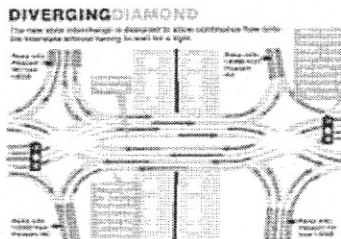
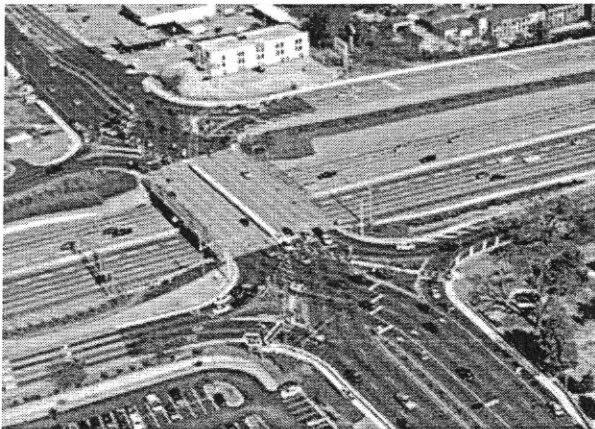


## First diverging-diamond interchange to change traffic in Gwinnett

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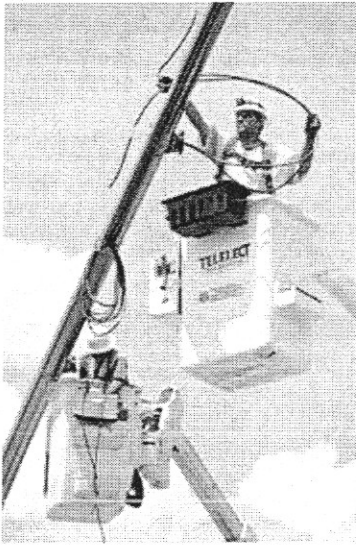
UPDATE: Diverging Diamond opens earlier than expected (STORY)

Courtesy of: Gwinnett Place CID This artist rendering shows what the completed diverging diamond interchange will look like at Pleasant Hill Road over Interstate 85 in Duluth.

DULUTH -- Your commute along Pleasant Hill Road could have a new luster this week.

By Monday's morning commute, crews will finish a conversion of the bridge over Interstate 85 to create Gwinnett's first diverging-diamond interchange.

The design, which was introduced in Europe in the 1970s but has only recently become popular in the United States, shifts traffic to the opposite side of the road to reduce conflict points in an interchange and allow for free-flowing turns onto and off of the interstate. Atlantans were first introduced to the idea last



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Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan Carlos Santiago, right, and Daniel Alvarado, left, install traffic lights as crews continue to construct the diverging diamond on Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85 in Duluth on Wednesday.



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Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan In an attempt to control erosion crews member Trey Snell, directs the projection of straw as Joe Freeman and Jose Aguilar assist with the loading of straw just off Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85 in Duluth on Wednesday.



year, at the Ashford-Dunwoody Road bridge over Interstate 285. And another could open along Jimmy Carter Boulevard at I-85 in Gwinnett later this year.

"It does seem a little strange to go on the wrong side of the road," said Kevin Priger, who has gone out of his way to drive the Ashford-Dunwoody diverging-diamond because he knew one was in the works by his workplace at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place hotel. "It's very intuitive. You just follow the lines and follow the traffic and it works."

Leaders turned to the concept while studying a \$60 million project to rebuild the often-clogged interchange, said Gwinnett's Deputy Transportation Director Alan Chapman.

While funding for a bridge is hard to come by, officials found that restriping, reconfiguring traffic signals and other less invasive changes that come with a DDI would cost about 10 percent of the re-build.

At the same time, members of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District saw the work as an opportunity to redefine one of the county's oldest business districts -- a once-shopping mecca that put the county on the map -- as an innovative, 21st century place.

The self-taxing district pitched in funds for decorative yard arms and fencing to make the bridge a statement piece, said Joe Allen, the group's executive director.

"We see this project not only as a more efficient and safe way to move traffic in the area, but also as a symbol for the re-emergence of Gwinnett Place as Gwinnett County's central business district," Allen said. "This project is just one of many positive things happening in the area."

Priger, who often talks to people from outside the area as the hotel's senior sales manager, said he has hopes that traffic will improve not just for his own commute but for business.

"I have not been able to speak confidently about the traffic on Pleasant Hill," he said of concerns groups of travelers have about getting around in the area. "This, I hope, will free that up and give people more confidence when they come to the area."

During the construction this weekend, Priger said he was sure to give a group special instructions on how to get around the area while the bridge is closed, but he said that wasn't a problem because of the county's investment into the infrastructure close by.

"It's pretty cool they are continuing to do that," he said of using innovative ideas to combat traffic.

With the possibility that a quick construction period could open the diverging-diamond to traffic today, leaders have worked to spread the word, putting out info and videos to help drivers nervous about the new approach.

Priger said he worries that the international community that frequents the area may have less knowledge, but officials say any confusion could be short-lived.

"I expect that traffic may be a little slow as folks figure out the way the DDI works," Commission Chairwoman Charlotte Nash said. "While the full value of the DDI may not be immediately apparent, I think the opening will go fairly smoothly. There will be good signage and there has been good coverage of the earlier DDI in the Perimeter CID area as well as for the construction of the ones at Pleasant Hill and (Jimmy Carter Boulevard). Anyone who pays attention to road signs, the markings should be fine."

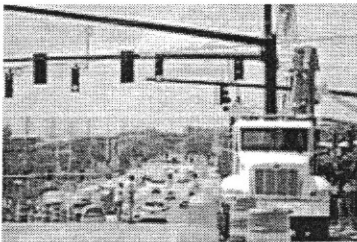
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Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan The bridge on Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85 will be closed at 9 p.m. Friday, weather and conditions permitting. The weekend work will be complete by 5 a.m. Monday in Duluth.



BRENDAN SULLIVAN

Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan Motorist await the long line to approach the bridge on Pleasant Hill Road over Interstate 85 in Duluth on Wednesday. Crews hope that the diverging diamond relieves traffic on Pleasant Hill Road.



BRENDAN SULLIVAN

Staff Photo: Brendan Sullivan Project Engineer Mike Nollen, center, assists with directing traffic as crews continue to construct the diverging diamond on Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85 in Duluth on Wednesday. Crews hope that the diverging diamond relieves traffic on Pleasant Hill Road.

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