

From the Cincinnati Business Courier

:<http://www.bizjournals.com/cincinnati/print-edition/2014/10/17/u-s-car-sales-driving-auto-mile-expansion.html>

U.S. car sales driving 'auto mile' expansion

Regional Development Guide

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: Oct 17, 2014, 6:00am EDT

James Ritchie, Courier Contributor

As U.S. auto sales approach levels not seen since 2006, dealers along Fairfield's "auto mile" are investing to attract their share of buyers.

At least eight dealerships along State Route 4/Dixie Highway have completed construction or renovation projects in the last three years, said [Greg Kathman](#), Fairfield's economic development manager. The cost of the work along the auto mile, one of the region's top auto sales destinations, has totaled about \$7.5 million, according to estimates submitted by builders on permit applications.

Much of the spending has involved renovation of showroom interiors and exteriors. Such improvements provide an economic boost to Fairfield as the dealerships draw consumers from throughout the region, including Cincinnati, Dayton and Indiana, Kathman said.

"You're always looking to bring new money into the community," he said. "If people are traveling here to Fairfield from other places and buying cars or getting their cars serviced, then that's a good thing."

He added: "They get exposure to our community, and it's hard to put a specific value on that. But those folks are coming here, and we want them to have a good experience."

The Fairfield construction is part of a long-running arms race among Greater Cincinnati auto dealerships. Many upgrades throughout the region are completed with the aid of manufacturers' initiatives to improve customer experience. The largest investment along the auto mile has been a nearly 28,000-square-foot expansion of showroom and sales space at Performance Toyota, part of Performance Automotive Network. The project involved \$2.7 million in direct building costs.

Performance Automotive Network saw a 7 percent jump in the number of vehicles sold last year, according to Business Courier research. Other large Cincinnati-area dealers also reported sales increases, including **Jake Sweeney Automotive Group**, 17 percent; **Jeff Wyler Automotive Family Inc.**, 9 percent; Kenwood Dealer Group Inc., 8 percent; and **Joseph Auto Group**, nearly 6 percent.

A project at [Jeff Wyler Kia](#) involved a 13,000-square-foot expansion of the dealership's service facility and showroom. Other dealers that have expanded or renovated include [Jeff Wyler Cadillac](#), Superior Hyundai North, Busam Subaru and Fairfield Volkswagen.

Analysts with **Edmunds.com** expect car sales this year to hit 16.4 million. But "there is definite potential for numbers to hit higher than that," Lacey Plache, the car shopping and research website's chief economist, told Automotive News.

In fact, sales could exceed the 2006 total of 16.6 million, completing the long climb to pre-recession levels. If August — when the seasonally adjusted annual selling rate was 17.5 million — is any guide, it's a realistic prospect.

That would be fine with Fairfield officials.

The auto mile dealerships support a variety of jobs, from sales roles to auto service positions, Kathman noted. They also stimulate spending at other businesses — auto shoppers often stay in Fairfield for a meal or check out retail outlets such as Jungle Jim's International Market.

Kathman said the auto mile is "an important part of the economic health of the Route 4 corridor and the Fairfield area."