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The new exit protocol put in place by the Georgia Department of Transportation will feature traffic upgrades at the Kiutuestia Creek Road and Georgia 515 intersection. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

the heels of several meetings over a couple of years, the most recent of which occurred in July, when Paris met with Georgia Sen. Steve Gooch and GDOT representatives.

Paris and others have shared their safety concerns repeatedly with GDOT about the severity and frequency of accidents that have occurred at the Walmart pullout onto 515, including multiple deadly crashes over time, with a fatal accident as recently as last month.

GDOT casts a wide net with 159 counties in the state, but the department is now beginning to implement its proposed traffic changes there on 515, which should go a long way toward making the intersection safer.

The intersection at Walmart and Georgia 515, in conjunction with Airport Terminal Road across from Walmart, will feature a traffic design known as an RCUT intersection.

RCUT stands for Restricted Crossing U-Turn, and according to the Federal Highway Administration, "the RCUT intersection appears to offer substantial safety advantages over conventional intersections."

This is because, now, drivers can only turn right when exiting Walmart at the revamped intersection with 515, instead of having to monitor two directions of traffic to make a left.

And the same holds true for motorists turning out of Airport Terminal Road onto Georgia 515 – right-turn only.

Drivers looking to head east on 515 from Walmart will either need to go to the

traffic light via the Kiutuestia Creek Road exit from Walmart, or they must turn right onto Georgia 515 West, then cut over to get in the dedicated left-hand turn lane at K Creek Road and 515.

From there, people can make a U-turn to head east.

Left-hand turn lanes will also be constructed on Georgia 515 to allow 515 traffic to enter Walmart and Airport Terminal Road from east and westbound lanes, respectively, and people can make U-turns using these lanes, too.

The various changes to the Walmart/515 intersection will necessitate changes at the K Creek Road intersection, including brand new traffic lights with dedicated turn signals for all directions of incoming traffic at K Creek and Georgia 515, and extra space to accommodate the wide turning radiuses of semi-trucks performing U-turns to head east.

There are no changes to the way people will need to turn in to Walmart from Georgia 515, except that eastbound traffic turning across 515 W will be doing so using a newly constructed turn lane that is closed to cross-traffic from Walmart and Airport Terminal Road.

"We understand that there are probably going to be accidents there in the future no matter what we do, we just hope that this will help save lives," said Commissioner Paris.

Back in 2015, Paris and GDOT teamed up to create a new westbound turn lane into Walmart that was one lane's width further from the edge of the road.

And though it didn't solve the problem all together, the 2015 turn lane made the intersection safer by dramatically increasing the sight distance for people turning

right, left or going straight out of Walmart onto 515.

Additions at the K Creek Road/515 intersection should also include new crosswalks, according to Paris, and GDOT recently installed yellow flashing caution signals for left-turning east and westbound 515 traffic at K Creek Road.

All funding for the project comes from the state, and Commissioner Paris told the *North Georgia News* that he was thankful to GDOT for the work that it has done so far, and for the work it will hopefully soon complete.