

Intelligent choices help smart drivers

By John D. Leonard

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Did you ever wish your vehicle had a fast-forward button just like your VCR? One that would let you just skip past metro Atlanta's traffic snarls like skipping past commercials while watching the last episode of "The Apprentice" you missed?

Just as the technology in the VCR allows you to navigate around ads, part of Gov. Sonny Perdue's "Fast Forward" transportation plan gives a significant boost to our ability to navigate around metro Atlanta more efficiently and safely.

About \$500 million of the \$15.5 billion program is dedicated to expanding and enhancing Georgia's Intelligent Transportation System. ITS technologies help improve the performance and safety of our roadways by providing real-time traffic information to traffic managers and drivers. This information is used to improve the flow of traffic, provide quicker response to accidents, advise drivers of congestion ahead and provide the green light to buses along major corridors.

One example of ITS technology is the Georgia Department of Transportation's pioneering Georgia Navigator, an integrated system of cameras, sensors and call centers that help engineers immediately identify accidents, inform the public and dispatch the always-welcome HERO units. HERO units then quickly clear traffic incidents that disrupt the flow of traffic and cause delays. According to GDOT, the increased spending for Navigator and the HERO program should reduce rush hour delays by nearly a third.

Navigator also provides real-time travel information to local television and radio station traffic reports, cellphone callers who use *DOT, changeable message signs over the freeways and the Navigator Web site. More and more travelers are checking their trip home by visiting the Navigator Web site (www.georgia-navigator.com) to avoid accidents between them and their destination.

Other examples of ITS include ramp meter systems that delay the formation of congestion on freeways and synchronized traffic signals that keep bunches of cars and buses moving in unison.

The heart of Georgia's Navigator is the Transportation Management Center. This nerve center coordinates the continually updating flow of information from interstate highways and local streets and shares it with county and city traffic managers.

MARTA and the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority are developing a trip-planning tool that will make it easier for potential transit travelers to find cost- and time-competitive transit alternatives to driving. ITS also provides transit riders with arrival times of the next train or bus.

Daily commuters and professional drivers alike who take advantage of ITS technology are a big part of solving Atlanta's traffic problems today and in the future.

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