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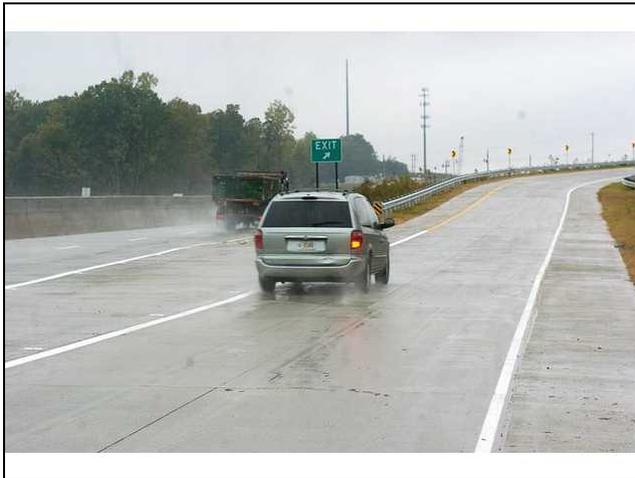
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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on October 8, 2008

With I-985 ramp open, Oakwood traffic changes



Tim Hayes will be glad when all the orange barrels are gone, but for the short term, he was pleased Wednesday with the partial opening of Interstate 985's Atlanta Highway interchange.

"We should see customers and people knowing they can travel down to Oakwood without worrying about congestion," said Hayes, general manager of Hayes Chrysler Dodge Jeep at 3115 Frontage Road.

The state Department of Transportation opened the exit ramp off the interchange for southbound motorists Tuesday afternoon.

Drivers coming off the exit can cross the four-lane Atlanta Highway, after going through a traffic light, and proceed on Thurmon Tanner Parkway, which, for now, dead-ends into Mundy Mill Road.

That route also crosses Frontage Road, which brings motorists to Gainesville State College and Lanier Technical College.

In the next two weeks, the state plans to open the new northbound on-ramp from Atlanta Highway to I-985, temporarily close the northbound on-ramp from Mundy Mill Road to I-985, shift traffic on I-985 and reopen the Park-N-Ride lot on Wallis Road for carpoolers, state officials have said.

When that happens, motorists traveling east on Mundy Mill Road can reach I-985 North by taking Thurmon Tanner to the Atlanta Highway exit. Winder Highway motorists traveling west on Ga. 53 and wishing to go north on I-985 will have to turn on Atlanta Highway to reach the exit.

The Ga. 53 northbound ramp is set to reopen March 1.

The overall \$75 million project also includes widening portions of Ga. 53 and Atlanta Highway in the area.

More road work is on the way for the area, as the state Department of Transportation is set to consider construction bids Oct. 17 on extending Thurmon Tanner to Plainview Road in Oakwood.

Thurmon Tanner picks up as a four-lane road at Plainview and runs to Spout Springs Road in Flowery Branch.

Thurmon Tanner's completion is expected to coincide with the \$75 million project wrapping up in February 2010.

Hayes longs for the day.

As part of the work, Frontage Road was rebuilt so that it no longer connected with Atlanta Highway, instead swinging toward the colleges.

Also, the DOT eliminated the left turn from Frontage Road to Mundy Mill Road and I-985, and the left turn from Mundy Mill Road to Frontage Road.

"For the past two years, since we started this project, (the work) has really hurt us," Hayes said. "... Everybody has had the idea that it's not good to come to Oakwood because of the traffic flow. I've heard that over and over."