

By Tim Steller
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Courtesy of Ford Motor Co.

The 2006 Ford Fusion, a midsize sedan, is one of three new Ford Motor Co. products beginning production this week in Hermosillo, Sonora. The others are the Lincoln Zephyr and the Mercury Milan. More than 20,000 new jobs are expected to result, including those at suppliers' plants and other businesses. Traffic congestion due to railroad crossings will worsen in Nogales, though.

Ford Motor Co. began producing three new models at its Hermosillo, Sonora, plant this week - a move that means contracts for some Southern Arizona firms and extra train traffic for Nogales.

Ford is investing \$1.2 billion in an expansion of its existing stamping and assembly plant about a four-hour drive south of Tucson to make the Ford Fusion, Lincoln Zephyr and Mercury Milan.

Suppliers are putting another \$800 million into a massive industrial park across the street, the Sonoran newspaper *El Imparcial* reported, for a total investment of around \$2 billion.

Those numbers already have turned into money for some Southern Arizona companies, said Lee Smith, director of business development for Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities Inc.

"There have been contracts made, and we have several opportunities in the works for our region," said Smith, who runs a supply-chain program called AzBusinessLinc.com

He declined to name the companies that have benefited from the Ford plant but said they are supporting Ford's first-tier suppliers.

The plant itself will have about 6,800 employees and capacity to produce about 300,000 cars a year, Mexico's minister of economy, Fernando Canales Clariond, said in Hermosillo Wednesday. More than 20,000 additional jobs are expected to result from the plant's expansion - jobs at suppliers' plants and in other businesses, he said.

Production during the next couple of months will be preliminary as the plant ramps up toward full production in October or November, Smith said. He has been traveling to Hermosillo twice a month to maintain relations with suppliers and seek opportunities for local businesses, he said.

Those opportunities may arise especially in this stage, as production problems arise, Smith said.

"We want to be there when they find problems, because we want to find solutions for them," Smith said.

When the plant reaches full production, it could mean a doubling or tripling of train traffic through Nogales, Sonora, and Nogales, Ariz., El Imparcial reported. Already, residents of the twin border towns are bothered by trains that often block traffic as they cross the border in the middle of the cities.

Ford official Flavio Díaz Mirón told El Imparcial that "there will be an unending, uninterrupted railroad flow."