



Save time, drive on the 'opposite' side of the road

6:52 AM, Aug 30, 2011 | [comments](#)

DULUTH, Ga. -- By this time next summer, you could be driving on the 'opposite' side of the road, if you travel through three congested intersections in Metro-Atlanta. The interchanges at Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Ashford Dunwoody Road and Pleasant Hill Road are all slated to undergo a major redesign that engineers call innovative and efficient.

Joe Allen of the Gwinnett County Community Improvement District (CID) has worked to beautify the busy intersection Pleasant Hill Road and I-85, but the traffic-still isn't pretty.

"It's time to think outside the box. Do something revolutionary," Allen said. "We have historically been choked with traffic congestion in this area."

The Diverging Diamond Interchange, or DDI, is supposed to fix that gridlock. CID said studies show, it will reduce morning delays by 39 percent and afternoon back up by 35 percent.

Used in Europe since the 1970s, the design was only brought to the U.S. in 2009. Springfield, Miss. was the first city to try it. Four other U.S. communities followed along. And next, Georgia.

If you're concerned about not understanding what to do, the county pledges easy to understand signage and lots of lighting.

An animation in the video above drives the concept home. Once you pass the light, you'll drive briefly on the opposite side of the bridge. But, you won't encounter another light. Instead, you'll either turn left onto the highway or continue along Pleasant Hill Road, making it much more efficient for drivers.

It's also cost efficient. Allen said the estimated price tag to replace the bridge is \$58.5 million. The CID says DDI will run \$7.5 million dollars.

"We're keeping that bridge structure which is still very sound and very safe," Allen said.

A decade from now, the bridge will likely need total reconstruction, but this buys time in a tough

economic environment.

Engineer Erick Fry, who is working on reformatting the bridge, said the other bonus is safety. Fewer left turns will mean fewer chances of a collision. A traditional intersection has 26 conflict points, while the DDI, also known as the double crossover, has just 14.

Three projects are just about to get started. At Pleasant Hill, officials are waiting to start construction until the new year, hoping to keep things status quo until after the holiday shopping rush. By next summer at this time, that project will be complete.

At Jimmy Carter, they're in the final design stages and construction should be complete summer 2012.

Construction at Ashford Dunwoody Road at 285 will start this fall but work will break for holiday shoppers and then be completed in the spring.