

LIGHT-DUTY TRUCKS

DEFINITIONS AND HOW THE SUPPLY HAS EVOLVED

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SERIES

THE RISE OF LIGHT-DUTY TRUCKS IN CANADA:
REVERSING THE TREND



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This research project examines the causes and consequences of the growing popularity of light-duty trucks in Canada, with a particular focus on sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and crossover utility vehicles (CUVs). Part one looks at changes in vehicle supply. We will begin by characterizing the light-duty truck category in relation to the other types of vehicles available on the market, and in so doing, pointing out the growing challenges associated with vehicle definition and classification. We will then assess changes in the physical dimensions and other features of the vehicles sold on the market.

Observations on definitions and classifications used by the automobile industry and the various levels of government

- The terminology used to describe road vehicles lacks consensus not only within the industry, but also among governments both in Canada and around the world.
- There is confusion surrounding the terms used in legislation and regulations to describe vehicles, not only between governments but also across languages (English and French).
- Harmonizing the various definitions and creating a clear phraseology seem essential to help the industry steer a coherent path, foster cooperation among governments and make it easier for governments to track their various objectives, especially in a context where transformation of the vehicle fleet generates multiple negative impacts that greatly undermine the collective ambitions of our municipalities, provinces and the country as a whole.
- The terms used to describe and classify vehicles are determined mainly by the automobile industry (automakers, dealerships, columnists, expert consultants, car rental companies, etc.), which impedes their standardization and leads to ambiguous use of certain concepts to the industry's benefit.
- The criteria used by the industry to inform the public about their purchase options are relatively variable and subjective.
- The Constitution Act of 1867 does not provide for separate jurisdiction relating to road transportation and the environment. Both Ottawa and the provinces may legislate in the area listed in the Constitution that is closest to the core element of the act or regulation that the governments wish to adopt.
- Accordingly, road vehicles and their impacts are regulated differently from one jurisdiction to another. This greatly impacts the availability and comparability of the data from one source to another.
- Public classifications are not aimed primarily at informing consumers about their purchasing options, but rather at enforcing the regulations in effect, particularly as regards harmful emissions (federal government), vehicle registration (provincial governments) and parking (municipalities).
- Current knowledge of vehicle supply and shortcomings in data availability are making it harder to establish objective, and relevant criteria for these classifications.
- The observations in this report indicate that the classification criteria chosen should be consistent with our collective objectives.
- Since vehicle features are constantly changing, it is hard to know where to draw the line in determining which vehicles to include or exclude in such binary categories

as cars and light-duty trucks.

- It has become increasingly challenging to classify SUVs and CUVs. CUVs are but one example of crossover vehicles. For every vehicle body type, there are exceptions: unclassifiable vehicles, vehicles that are much larger, much smaller, more luxurious, unique in relation to the typical vehicle belonging to their category. In fact, the typical characteristics of the categories themselves change significantly over time, thus moving away from their initial definition.
- Governments are increasingly hard-pressed to accurately define the elements that characterize a particular vehicle category or line and to regulate these vehicles.
- Federal classifications encompass different regulatory criteria and objectives for cars and light-duty trucks. This distinction could lead to distortions regarding vehicle supply and demand.
- Vehicles form a vast continuum, in terms of both their physical and mechanical characteristics. Thus, it should be possible to establish a universal classification for all vehicles based on simple, transparent and objective criteria. For purposes of illustration, two systematic and automatic classification experiments are proposed in this report.
- Public databases do not generally allow for vehicles to be classified according to the criteria used by the industry or governments, which makes it difficult if not impossible to conduct an independent assessment of trends or to meet our collective objectives in the area of sustainable development.
- To allow a rigorous selection of criteria and classifications, it appears that database content and degree of accuracy must be significantly improved.
- The level of information available on vehicles varies considerably over time, from one automaker to another and from one database to another.
- The information provided by automakers should be regulated more strictly. Also, unique identification numbers for each vehicle model version should be included to make it easier to trace registrations across databases.

Observations on the changing characteristics of vehicles on the Canadian market

- The increase in the share of light-duty trucks, owing mainly to the growing popularity of SUVs and CUVs, is only the tip of the vehicle fleet transformation iceberg, so to speak.
- A trend analysis of the vehicles' physical dimensions indicates a significant increase in the size and weight of vehicles on the market.
- This is attributable to the introduction of vehicles that are relatively larger and more powerful than those in the past, but also to the disappearance of a line of small vehicles.
- These observations apply to all vehicle categories, whether they are SUVs/CUVs, hatchbacks, sedans, station wagons, minivans or pickup trucks.
- SUVs and CUVs owe their growing popularity at least in part to the diversification of the features of this category's vehicles. Since they are now available in a variety of configurations, for every taste and budget, SUVs/CUVs seem to appeal to an increasingly diverse range of consumers.
- Another factor behind the growing demand for SUVs/CUVs is the disappearance of many alternatives to these vehicles, particularly within the minivan (classified as a light-duty truck) and station wagon (classified as a car) categories.