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U.S. seeks to double average gas mileage by 2025

The Obama administration's proposed rules would increase average gas mileage for each automaker's passenger vehicle fleet to 54.5 mpg from the 2011 model-year average of 27.8 mpg.

By Neela Banerjee, Los Angeles Times

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Reporting from Washington

The Obama administration has proposed landmark fuel economy standards that would almost double the average gas mileage for each automaker's passenger vehicle fleet to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

The rules proposed Wednesday mark the latest step in a lengthy campaign to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and oil consumption. They would build on the administration's ambitious standards that raise the average to 35.5 mpg over five years ending with the 2016 model year.

The latest standards would be phased in starting with the 2017 model year.

When he disclosed his intent in July, President Obama was flanked by executives from 13 major automakers and the head of the United Auto Workers union, signaling their broad buy-in to the final proposal.

With exemptions and other provisions, actual mileage may be about 42 mpg for cars, with significantly lower requirements for light trucks, including minivans, SUVs and full-size pickup trucks.

Still, the standards demand a substantial leap from the 2011 model-year average of 27.8 mpg.

"Think about what this means: American families would fill up their cars every two weeks rather than every week," Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said.

The new fuel economy regulations are being jointly proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Transportation Department.

Environmentalists praised the proposed new rules.

"These standards are the biggest single step any nation has taken to fight global warming," said Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Campaign at the Center for Auto Safety. "You will see most 2025 cars and light trucks getting the mileage of today's Prius and Ford Escape hybrid. Most of the changes will be under the hood."

Carmakers have backed both the current and the proposed standards, but the National Automobile Dealers Assn. criticized the proposed rules for tacking on what it said would be an additional \$3,000 to average vehicle prices by 2025.

"This regulation gambles that millions of consumers will be able to afford thousands more for generally smaller, more expensive vehicles that may not meet their needs," the trade group said. "This policy is contrary to what most consumers are actually buying today, despite the wide availability of more fuel-efficient models."

The administration asserted that the fuel economy standards won't push Americans to drive smaller vehicles and pointed out that truck and SUV makers are already working to manufacture far more fuel-efficient versions of their current models.

The new, combined sets of fuel economy standards would save Americans more than \$1.7 trillion at the pump, the administration estimated, or about \$8,000 per vehicle. The standards also would reduce the nation's oil consumption by 2.2 million barrels a day — "enough to offset almost a quarter of the current level" of oil imports, the administration said.

Meanwhile, heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions would be cut by 6 billion metric tons over the life of the programs, according to federal estimates.

The new standards will be open for public comment for 60 days after being published in the Federal Register. The administration said the EPA and the Transportation

Department also would hold public hearings around the country.

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