

The Alternate Route Queen

Miracle jokingly calls herself the “Alternate Route Queen” because she’s mastered the art of getting around DeKalb County during rush hour without ever having to get on a major interstate. Miracle has a 15-mile commute from her home off of Panola Road in southeast DeKalb County to her office in Atlanta’s Edgewood neighborhood. There’s a pretty direct route that she could take: Panola Road to I-20 west, exit at Moreland Avenue, take a few turns, and she’s there. If it’s not rush hour, the trip only takes about 20 minutes. During rush hour (when Miracle is usually making this trip, of course) it can take 45 minutes—and that’s on a good day. If there’s an accident, she can expect the trip to take an hour or longer. That’s three times as long! Miracle simply refuses. “I can’t stand traffic. If I’m stuck in traffic on my way to work, it’s not going to be a good day! I avoid I-20 at all costs because it’s always congested.”

Many commuters living east of the perimeter have the same experience as Miracle. As the only option offering direct, east-west connectivity, I-20 is heavily congested during peak hours. Right now, the average PM commute time from downtown to the Panola road area is 50 minutes, and experts predict that the situation will only get worse. By 2030, the travel time is expected to increase by 16 minutes, making the commute over an hour long.

Miracle loves Lithonia and DeKalb County. She was born and raised here and after graduating from college, she came back. She and her husband plan to raise a family in DeKalb, and she believes that people from outside of the area also recognize the high quality of life the County offers. However, she also believes that things need to change, beginning with the issue of congestion. “People consider Atlanta to be a world class city, but we can’t be a world class city if you can’t get from point A to point B in a decent amount of time.”

Miracle opts for local roads instead of using I-20. She has a favorite route that gets her to work in 30 minutes. That’s not bad considering it could easily be 15 minutes longer. On paper, it’s a much longer and less direct route, but totally worth the time she saves by avoiding the interstate. So, what is this alternate route that shaves 15 minutes off of Miracle’s commute? She begins to tell her secret, pauses and then stops, altogether. “You know what? I’m not even going to tell you. I don’t want everyone else on my route!”

