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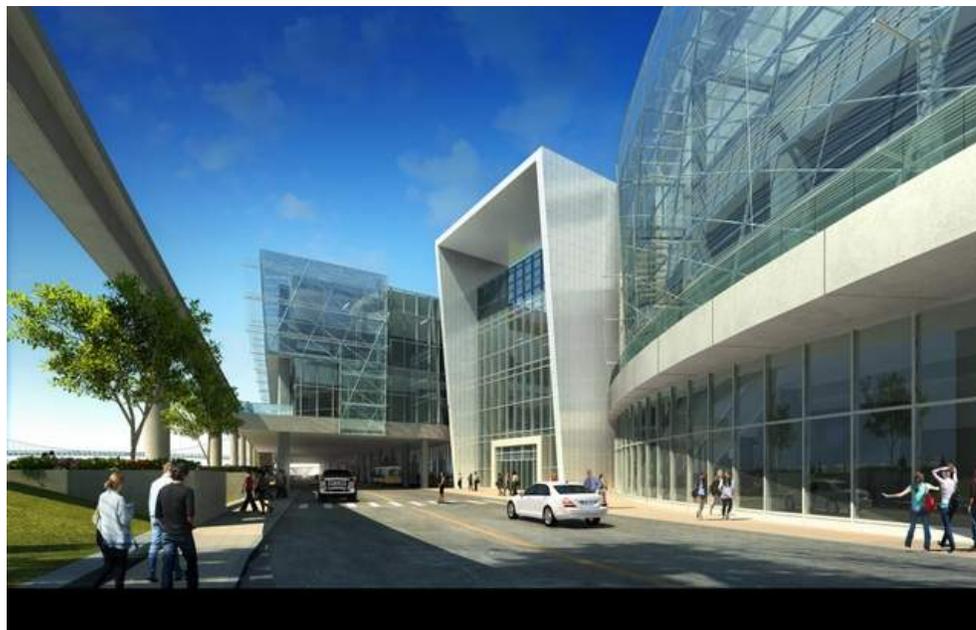
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APRIL 6, 2012 AT 1:00 AM

## Demolition of Cobo Arena begins to make way for overhaul of convention center

BY LOUIS AGUILAR AND SUSAN WHITALL THE DETROIT NEWS 5 COMMENTS



In this rendering, the new events and banquet center will be mostly glass and showcase views of the Detroit River. (Cobo Center)

**Detroit**— Along the downtown riverfront Thursday morning, a giant crane began to tear down the wall separating Cobo Center and the former Cobo Arena, smashing one of the last physical remains of the legendary [concert venue](#).

The space is part of a nearly \$300 million renovation of the entire convention center expected to be completed by 2014, though major parts of it will be ready next year. The former 12,000-seat Cobo Arena will get glass walls and an atrium that will turn it into a state-of-the-art event and banquet space with sweeping views of the Detroit River and the city skyline.

"I'm sure the new Cobo in the future will provide people with a whole new host of wonderful memories," said Thom Connors, regional vice president

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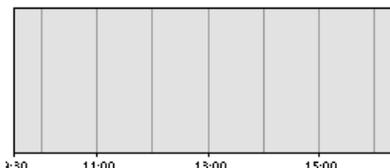
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and general manager of Cobo Center.

The entire convention center is getting a vast overhaul, which will add nearly 125,000 square feet of convention space. The expansion was necessary to keep the North American International Auto Show, the annual event the city was in danger of losing.

It also is expected to make the facility more competitive in attracting conventions and other events.

The Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority said the extra space gives Cobo the capability to host most of the world's largest conventions.

The renovations are estimated to create 1,200 construction jobs through 2014.

The Cobo Arena space will be converted into multiple floors of [meeting space](#). It includes a hydraulic lift stage to allow for dramatic vehicle introductions during the auto show where cars and trucks can rise from the floor below.

For now the arena is an empty shell — the insides have been gutted since work began last summer. Connors admits most people look at the space now and get nostalgic for the venue's past.

"I would say almost every day, someone tells me of what [band](#) or event they attended," he said.

The space hasn't been used for a concert since Phish played there in 2009. The venue waned in popularity during its final years because of competition from larger venues. But for decades the venue was a prime place to see entertainment and other events. It opened in 1960 and was home to the Detroit Pistons from 1961-78. It also hosted presidential speeches, boxing, wrestling, figure skating, roller derby and local Detroit-area graduation ceremonies.

Bands such as The Doors, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, Prince and Madonna played at the venue.

Cobo Arena was a steep, round bowl, so the sound didn't carom around a vast arena, but would bounce off the wall of humanity packed in seats going almost vertically upward from the risers.

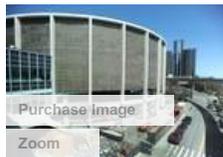
The 1999 film "Detroit Rock City" showed how Cobo ranked in the music world. In a scene where the bedazzled Kiss fans arrive in Detroit, the camera flashes on iconic local landmarks: the (then) General Motors Building in the New Center area, Ford headquarters, Motown Records and lastly — the holy of holies — Cobo Hall.

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The outside structure of Cobo Arena will still stand but the interior has ... (Bryan Mitchell/Special to The Detroit News)



This rendering shows the proposed entry hall of the new facility that will ... (Cobo Center)

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 **Aziz Ansari**  
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