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Town Center becomes traffic central
Proposal for the area's largest mix-use development stirs road fears
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When some people heard plans were under way to build the largest mixed-use development in Cobb County near Town Center at Cobb, a single vision gripped their mind: Traffic Armageddon.



Barrett Parkway is already a nightmare of slow-motion, stop-and-go traffic, especially on the weekends, they said. Roads nearby suffer from a crush of cars squeezed into too few roads, moving along with all the success of pushing a camel through the eye of a needle.

"It's pretty nasty," said Grace Amato, 19, who works at the mall, adding that another giant development nearby "would make it worse."

Cobb County officials stress they have yet to approve or deny the zoning change needed for the 4.1 million square feet of housing, office, hotel and retail space on Big Shanty Road. But at the same time, they note that millions of dollars worth of road improvement projects are planned for the area, which would help handle additional traffic from the development called Cityside at Town Center.

David Montanye, Cobb's transportation chief, pointed out the big challenge with this area. The Town Center area has plenty of major roads heading north and south, such as I-75, I-575, Cobb Parkway, Bells Ferry Road and Canton Road. But the area has only a few east-west roads, several of which easily become bottled up with traffic, such as Barrett Parkway and Chastain Road.

Cobb crews recently completed improvements to Chastain Road, and work on several projects to help traffic flow along Barrett Parkway should begin as early as this year, Montanye said. For example, a \$1.2 million project will add left- and right-turn lanes to Barrett at Cobb Place Boulevard.

"We've got a bunch of improvements to Barrett," he said.

Plans are also in the works for what officials are calling the South Barrett Reliever, which includes building a new road parallel to Barrett by the mall, from Cobb Parkway to Bells Ferry Road.

In addition, Cobb officials are also planning a \$45 million widening of Barrett Parkway

from Cobb Parkway to Dallas Highway, enlarging the roadway to six lanes. Construction would begin in 2011.

"This is a huge project with a huge budget," Montanye said.

Most of these projects are funded by the penny sales tax approved by Cobb voters in 2005. That special-purpose local-option sales tax, or SPLOST, is slated to raise \$873 million over six years, which would be combined with millions in federal money.

But some projects could be delayed, scaled back or even cut due to a recent shortage of federal dollars, along with increasing costs of asphalt and other construction materials.

The county also is planning a \$16 million project to connect the two halves of Big Shanty Road separated by I-75. Design is already completed on the Big Shanty Connector and the county expects to soon start buying the needed land. Construction should begin next year, Montanye said, helping to smooth the east-west traffic in the area.

"It will relieve Chastain considerably, and Barrett to a lesser extent," he said.

Plans were only recently submitted for the Cityside development, which would be located on Big Shanty Road near George Busbee Parkway. The Atlanta Regional Commission has deemed it a "development of regional impact." ARC meetings on the plan began Monday.

Traffic concerns have been heightened by the fact that Cityside would go up near another major mixed-use development called The Village at TownPark, which recently broke ground on 13 acres at the corner of Chastain Road and George Busbee Parkway.

Cobb Commissioner Tim Lee said he is excited about both proposals because they would create mixed-use communities in Town Center that would let people walk from homes to shops, jobs and restaurants.

Consequently, they will allow for growth while tempering the impact on traffic, he said.

He also stressed that the developer of Cityside will have to provide traffic studies on the impact as part of the review by the county Board of Commissioners.