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Editorial: Cobo proves benefits of regional cooperation

Five-year extension for auto show reflects better management of center under the new authority

BY THE DETROIT NEWS 0 COMMENTS

The wisdom of establishing a regional authority to run Cobo Center is confirmed by the decision of the North American International Auto Show to extend its run at the convention hall for another five years.

The Detroit Auto Dealers Association, presenters of the auto show, inked the extension Thursday with the Cobo Center authority.

Just four years ago, the DADA was seriously considering taking the auto show to a different locale in Metro Detroit, perhaps even to Chicago, because of inadequate facilities and space shortages at Cobo.

The auto dealers were rightly frustrated at trying to put on a world-class show in a second-class facility.

The ensuing recession years made the question of more space moot, but the center was in desperate need of a serious upgrade that its owner, the city of Detroit, could not afford without help from its neighbors.

After a nasty tug-of-war, the Cobo authority was finally formed, including representatives of Detroit and Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

It's a success story that once again proves the benefits of regional cooperation.

This year, the first 25,000 square feet of an eventual 175,000-square-foot expansion is available for the auto show. When it's finished, the expanded hall will take over the space now occupied by Cobo Arena and will offer visitors sweeping views of the Detroit River.

The upgrades should make Cobo more marketable to other large conventions and trade shows.

Separating from the city of Detroit also is a marketing advantage. With Detroit taking another hit to its image because of the fiscal crisis, many would-be convention bookers are worried that the city's financial problems will impact the quality of service at Cobo.

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The authority can assure them that the city's woes do not affect Cobo, because its operations and finances are entirely separate.

Operating costs are now lower, the authority contends, allowing more competitive pricing for Cobo space.

None of the improvements would have been possible had the city not agreed to turn over Cobo to a regional authority and give its suburban neighbors a greater say in Cobo operations.

That's a model that could be duplicated, say for bus service, and must be if this region is to get the greatest return on its assets.

Visitors to the auto show will see a more polished and larger Cobo this year, and it will keep getting better over the next four years as the construction work continues.

It won't matter at all to them that Cobo is now run by an authority, instead of the city. All visitors care about is the quality of the experience.

The experience will be greatly improved this year because the region's leaders agreed to work together.

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