



We go into the crisis with the car fleet that we have

Posted by [Heading Out](#) on May 3, 2005 - 1:37am

[J mentioned in comments](#) that he is in the process of changing cars, and moving back to older more efficient ones, rather than seeking an overly expensive hybrid.

In their view of the developing crisis [the Hirsch Report](#) notes that the average age of the 130 million strong US auto fleet is nine years, with about half of the 1990-model cars still expected to be on the road in 2007. To expect much more than normal rollover of this fleet seems overly unrealistic. After all, since each vehicle may go through several owners, the number of new cars currently entering the fleet is only about 8.5 million each year.

In the same way there are some 80 million light trucks with an median lifetime of some 16 years, and an annual replacement of about 8.5 million; and there are some 7 million heavy trucks, with a median lifetime of some 28 years and about half a million new trucks bought each year.

Within the context of those numbers, particularly the relatively small percentage of replacement vehicles to the overall fleet size, it is not easy to see how the transportation fuel demand can be expected to change significantly through the introduction of new options (diesel or hybrid) in the near term. Particularly as gas prices go up the money available to an individual to change vehicles will diminish. The only likely change will be in the purchase end where, as in the 1973 - 1983 there was a greater emphasis, and public sentiment, as [Philip Brewer noted](#) to using smaller, less obviously gas-guzzling vehicles.

It is therefore most likely that drivers will, where they can, drive somewhat less (the Hirsch Report notes that 67% of personal automobile travel, and 50% of airplane travel, is discretionary). This will likely have a significant impact on those who work in the sectors that service this discretionary activity.

To complete this series on the report, which holds a considerable volume of additional data, I'd like to quote some of their recommendations. They note that "given the experience of the 1970's many of the policies enacted in a crisis atmosphere will be, at best, sub-optimal." In terms of doing something positive they look to a combination of solutions that will, over a twenty-year period, provide an amelioration of the situation. These include:

- More fuel efficient transportation
- Deriving fuel from heavy oil and oil sand deposits
- Coal Liquefaction
- Enhanced oil recovery
- and Gas to liquids conversion.

Note that all of these are relatively current technologies. As we have commented before, if the technology is not at some obvious stage of testing for commercial reality at this point, it will not have much impact in the next 20 years. The report further notes that the peaking of the oil

The Oil Drum | We go into the crisis with the oil that we have <http://www.theoilbarrel.com/classic/2005/05/we-go-into-crisis-with-car-fleet-that.html>
supply is largely going to be a liquid fuels problem, not an energy crisis. Thus the development of alternate energy sources, wind, solar and the like, will not mitigate the problem in this time frame. Further they conclude "Intervention by governments will be required, because the economic and social implications of oil peaking would otherwise be chaotic."

The report would provide more comfort if more of the five suggestions were currently being aggressively pursued, and if we had the twenty years to wait.

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