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Work to begin soon on new I-85 interchange in Gwinnett

By David Wickert
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Construction will begin soon on a new interchange at I-85 and Pleasant Hill Road that Gwinnett County officials say will reduce wait times for frustrated commuters.

The county Board of Commissioners on Tuesday awarded a \$4.3 million contract for the project to E.R. Snell Contractor, the lowest of three bidders. Work should begin in 30 to 45 days, and the new "diverging diamond" interchange would open next summer.

The move comes three weeks after the opening of Georgia's first such interchange at I-285 and Ashford-Dunwoody Road near Perimeter Mall.

The "diverging diamond" is a novel design that transportation officials say will ease traffic congestion by speeding access to the interstate. Under the design, traffic on Pleasant Hill Road will be routed into the left-hand lanes across the I-85 bridge before switching back to the right-hand lanes on the other side.

Gwinnett officials say that will make it easier for motorists to turn left onto I-85, reducing wait times and improving safety.

So far, the Ashford-Dunwoody interchange appears to have lived up to its billing. Dunwoody police say traffic doesn't back up on Ashford-Dunwoody like it did in the past.

"They seem to be pretty pleased with it," Gwinnett Transportation Director Kim Conroy said.

About 58,000 vehicles pass each day through the interchange at Pleasant Hill Road and I-85, which has become a major congestion point. Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, said reduced traffic congestion should attract customers to local businesses. That would spark "a re-emergence of Gwinnett Place," he said.

E.R. Snell Contractor will widen a half mile of Pleasant Hill and build new retaining walls, sidewalks and traffic signals. Conroy said the work will extend the life of the bridge over I-85 by 10 years.

Gwinnett County is planning another diverging diamond interchange at I-85 and Jimmy Carter Boulevard. Conroy expects the commission to consider a contract for that work in about three months.

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