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## **EPA’s Vehicle ‘Trends’ Report Shows Little Gain On CO2 Performance**

By Doug Obey  
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EPA’s latest annual “trends” report on vehicle fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions for model year 2021 is painting a largely status quo picture of the fleet’s performance over the prior year, while suggesting future improvements are likely though environmentalists are urging officials to step up pending regulatory measures.

The agency is touting the data from MY21 vehicles as evidence of continued long-term progress toward emissions cuts, even as the report continues to highlight a gap between current fleet performance and changes ultimately needed for automakers to comply with current and future rules and achieve GHG goals.

“In model year 2021, the average estimated real-world CO2 emission rate for all new vehicles fell by 2 [grams per mile (g/mi)] to 347 g/mi, the lowest ever measured,” states [the Dec. 12 report](#).

“Real-world fuel economy remained at a record high 25.4 mpg” the report adds, with this figure reflecting a status quo top-line performance average for the vehicle fleet compared to MY20 vehicles.

The broader report examines both industry-wide trends and performance by individual automakers, with the agency noting that annual changes garner the biggest public attention but that its broader database is more valuable for identifying long-term trends.

For example, the average fuel economy in the U.S. has increased 32 percent, or 6.1 mpg, since 2004, EPA notes in a press release.

In that same timeframe, CO2 emissions have decreased 25 percent, or 115 g/mile, with emissions falling in 14 of the past 17 years.

But the essentially stable short-term trend in vehicle performance highlights the heavy lifting that automakers must do to meet the Biden EPA's [tougher GHG requirements](#) for MY23-26, and to even approach the Biden administration's 2030 goal of achieving 50 percent of new vehicle sales being battery electric, plug-in hybrid or fuel cell hydrogen vehicles.

For example, combined sales of those vehicle types were 4 percent of nationwide production in MY21, according to the latest trends report.

### **'No Progress'**

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That rulemaking is also an opportunity to respond to a troublesome trend in which the continued market push toward heavier sport utility vehicles is continuing to overwhelm performance gains including from an increasing number of hybrids and EVs, according to another environmentalist.

"Two grams per mile a year [emissions improvement] isn't going to cut it," the source says. "In March, we certainly hope to see something from the administration that puts an end to that incentive so we can start seriously reducing total emissions as we're supposed to."

The trends report also serves as a means for tracking the emissions and fuel economy performance of individual automakers, including the rates at which they are installing specific fuel-saving technologies.

It identifies five automakers with worse "real-world" average CO2 performance since 2016 -- Hyundai, Mazda, Volkswagen, General Motors, and Stellantis.

Automakers showing at least some real-world improvement since then are Subaru, Kia, Nissan, Honda, Toyota, BMW, and Ford, according to the report.

EPA also projects that both GHG and fuel economy performance “will improve” in MY22 compared to MY21 -- using more optimistic language than last year’s report that predicted MY21 GHG and fuel economy performance would “remain near” MY20 levels.

[Last year’s report](#) saw larger improvement on GHGs and fuel economy, with average CO2 emissions dipping by 7 g/mi, and fuel economy improving by 0.5 mpg.

But the agency cautions that its data on MY22 is based on preliminary production estimates provided by manufacturers months before vehicles go on sale, and thus it could change.