Where better to talk about this construction [than here/ *than for six hours]?  
Haj Ross  
Department of Linguistics and Technical Communication  
University of North Texas  
haj@unt.edu

This paper aims at opening one of Pandora’s more capacious boxes: the pragmantax of such rhetorical questions as the above title and similar sentences such as those in (i).

(i)
a. Where better to play chess than on I35?  
b. When better (for us) to finish off the Rocky Road than right now?

The general structure of these clauses is schematized in (2):

(2) [WH-phrase of syntactic type i] [“compared” (sentential) adjective of type j]  
[for NP to V + X] S than [definite syntactic phrase of type i]

Definite syntactic phrase of type i: this condition is necessary to get grammatical sentence like (1a,b), rather than ones whose than clauses exhibit a mismatch in syntactic type, as in (1’a,b):

(1’) a. *Where better to play chess than right now?  
b. *When better (for us) to finish off the Rocky Road than on I35?  
[starred on the relevant reading]

Sentential adjectives of type j: for me these are (a subset of) the class of adjectives which have complement subject clauses, such as those in (3a); some examples involving them appear in (3b).

(3) a. good, advantageous, useful, easy, profitable, obvious, surprising (interesting, fascinating, etc. – the whole class of V+ing adjectives), weird, strange, sick, etc.  
b. i. Where so advantageous to build a church that even pagans will come?  
ii. When as useful to buy a flashlight as just before getting a flat tire?  
iii. How as easy to dispose of a burglar as to plug him right between the eyes?

As we see, the adjective of type j can not only be compared, as in the title of this paper, but also modified by the other five sentential ways of expressing adverbs of degree:

(4) a. Where better to cut the pizza (than on the table)?  
b. Where as good to cut the pizza (as in Mark’s pad)?  
c. Where so good to cut the pizza that we won’t even be audited *(if not right here)?  
d. Where best (of all the places in this room) to cut the pizza *(if not right here)?  
e. Where good enough to cut the pizza to fool the GAO *(if not right here)?  
f. ??Where too appropriate to cut the pizza for those fools in accounting to find some reason to complain about *(if not right here)?

At present, it seems beyond the power of a transformational rule to state the conditions involving the matching of adverb types. Whether construction grammar is up to the task remains to be seen. My best will be tried at the conference.