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Auto Mall Parkway getting into gear

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Auto Mall Parkway is finally starting to live up to its name.

Two car dealers viewed as crucial to the success of the auto mall — Hank Torian and Don Signer — have committed to move their franchises to the 88-acre site in the southwest part of Fremont.

Torian's decision is important because he owns the high-volume Honda and Toyota franchises, in addition to the Acura and Dodge franchises. Signer is significant because the commitment of his Cadillac and Buick franchises is expected to lure other

domestic dealerships to the mall.

So far, the mall is home only to one dealer with four foreign-made franchises.

"I'm committed," said Signer, who owns the Cadillac and Buick franchises on Fremont Boulevard. "That's going to be the place to buy a car in Fremont."

Torian, who owns four franchises in the Centerville district, could not be reached Wednesday for comment. But Liz Calhoun, the auto mall manager, confirmed Torian is on his way to the mall.

Both deals will be announced officially next week, she said.

The news delighted city officials.

"I'm very pleased," Mayor Bill Ball said. "It's kind of a breakthrough, really."

Councilman John Dutra predicted the Torian and Signer announcements will prompt other dealers to get off the fence and take steps to move.

When the auto mall agreement was signed two years ago, two dozen franchises were expected to move dealerships onto Durham Road west of Interstate 880 by late 1991. To promote the mammoth auto supermarket, the city council agreed to change the road's name to Auto Mall Parkway.

But there aren't many dealers on the

parkway.

For a variety of reasons, among them tough times in the auto industry and financing problems, auto dealers have been hesitant or unable to make the move.

So far, only Hank Pierotti, owner of Volvo, Hyundai, Nissan and Suzuki franchises is in business in the auto mall. Tom Claridge has pulled building permits for his Rolls-Royce, BMW, Mercedes, Bentley and Porsche franchises, as has an existing Lexus dealership.

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Car dealers' moving plans rev Fremont officials' hopes

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Torian, who owns 20 acres of the mall, and Signer both wanted to relocate there but were waiting for the other to make the first move, according to Dutra, who with Ball's blessing talked with both of them.

All Torian and Signer needed, Dutra said, was a little extra push because signs look good for an economic recovery.

The clincher for Signer came when he reached a financing arrangement with Catellus Development Corp., the original owner of the mall property.

Dutra proposed the council de-

lay until July 1 a scheduled 50 percent increase in developer fees — which could save Torian and other developers thousands of dollars in additional fees. The council appears ready to approve the delay.

City Manager Roger Anderman said the Signer and Torian announcements indicate the auto mall is shaping up as the successful center that everyone expected.

"Having an auto mall in your city is good," Anderman said, "because we're able to attract car shoppers from other cities to spend their dollars in Fremont, which doesn't happen as often as we like."