

CID backs revamping

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DULUTH - Members of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District have been searching for a signature project.

The group's executive director said Wednesday that they may have found it in an arching proposal that would alter the Pleasant Hill interchange with Interstate 85, allowing for a better flow of traffic.

"It's a single project rallying point," Joe Allen said. "Here's a project we believe can really help. ... It's what we're all about."

The conceptual proposal, as presented to the group's board of directors by Street Smarts President Marsha Anderson Bomar, calls for what is known as a single-point interchange at Pleasant Hill Road's interchange with I-85. Instead of the traditional diamond design, the interchange would look like two back-to-back U's. On the Pleasant Hill Road bridge, drivers would enter at a single intersection, or pivot point, instead of the usual two intersections, therefore decreasing the amount of time that a car would spend stopped at a light.

Similar interchanges exist on Peachtree Industrial Boulevard at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Winter's Chapel Road, Bomar said.

She said initial data shows that the plan would improve the failing interchange from an F grade to a D, with other improvements a possibility.

The plan would require a new bridge over the interstate with three through traffic lanes each direction, as well as turn lanes each way.

Steve Bitney, Street Smarts' vice president, said it would make a drastic improvement to the traffic flow along the Pleasant Hill corridor.

"We're providing the internal movement for folks to get around," he said.

"Can it be done? Anything can be done if we have unlimited money."

The bridge and interchange proposal is the most ambitious aspect of a plan that also calls for extending collector-distributor lanes that are being built in conjunction with the

I-85 and Ga. Highway 316 project to Steve Reynolds Boulevard. That would, in effect, allow for a southbound exist from I-85 at Steve Reynolds, where only a northbound one exists.

Bitney said the project could cost \$30 million to \$40 million, but he

cautioned that the actual price of the project has yet to be determined. Other aspects of the mobility plan include decreasing the number of curb cuts on Pleasant Hill and realigning and expanding Venture Drive, Bitney said.

With the state facing a shortfall in transportation funding already, Allen said it is important for the CID to be flexible in the project. But he said the costly bridge is perhaps the most important element.

Traffic mitigation along Pleasant Hill Road is the main priority of the CID, Allen said, and board members are pleased that they are finally getting to a point where they can take steps to improve the area.

"We're not in huge decline, but we're not where we were in our heyday. We're in a gray area," Allen said. "We're past the dreaming process. We have studies in place."

The next step is to take the proposal to Gwinnett's Department of Transportation, Bomar said, to get input on the project. From there, it will go to the state and federal levels.

Bomar, who is also a Duluth councilwoman, said the design is realistic but not inexpensive. But the changes are important for an area that many people see as the heart of Gwinnett, she said.

"Changing the flow will mean a lot less jockeying around in that area," she said. "We just don't have enough capacity."