

Drivers to lose 2 lanes until '09

By Ariel Hart

The first big shoe drops Monday in what's scheduled to be three long years of Midtown traffic misery.

Williams Street, a northbound street and key feeder to I-75, will close two of its three lanes in Midtown, leaving just one lane open between 10th Street and 16th Street, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation. It's not slated to reopen until summer 2009.

It's the first long-term lane closure in a collection of projects intended to make the Connector in Midtown and Downtown an easier drive — eventually.

"This is just the next piece of improving the corridor," following the 17th Street bridge project, said Crystal Paulk-Buchanan, a DOT spokeswoman. She said that single Williams lane should remain open throughout the project.

The two major initiatives there involve rebuilding the 14th Street bridge with dedicated turn lanes, 14th Street pedestrian improvements and two new Connector exit ramps to other streets to take the load off 14th Street; and repaving the Downtown Connector. The Connector paving project hasn't been put out to contract yet, but the \$88.5 million 14th Street bridge project will include a bit of Connector repaving, and should all wrap up in 2010.

Drivers who despair at the closures can take heart from driving down Peachtree Street. Atlanta's signature street has been closed to traffic at Five Points for more than a year so that a bridge could be replaced. Tomorrow, assuming all goes according to plan, it opens again.

