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Triad on fast track to land Toyota-Mazda plant, consultant says

By David Mildenberg - November 15, 2017



John Boyd, Jr.

.This time, it looks like the Triad is going to land the “game-changer” project that can accelerate the region’s growth. That’s the view of site-selection consultant John Boyd, who believes the *Bloomberg News* report that North Carolina and Alabama are finalists for a \$1.6 billion Toyota-Mazda vehicle assembly plant.

“This is the plant that North Carolina has been waiting for for a couple of decades,” says Boyd, who heads Princeton, N.J.-based The Boyd Co. Indeed, it was more than 20 years ago when Mercedes-Benz selected Tuscaloosa, Ala., for a plant instead of Mebane, about 30 miles west of Durham.

The key challenge for North Carolina may be matching or topping the incentives that Alabama is known for offering big manufacturers. Toyota is reportedly seeking at least \$1 billion to defray costs. After historically spurning such a “flash-the-cash” approach, North Carolina lawmakers approved new rules this year that paved the way for the N.C. Commerce Department and Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina to compete with other free-

spending states.

The plant is particularly attractive because it is likely to produce electric-powered “crossover” vehicles that employ cutting-edge artificial intelligence in the manufacturing process, Boyd says. “This is not your grandfather’s auto plant. It will require a highly skilled workforce.”

Boyd says North Carolina’s advantages versus ‘Bama are considerable: It has megasites ready for use (he thinks the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite near Liberty is the state’s top prospect); a more highly regarded educational system; sharply lower union membership; less competition for workers given the big Boeing and Airbus plants in Alabama; and a bigger congressional

delegation. Alabama politics are also in turmoil given the circus involving Senate candidate Roy Moore and the resignation earlier this year of Gov. Robert Bentley. Kay Ivey replaced him in April.

Still, low land prices, a pro-business climate, access to ports and rich incentives have prompted automakers Mercedes, Honda and Hyundai to add plants in Alabama. North Carolina has also seen the dramatic impact of BMW's massive auto plant in Greer, S.C., about 90 miles southwest of Charlotte.

"This new plant will become a coveted place to work for both blue-collar and white-collar workers," Boyd says.