing lanes that brings traffic to the left side of the bridge, allowing cars to turn freely onto the interstate. A protected 8-foot sidewalk also will be built.

About 58,000 vehicles pass through the interchange every day. It can take more than 10 minutes just to cross the bridge when cars line the left lane to turn on the interstate, said Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, which has put nearly \$1.2 million into the \$4.3 million project.

Coffee said the congestion can strike at any time of the day. "You could have it bad at 2 and 3 o'clock," he said.

Allen, citing a CID survey, said people avoid the area because of the unpredictable traffic. He hopes clearing the

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roads will bring shoppers to the struggling Gwinnett Place Mall and other businesses.

Construction will begin in the next several weeks, said Alan Chapman, deputy director of the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation. The new interchange is expected to open next summer.

The county also plans to build a diverging diamond interchange at Jimmy Carter Boulevard.

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