

# PROGRESS: Diverging-diamond expected to make big impact on traffic, business

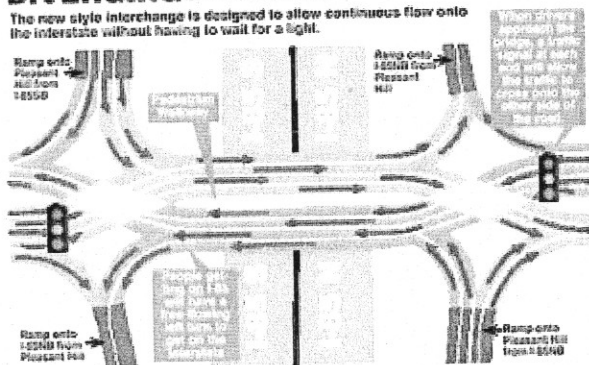
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## DIVERGING DIAMOND

The new style interchange is designed to allow continuous flow onto the interstate without having to wait for a light.



## 2013 PROGRESS

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LAWRENCEVILLE -- Traffic will be transformed this summer, with the expected opening of Gwinnett's first diverging-diamond interchange at Pleasant Hill Road and Interstate 85.

"Easing congestion on the bridge is critical to the future success of that area," said District 1 Commissioner Jace Brooks, who represents the Gwinnett Place area. "I believe that innovative traffic and transportation solutions must be evaluated and implemented due to constrained budgets yet continued congestion concerns."

Leaders often describe the interstate as Gwinnett's "river," an obstacle that is one of drivers' most difficult to traverse.

So the new design is the latest attempt to get drivers across the river faster, moving cars to the left side of the road to make turns more free-flowing.

"Around the nation, DDIs are a proven, cutting edge, cost effective approach that provides immediate traffic relief with better safety resulting in less congestion," said Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District Director Joe Allen, who said traffic could be reduced by as much as 25 percent.

The project is considered a game-changer for the area, which has struggled since its hey-day as the site of the county's first mall.

"Reducing the movement time and congestion helps mitigate a reason that some folks avoid the Pleasant Hill area -- they simply don't want to be stuck in congestion on the bridge," Chairwoman Charlotte Nash said. "With the DDI, traveling from one side of I-85 to the other should be easier, so that, for example, a restaurant near Gwinnett Place Mall no longer seems out of the question as a lunch choice if you have to cross I-85 to get there."

Last year, the first diverging-diamond interchange opened in DeKalb at Ashford-Dunwoody Road and I-285, and Gwinnett leaders are staking their bets on another success along I-85 at Jimmy Carter Boulevard, where construction is just beginning.

The impact, leaders say, should be so great that it could delay the replacement of the bridges by a decade.

As part of the project, the Gwinnett Place CID dedicated money to add some aesthetic upgrades to the design, including sidewalks and decorative lighting and fencing. After all, the bridge is a gateway to the community.

Nash said the DDI has "intangible value" for the area.

"Building an innovative traffic solution says to the rest of the world that the Pleasant Hill Road area is an important part of our community and that its businesses are progressive and involved," Nash said. "It makes a statement that this area is open for business and has viability going forward. I also believe that the DDI will enhance a sense of place for the area since it is an unusual traffic feature."