

**Publication:** The Detroit News

**Datestamp:** 03/12/2008

**Edition:**

**Section:** Opinions

**Page:** 11

**Type:** Doug Rothwell is chief executive of Detroit Renaissance. Hear his interview on the "50 CEOs on the D" podcast at [a target="new" href="http://www.DetroitRenaissance.com"](http://www.DetroitRenaissance.com) www.DetroitRenaissance.com

**Column:** Doug Rothwell

**Note:**

## Region already is headed on road to renaissance

**Byline:** Doug Rothwell

True economic transformation can be disruptive, as past "winners" and future "winners" often look very different. We've seen this throughout history many times, including during the transition from an agricultural economy to a manufacturing economy.

During the last decade or so, we've been in the midst of another massive transformation, this time into a technology-based economy. Just as manufacturing supplemented agriculture as an economic force, so is manufacturing being supplemented by technology.

This transition is already well under way in our region. The automotive industry, for example, employs more technology than virtually any other sector of the economy. Unfortunately, that fact isn't as well recognized as it should be, and relying on one industry alone is insufficient to achieve strong economic growth.

That's why our region developed and is making great progress toward implementing the Road to Renaissance -- our region's first economic growth strategy. It's a six-pronged plan that serves as a blueprint for transforming our economy.

First, we need to better leverage our assets. We're the world center for the automotive industry. But we need to attract more federal funding for advanced mobility research, more global automotive company investments and more investments from mobility-related sectors, like aerospace and defense.

Similarly, we have one of the world's best airports at Detroit Metro, but can develop it into an Aerotropolis that serves as a cargo and passenger hub and attracts hundreds of related businesses to the 25,000 acres of underdeveloped land around the airport like Chicago O'Hare has.

We then need to supplement these assets by building our creative and entrepreneurial classes. This requires an environment in which smaller, often fast-growing businesses can thrive. We'll do that by developing a district for creative-economy businesses in downtown Detroit and growing our region's pool of venture capital and business incubators and accelerators.

Doing these things and connecting students through a regional internship and apprenticeship program will show our area's young talent that they have a future here that's worth staying around to enjoy.

Finally, since perception changes even slower than regional economies, we need to promote what we have

globally and locally. Despite all the work we have left to do, Metro Detroit's business infrastructure is still the envy of most of the world. As we transform it for a new economy, we'll be even stronger, provided we get the word out in an aggressive fashion.

If you think all of these ideas are just plans, you'd be wrong. Nearly \$60 million has been raised to date to implement these initiatives and many will be launched this year.

So as the daily news documents the challenges our region faces, know there is a new story being written all around you -- a story that builds on our assets by growing new businesses and sectors. We're a strong region with a great future ahead of us.

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**Keyword:** MICHIGAN

**Id:** archive~15694334

**Words:**

**Slug:**

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