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Technologies and Approaches to Reducing the Fuel Consumption of Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicles

National Research Council, Transportation Research Board, Division on Engineering and Physical Sciences, Board on Energy and Environmental Systems, Committee to Assess Fuel Economy Technologies for Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicles

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Technologies and Approaches to Reducing the Fuel Consumption of Medium- and Heavy-Duty Vehicles evaluates various technologies and methods that could improve the fuel economy of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, such as tractor-trailers, transit buses, and work trucks. The book also recommends approaches that federal agencies could use to regulate these vehicles' fuel consumption. Currently there are no fuel consumption standards for such vehicles, which account for about 26 percent of the transportation fuel used in the U.S.

The miles-per-gallon measure used to regulate the fuel economy of passenger cars. is not appropriate for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, which are designed above all to carry loads efficiently. Instead, any regulation of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles should use a metric that reflects the efficiency with which a vehicle moves goods or passengers, such as gallons per ton-mile, a unit that reflects the amount of fuel a vehicle would use to carry a ton of goods one mile. This is called load-specific fuel consumption (LSFC).

The book estimates the improvements that various technologies could achieve over the next decade in seven vehicle types. For example, using advanced diesel engines in tractor-trailers could lower their fuel consumption by up to 20 percent by 2020, and improved aerodynamics could yield an 11 percent reduction. Hybrid powertrains could lower the fuel consumption of vehicles that stop frequently, such as garbage trucks and transit buses, by as much 35 percent in the same time frame.

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