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ARC releases rankings of most congested roads in metro Atlanta

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ATLANTA - The word "freeway" connotes open roads and breezy drives, but that is rarely the case for Gwinnett County road warriors.

This is especially true for those who commute down Interstate 85 or across the top end of the Perimeter.

According to rankings released Thursday by the Atlanta Regional Commission, Interstate 285 from Spaghetti Junction over to Ga. Highway 400 is the second-most congested freeway section in metro Atlanta. It trails only the Downtown Connector, where several interstates converge in the center of Atlanta to create a hair-raising ride for the uninitiated. The slice of I-285 heading east from Spaghetti Junction over to U.S. Highway 78 is the fourth worst, while inside Gwinnett County, I-85 from Spaghetti Junction to Ga. Highway 316 is sixth worst.

Things don't get better on surface streets.

On a separate list looking at highway congestion levels, Peachtree Parkway in the southwest corner of Gwinnett County tied with two others for worst place.

Buford Drive in north Gwinnett followed closely, with Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Duluth Highway and Pleasant Hill Road also making a showing. ARC is the metropolitan planning agency for 10 counties, including Gwinnett, and the congestion rankings will help its board of directors decide how to prioritize transportation spending as it tries to loosen the ever-increasing grip traffic has on the region.

That process will culminate next year when city and county leaders on the ARC board decide how to divvy up about \$53 billion in federal dollars the region expects to get through 2030.

The road rankings released Thursday are the jumping-off point for that process, said Tom Weyandt, ARC's director of comprehensive planning. The congestion list is devised annually, but the new one gives a better picture of congestion levels because more factors were used, Weyandt said, including congestion intensity, duration and the number of people affected. That in turn will help the region better spend its limited transportation funds,

Weyandt said.

The region is facing a shortage of transportation funds, and it must squeeze every drop it can from the money it does get if it wants to hold congestion in check as it adds 2.4 million more people through 2030, officials say. In addition to expanding roads, the region will have to add more mass transit and sidewalks, increase the effectiveness of existing roads and change its growth pattern by funneling more development to road corridors, towns and business centers where infrastructure already exists, Weyandt said.

"We have limited resources and we know we cannot build our way out of congestion," Weyandt said.

A message left Wednesday at the Gwinnett County Department of Transportation regarding the regional congestion rankings was not returned.