

Drivers adjust to new interchange

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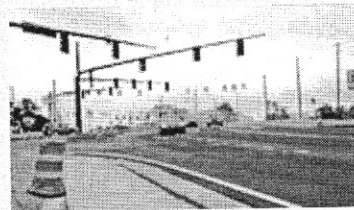
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Video

RAW VIDEO: Diverging-Diamond Interchange



Raw video footage of the diverging-diamond interchange at Pleasant Hill Road over I-85 on Monday morning.

Staff Photo: Jason Braverman — The Pleasant Hill Road bridge over I-85 opened Sunday as a new diverging-diamond Interchange. It is designed to relieve congestion and improve safety. A DDI shifts traffic to the opposite side of the road, making left turns onto the interstate easier and improving the flow of traffic across the bridge.

DULUTH — When Orrin Lynch drove along Pleasant Hill Road to get to the mall Monday, it took him a minute to understand how to traverse the bridge over Interstate 85.

But he said the new diverging-diamond design seems to already make a difference on the often-congested road.

“At first I wasn’t sure what was going on, but then I saw and thought it was good,” he said of the bridge, which was reconfigured this weekend to shift traffic to the opposite side of the road to allow free flow onto and off of the interstate. “I think it’s a good design. It helps out.”

Sheema Qamar wasn’t so sure. “It looks dangerous,” she said, after seeing a collision during her first trip through the new configuration.

While police said statistics are not yet available, officials were pleased with the weekend’s work, which ended early when the bridge reopened with its new design before noon Sunday.

“We successfully achieved a major milestone in the construction process with a well orchestrated and implemented crossover weekend,” said Joe Allen, the director of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, an organization of nearby business owners which helped fund aesthetic upgrades with the construction. “Overall, I am very pleased with how the (diverging-diamond interchange) is functioning.”

Gwinnett Commissioner Jace Brooks checked out the design — the first to open in Gwinnett and the second in Georgia — both Sunday and Monday.

“It seemed to me like, if you don’t driver here that often, then it’ll be pretty smooth. If you do (drive it frequently), you’re going to need to change your habits,” Brooks said.

The biggest confusion for drivers seemed to be those used to turning right during red lights from the entrance ramps, he said, noting that, since traffic is crossing over from the opposite side of the road now, right-on-red is now prohibited.

A Gwinnett Daily Post reader said traffic backed up a mile down Ga. Highway 316 on the

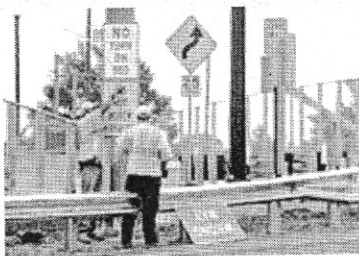


Photo by Jason Braverman

Contractors hang signs at the Pleasant Hill Road bridge over I-85 on Monday morning. Construction will continue on the center median and pedestrian facilities while crews finalize the signals, interchange lighting and pavement markings. The project is expected to be substantially complete in September, with landscaping to begin in the fall.

Pleasant Hill Road ramp because of the change.

"I thought everything was marked well. It seems to make sense," Brooks said. "It's going to take a few weeks for people to get used to it, but I think it'll help."

Irene Henneborn, who made the trek from Norcross to her job at Gwinnett Place Mall on Monday, agreed.

"It will take time to get adjusted to it, but it's good," she said. "I think it'll help traffic."

And while the big transformation is complete, Allen points out that the bridge is still a work zone. Crews from E.R. Snell have a lot left to do, including work on a pedestrian walkway in the median. The work is expected to be substantially complete in September, with landscaping work in the fall.



Photo by Jason Braverman

Gwinnett Police officers were visible around the new interchange as motorists made their way across the new diverging-diamond interchange on Monday morning.

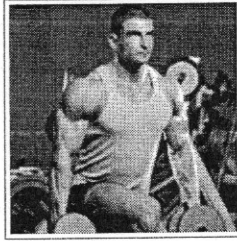
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