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Type: Richard E. Blouse is president of Detroit Regional Chamber, and Doug Rothwell is president of Detroit Renaissance, a group of the region's chief executives.

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Make airline merger work for region

Byline: Richard E. Blouse and Doug Rothwell

The airline industry is sure to make front page news this year as anticipation about consolidation among the carriers grows. The impact on the Detroit region is potentially significant if speculation about a Northwest Airlines and Delta Air Lines merger comes to fruition. However, it's important to wait and not get caught up in rumors.

Any consideration of a merger affecting Northwest Airlines should take into account the effect it will have on the region's economic development strategy. This is especially true for the logistics hub and Aerotropolis initiatives being aggressively pursued by the business community and Wayne County Executive Bob Ficano. These initiatives envision using the region's air, land and sea resources to establish a major transportation center for moving people and goods around the globe.

Northwest's hub is one of the region's crown economic development jewels and needs to be protected. Nobody knows this better than Richard Anderson, Delta's chief executive who held the same position at Northwest and directed the development of the Midfield Terminal, calling it the best connecting airport facility in the world.

In fact, we could see an increase in service, growth in jobs and a boost to the local economy through a merger. In airline economics, the more flights a hub gets, the better it works. More flights mean more connections and more destinations (including international ones). More connections mean more travelers and businesses using Detroit Metro Airport. This translates into more jobs for people in our community.

A larger, more stable airline would be a stronger competitor with global reach, able to better compete for customers flying other airlines, particularly those we see gaining ground abroad. A stronger airline would offer employees a more stable workplace along with the possibility of growth and will help position the region to leverage its transportation assets and infrastructure for long term job and business development.

As representatives of the business community, we hear talk of mergers and acquisitions all the time. It's important to evaluate a potential merger on the facts. Until that time comes we will continue to put our faith in Northwest and its leadership to have the best interests of the region's economic development in mind. They have been an important partner in allowing our region to be a front door for global economic development.

While he was visiting the Detroit auto show last week, Northwest Chief Executive Doug Steenland reiterated

that Northwest would only consider a transaction that benefited the airline's employees, shareholders and the communities Northwest serves. That's an encouraging sign that Northwest understands how important it is to the success of this community and -- in turn -- how important this community and its people are to the success of Northwest.

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