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Where will Toyota-Mazda plant end up? NC is still in the running.



Toyota Motor Corp. and Mazda Motor Corp. logos were displayed at a news conference in Tokyo in August when the joint venture was announced. Eugene Hoshiko AP

By Craig Jarvis - December 07, 2017

It could be just a matter of weeks before Toyota announces where it will build its auto plant venture with Mazda – and North Carolina is considered still in the running.

Earlier this week, the chief executive of Toyota North America told Reuters news service that a selection will be made by the first quarter of 2018. It's not clear if that means by Jan. 1 or in the coming three months.

“The final decision has not been made,” Jim Lentz, the executive, told Reuters in an interview in Detroit on Monday. He added that more than one state is being considered.

There has been widespread anticipation that North Carolina and Alabama are the two states still in the running to reap the huge hiring and economic infusion the project promises. That follows

a Bloomberg News story last month that named those two states as finalists, attributed to unnamed sources.

Most of the attention in North Carolina has focused on one of the state's four "megasites" that is in Randolph County near Greensboro.

Efforts to land an auto manufacturer for that site have gone on for years, and an organized support network has evolved to promote it. Backers have a Facebook page that keeps readers up to date on the latest recruitment efforts and a Twitter account.

The Greensboro-Randolph Megasite Foundation last year had amassed about \$5 million to buy land and collaborate with regional government, business and educational groups.

On Thursday, Kevin Franklin, vice president of the Randolph County Economic Development Corporation, said he couldn't comment on any project activity involving the megasite.

Randolph County recently rezoned 370 acres to add to the 1,500 acres that already comprise the megasite in an effort to help consolidate land ownership.

A number of residents from Randolph and Guilford have been fighting a slow-moving opponent — development on a massive scale near their homes — for several years.

John Boyd, a site selection specialist in New Jersey who has followed the Toyota-Mazda gambit closely, said Thursday that North Carolina has advantages over Alabama.

Toyota already produces more than 60 percent of its vehicles in Huntsville, Ala., he said, giving it the support of Alabama's congressional delegation. Putting a plant in North Carolina would give it two more senators and 13 more congressional representatives to press for its interests when national legislation is considered.

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John Boyd, site selection expert

"Picking up the clout of North Carolina's members of Congress would be an interesting site-selection driver," Boyd said. "Doing this facility in North Carolina would give it even more friends in Washington, D.C."

The car companies announced earlier this year that they were looking for a place to establish a plant that would manufacture 300,000 vehicles a year. It is expected to make a crossover model for Mazda and Corollas for Toyota.

Alabama has other production facilities for the automotive industry. But the industry has also been expanding in North Carolina with a substantial operations presence of parts-makers and suppliers.

The companies said the joint venture would create up to 4,000 jobs and entail an investment of \$1.6 billion. Bloomberg News has reported that the companies want an incentives package worth \$1 billion.