

Gwinnett officials celebrate success of Pleasant Hill diverging-diamond project

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U.S. Rep. Rob Woodall talks during the Pleasant Hill diverging-diamond interchange ribbon cutting.

By **Camie Young**
camie.young@gwinnettdailypost.com

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[Ribbon cutting for Pleasant Hill DDI](#)



Nearly a year after traffic shifted to a diverging-diamond on Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85, officials cut a ribbon, signaling the end to the project, which has been transformational for the Gwinnett Place area.

Officials cut a ribbon Tuesday, signaling the final completion of the diverging-diamond bridge on Pleasant Hill Road at Interstate 85. Those cutting the ribbon, from left to right, are: Joe Allen of the Gwinnett Place CID, Todd Long of the Georgia Department of Transportation, state Rep. Pedro Marin, state Rep. Dewey McClain, Commissioner Lynette Howard, State Transportation Board member Rudy Bowen, State Road and Tollway Director Chris Tomlinson, Gwinnett Place CID board member Mark Williams, David Snell of E.R. Snell Contractor, Commission Chairwoman Charlotte Nash and Commissioner Jace Brooks. (Staff Photo: Camie Young)

As the politician gave her speech, a man in a sports car revved his engine as he turned onto Pleasant Hill Road.

"Okie, dokie," Gwinnett Chairwoman Charlotte Nash said, as if heeding his call to speed along — the same way the government heeded business leaders' call to find a quick fix to the bottleneck at Pleasant Hill and Interstate 85.

Nash and other leaders were at the interchange Tuesday to celebrate the culmination of a conversion of the interstate bridge to a diverging-diamond interchange.

Only the second in Georgia, the innovative design calls for people to cross to the opposite side of the road, allowing for free-flowing turns on and off of the interstate. And it provided immediate traffic relief, when the cross-over occurred last summer, at a cost 10 times lower than the replacement of the bridge.

For years, local business owner Leo Wiener said, "If you didn't have to go across Pleasant Hill, you didn't do it. You'd find another way to go around. That wasn't good for the businesses in the area.

"But people are now taking another look," said Wiener, the chairman of the board of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District, a self-taxing business organization that discovered the idea for the diverging-diamond on an interstate in Missouri and offered it as a potential solution, instead of waiting on \$60 million in funds to open up for a bridge replacement.

The CID provided money for up-front feasibility studies and convinced Gwinnett officials the \$5 million project would work. With a \$1 million grant from the State Road and Tollway Authority, the CID put in another \$1 million of its own money to boost aesthetics, add lighting and landscaping features.

"This has been a wild success for taxpayers," said Congressman Rob Woodall. "Count me among the citizenry whose life is better because people dared to dream."

Nash said she was a "doubting Thomas," when it came to the bridge design, but she admitted she was wrong Tuesday, as thousands of cars bustled through the interchange during the ceremony. "It does make for a smoother travel through the interchange," she said, thanking for the partner organizations in the CID, Georgia DOT and SRTA that made the project possible.

Gwinnett Transportation Director Kim Conroy said the innovative idea heeds the call of taxpayers, who approved the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, in that it makes a big impact on traffic using a small amount of resources.

"It will make a tremendous difference for the 54,000 people who cross this bridge every day," he said.

And for those who live and work in the Gwinnett Place area, the diverging-diamond isn't just a traffic solution. It is a symbol of the revival of the community, said Joe Allen, the CID's director.

"(This shows) things are positive for the future of Gwinnett Place," he said.

Construction is currently underway on the Jimmy Carter Boulevard bridge along I-85, just a few miles south. Officials said its conversion to the diverging-diamond flow is expected to occur in the fall.