

## Overhaul gets extra emphasis

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By Arielle Kass

Staff Writer

[arielle.kass@gwinnettdaily.com](mailto:arielle.kass@gwinnettdaily.com)

DULUTH — Members of the Gwinnett Place Community Improvement District wanted to make sure a proposed interchange improvement at Interstate 85 and Pleasant Hill Road got their full attention.

So when they voted to adopt a study on the project, simply saying yes wasn't enough. They also added a sentence indicating that the interchange is their highest priority.

"It's important for the long-term sustainability and viability of the area," CID Director Joe Allen said. "We think we've got something here we can all get behind and make this happen."

Allen said traffic on Pleasant Hill Road bottlenecks at the bridge over I-85, where three through lanes become two and traffic lights mean cars have to stop twice when exiting the interstate.

The solution, he said, is what is known as a single-point urban interchange, two back-to-back U's instead of a traditional diamond design.

That setup is safer, Allen said, and requires less space. Because drivers would enter at a single intersection, or pivot point, instead of the usual two intersections, the new interchange would decrease the amount of time a car would spend stopped at a light.

Similar interchanges exist on Peachtree Industrial Boulevard at Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Winter's Chapel Road.

A plan that would include the new interchange, extension of collector-distributor lanes to Steve Reynolds Boulevard and a reconfiguration of Venture Drive to improve access across Pleasant Hill to Gwinnett Place Mall could cost about \$46 million, Allen said, and take three years to construct.

But the project is still far from that point. Although it has received good responses from members of the Gwinnett and Georgia Departments of Transportation, the idea still needs to be approved by the Federal Highway Administration and entered into the county and region's long-range plans. "This is how big projects get started," Allen said. "If it wasn't for the CID, it wouldn't be on anyone's radar."

Street Smarts, the company that created the preliminary study for the project, now has 60 days to create an actual concept, complete with

renderings and simulations. Allen said he wants traffic counts specific to Pleasant Hill Road, so the effect the plan would have on the street's F rating can be quantified.

Allen said he would like the project to be funded federally and through the county's special purpose local option sales tax.

Dave Rosselle, the district's director of operations, said the plan is about more than just the bridge.

"It's really an improvement of efficiency," he said. "There's really inefficient flow. We want to establish a beefed-up grid system to make traffic more efficient."

Without such changes, Allen said, redevelopment will still come to the aging mall area. But it will take longer, he said, and traffic improvements would greatly aid any new projects.

"Something has to be done," he said. "A key component to revitalizing the area is dealing with transportation issues."