

Fewer SUVs in the city - another topic for the government negotiations in Brussels

By Reinhard Boest

It cannot be overlooked: cars in Brussels (and not only there, of course) are getting bigger and heavier. This has an impact on road safety, but above all on the use of limited public space. This is noticeable in multi-storey car parks, but also in narrow streets where cars can hardly pass each other because the cars parked on the left and right are so wide.

The current Brussels Transport Minister Elke Van den Brandt has now commissioned a study by the regional transport and environmental authorities (Bruxelles Mobilité and Bruxelles Environnement), as reported by the business newspaper L'Echo. The study also looks at possible measures to deal with this phenomenon.

According to the study, the weight of new passenger cars registered in Brussels increased by 10 per cent between 2013 and 2023. Company cars are particularly affected: they weigh an average of 1,711 kilograms, private cars 1,463 kilograms. What is particularly critical, however, is that they are now often over 1.80 metres wide - and therefore exceed the dimensions of standard parking spaces.

This development is at odds with important transport, environmental and urban development policy goals that the coalition government in the Brussels region set itself in 2019. Among other things, the aim was to ensure that cars are better adapted to the urban environment, i.e. smaller and lighter.

How can we counteract this trend? Persuasion, including appropriate advertising, is obviously not very successful. The study assumes that you have to start with your wallet in order to (perhaps) make a difference. From mid-2025, the registration tax (taxe de mise en circulation, TMC) in Wallonia - as decided by the previous government - will no longer be based solely on engine capacity, but also on the weight of the car. The new government wants to reduce this additional burden for purely electric cars; however, the study estimates that it is too low overall to really influence a purchase decision. This would require a tax rate similar to that applied in the Netherlands, where every 100 kilograms of additional weight incurs an extra 100 euros in tax.

Another instrument is parking charges based on weight or size. Some municipalities in Brussels charge up to twice as much for residents' parking permits for larger cars. Some European cities differentiate parking fees according to the size of the vehicle; Paris has taken a particularly drastic approach, tripling [parking fees for SUVs](#) since October this year.

Finally, the study also discusses the possibility of using the low-emission zone (LEZ) model to close the Brussels region or parts of it to large or heavy vehicles. A problem of social imbalance is not to be feared, as these cars are mainly found in the wealthier municipalities. The LEZ, on the other hand, would mainly affect poorer households, who often cannot afford cars that comply with the increasingly strict emission limits.

However, the authors of the study seem to realise that the measures being considered will meet with resistance. This is hardly surprising given the ongoing debate about the previous government's mobility policy. In order to do something about ever larger cars in the city, persuasion is needed. After all, surveys have shown that two thirds of Brussels residents are in favour of this. However, it should not be forgotten that a large proportion of car traffic in the city is caused by commuters from the surrounding area. This would again pose the same problem as the long-discussed congestion charge: it cannot be implemented without coordination with the other regions.

Minister Elke Van den Brandt sees the study as the basis for decisions that the - still unforeseeable - future regional government will have to make. Looking at the positions of the probable coalition partners, additional burdens for motorists - even the wealthier ones - seem rather unlikely. The deadlines for the LEZ have already been relaxed by the [new majority in the regional parliament](#). However, as it cannot be ruled out that the Flemish Greens (Groen), who were ahead in the election among the Dutch-speaking electorate, will also be part of the future regional government, the issue is certainly an additional bargaining chip for them. *Translated with [DeepL.com](#) (free version)*