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## Cobo to get \$221 million upgrade

By [Daniel Duggan](#)

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Cobo Center is poised to undergo the 40,000-square-foot expansion that has been sought by the **North American International Auto Show** and regional officials for the past several years.

Plans for a \$221 million expansion were announced this morning, with the hopes of making Cobo more competitive in the industry.

"When we started out on this process, we rejected the idea that this should be merely 'good enough,'" said Larry Alexander, chairman of the **Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority**, the appointed body that oversees Cobo. "We want to make this the kind of first-class facility it was years ago."

The expansion includes the new ballroom space, the creation of an atrium to provide better views of the Detroit River through a three-story window, along with a wall-sized digital screen to show images on a redesigned east exterior side of the building.

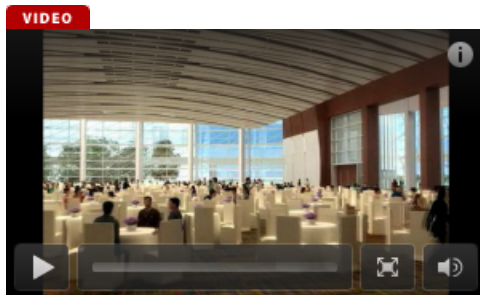
The changes come on the heels of the first two phases of work. So far, spending has been largely on "behind-the-scenes" renovations executed since ownership of the region's largest convention center was transferred to a regional authority in 2009. Past projects have upgraded the electrical system, the roof and the escalator.

Under the six-point plan, the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority hopes to make the facility more competitive by updating the interior and exterior and make the facility viable in the long term.

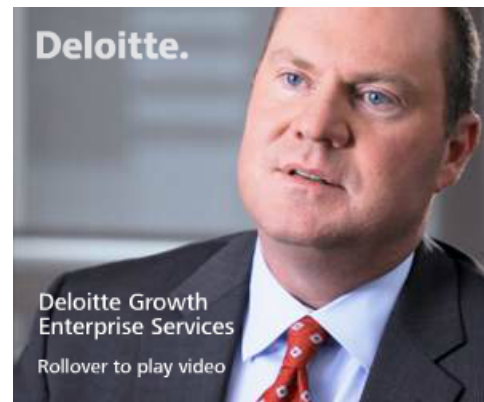
Funding for the project is based on the extension of a poured liquor tax approved by the state Legislature in 2009. The construction costs will be paid for by bonds which will be repaid with the tax revenue.

Largest among the renovations is the 40,000-square-foot ballroom space to be built where Cobo Arena is currently. The space will seat an additional 2,600 people for dining and 5,000 for general sessions.

An atrium will be built as a "signature space," and will open up views from the main level concourse directly to the Detroit River. The atrium will also create a walking route directly to the Detroit



Watch a four-minute video about the Cobo Center expansion.



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directly to the Detroit River. The atrium will also create a walking route directly to the Detroit Riverfront with the overall goal of improving the viability of the lower-level spaces.

The east side of Cobo will be outfitted with a "media mesh" to allow digital images to be shown on the side of the building.

Work will begin this summer in phases, but will not be completed until 2014. The construction schedules will be integrated with the schedule of events at Cobo to minimize disruption of events.

The changes are welcome, said Jim Seavitt, owner of **Village Ford** in Dearborn and president of the Troy-based **Detroit Auto Dealers Association**.

Seavitt, who is also co-chair of the 2012 North American Auto Show, said the 25,000 square feet that has been built-out in a prior phase has already been sold for the next show.

"We've been waiting for this for years," he said. "We can't say enough about how happy we are."

George Jackson, president of the **Detroit Economic Growth Corp.** said Cobo's success impacts the downtown business climate and needs to be vital.

"Especially when it comes to the hotel and restaurant industries," he said. "Cobo is crucial to those businesses and it's an anchor for the downtown as well as the riverfront."

Maureen Krauss, director of the department of economic development and community affairs for Oakland County said she's pleased to see the regional collaboration on a facility that puts a positive face on the city.

"I attend events all over the world, and the convention center says a lot about the community," she said. "This is important for our image in terms of what we show the rest of the world."

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano, who led the charge on the improvements and the creation of a regional authority said the entire process should be considered an accomplishment for the region.

"Sure, there were some zigs and zags along the way," he said. "But we needed to protect one of our most important assets, the auto show, and we've shown that when you put your mind to it, this region can work together on a common goal and achieve it."

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**Bourne167** wrote:  
Looks very nice and I look forward to something happening but here is NO WAY this video is only \$221 million dollars, including escalation over the next few years. Somebody's being creative with the numbers. Ps. While the carpet in video is ugly, it is not as nasty as what's there today.  
3/5/2011 7:51 PM EST

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Spectacular vision and design – a great move ahead for our entire region!  
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**TIMOTHY DINAN** wrote:  
Good news for the City, The Auto Show and for Kiss fans should the band come back there for their AARP sponsored Retirement Tour.  
3/2/2011 3:31 PM EST

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**JAMES GOSS** wrote:  
I have attended many events at Cobo over the years, and will continue to do so. This is great news!  
3/2/2011 12:08 PM EST

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**JAK** wrote:  
If you put lipstick on a pig it still is a pig.  
3/2/2011 12:04 PM EST

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