

## Helicopters seen circling Triad megasite as Toyota-Mazda fast-tracks site selection for \$1.6B plant

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*SIKORSKY AIRCRAFT CORP.*

Since the \$1.6 billion Toyota-Mazda plant was announced in August, people who live near the Randolph-Greensboro megasite have noticed an uptick in activity around the 1,500-acre assemblage of land, with large helicopters and Mercedes-Benz buses pulling up to take a closer look at the land.

Alan Ferguson, a lawyer who lives near the megasite, told TBJ Wednesday that he's noticed several helicopters circling around site since the latter part of August.

"It's not just me, it's other neighbors who have seen helicopters flying over low, like Sikorsky's big helicopters," said Ferguson, a staunch opponent to the megasite project. "I think they are scouting around for places. We'll just see something circle over a couple of times and then go away. You wouldn't even know it if you weren't here all the time."

Ferguson added that he also has seen Mercedes-Benz buses, "bigger than a van, but not like a city bus," parked out front of the Triad megasite, which is located near Liberty and designed to lure a major auto manufacturer that could create thousands jobs.

"A couple of times we have seen those parked out front and a couple of tent canopies, but we don't have any way of knowing who that is of course," he said. "That was back in the summertime."

But Ferguson said he has continued to see helicopters hover over the megasite as early as this month. "It's somebody doing more than just touring the countryside I would say," he said.

John Boyd, a site consultant based in Princeton, N.J. whose clients include Boeing and Pepsi Co., told TBJ Wednesday that Toyota-Mazda is entering into the final phases of its site selection and that the Triad is certainly being considered.

"This site search has been fast-tracked," Boyd said. "It includes looking at physical sites. Up until now, much of the analysis has been in-house studying state business climates, studying incentive programs, studying skill sets, studying transportation linkages. Now the search has matured into on-the-ground inspections of candidate real estate properties and that's what (Alan Ferguson) is seeing there."

Boyd said sites across North Carolina, including the Triad's Liberty site, are strong contenders.

"North Carolina, in our view, is a finalist for the Toyota-Mazda joint venture project," he said.