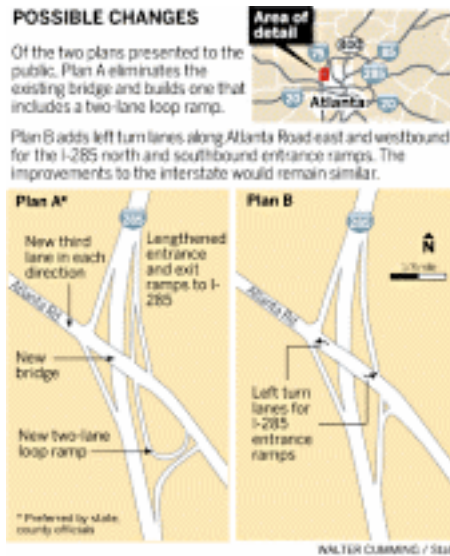


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Cobb's big traffic fix
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Cobb County and state Department of Transportation officials have unveiled a \$30 million plan to rebuild the interchange at I-285 and Atlanta Road in Cobb County. The interchange serves several rapidly redeveloping areas in south Cobb, and is an increasingly used route to Atlanta. The state and county project will replace the Atlanta Road bridge with a wider structure including turn lanes to smooth the rush-hour log jams between these two roads. In addition, the project will add longer lanes to enter and exit I-285. DOT officials are seeking input on two possible reconstructions for the interchange.



A proposed \$30 million reworking of the I-285



interchange at Atlanta Road is designed to unclog rush-hour jams for commuters in west Cobb County. Here, westbound traffic backs up on I-285 and on the exit ramp to Atlanta Road.

THE PLANS

Of the two plans, the one preferred by state and county officials replaces the existing Atlanta Road bridge with one that includes a two-lane loop ramp for vehicles traveling from Atlanta Road eastbound to I-285 northbound. This addition would eliminate the truck stop there, where truck traffic worsens the congestion at rush hour. Atlanta Road would also receive the addition of a third lane in each direction, helping traffic onto the interstate.

Improvements to I-285 include lengthening the interstate's entrance and exit lanes to Atlanta Road in both directions.

The alternative does not include the loop. This plan adds left-turn lanes along Atlanta Road east and westbound for the I-285 north and southbound entrance ramps. The improvements to the interstate would remain much the same.

THE PROBLEMS

Atlanta Road provides no extra lane for left turns onto I-285, so traffic backs up and blocks through traffic. During rush hours, traffic can back up all the way to Cumberland Parkway. Meanwhile, traffic coming up off the interstate can bottle up all the way down into the travel lanes of I-285.

The existing overpass was built in about 1965 and has not been updated. In recent years, Atlanta Road has blossomed from a relatively moribund area to one that has seen a boom in commercial and residential development. The traffic along Atlanta Road at the interstate has doubled in the past 12 years to about 50,000 cars a day, according to Cobb DOT.

Meanwhile, the roadway there has seen 327 accidents, with 67 injuries, from 2003 to 2006, state DOT officials said.

In the near future, the roadway must absorb the added traffic from West Village, a 60-acre mixed-use development expected to add about 1,000 residences.

THE PRICE TAG

The project is expected to cost about \$30 million. The two plans would cost about the same. While the final funding is not set, Cobb is expected to contribute up to \$17 million, including \$10.8 million from the penny sales tax approved by voters in 2005. The remainder of Cobb's contribution would come from interest earned in the sales tax money and from the Cumberland Community Improvement District, said Cobb officials.

The state and federal government would pay the remainder of the bill. U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) has secured an \$18 million federal appropriation for it. Officials say this earmark will help protect the project at a time when some metro Atlanta road projects have been delayed due to a \$7.7 billion shortfall in regional money for such work.

THE TIMELINE

Transportation officials expect to select one of the two reconstruction plans by the fall. They hope to purchase the needed rights-of-way next year and begin construction in 2009, said David Jackson, Cobb DOT special project engineer. The project is expected to take about 18 months to build.

The project must still receive approvals by federal and state transportation officials.

RESIDENT REACTION

"At rush hour it's just a mess," said Jeana Ferguson, a 54-year-old resident of the nearby Orchard Gate at Vinings subdivision.

Valerie LaRussell, another resident of the subdivision, said she has been stuck up to a half hour waiting to get from Atlanta Road onto I-285. "I don't use it all the time," she said of the interchange, "and I wouldn't want to."

Residents of this subdivision, which borders on the interstate, have asked officials to include sound barriers along the interstate. They complain of the sound of vehicles, especially truck hitting their brakes on the exit ramp.

"I can't use my backyard. The pictures shake on the walls," said Mike Bosworth. "The noise is just pounding me."

SOME OTHER THINGS TO KNOW

Cobb DOT officials plan to rebuild the Atlanta Road bridge over the Chattahoochee River this summer. The renovation will add two lanes in each direction as well as sidewalks.

Officials are also asking residents whether they want to eliminate a separate bridge that carries Orchard Road over I-285. They say they are concerned that the bridge leads to more cut-through traffic through the nearby residential areas. Several residents, however, say the bridge is needed and eliminating it will cause traffic problems in these areas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The plans can be viewed at the state DOT web site at www.dot.state.ga.us. Go to the public involvement section, and then to the public outreach section and search by county.