# Double-cab utes: causes and consequences

The double-cab ute is extraordinarily popular – the top five best-selling new vehicles in New Zealand in 2019 were in this category. This is new: until 2015 the top-sellers were much lighter vehicles like the Corolla, and the trend is global. In the US light trucks (utes and SUVs) make up 70% of new automobiles, and they weigh more than ever: between 2000 and 2019 the average US pickup put on 300 kg. Designed for commercial activities such as construction and farming, these vehicles are now commonly used for short urban trips previously undertaken by light cars. There are consequences. The predominance of diesel engines means higher emissions of NOx and other local pollutants. Weighing 2 tonnes or more, fuel efficiency is reduced, and greenhouse emissions per km increased, relative to lighter vehicles. The height and width of these vehicles dominate road space. There are safety issues, including blind spots, a high centre of gravity, and an unforgiving front end. We estimate the effects of the recent rise of the ute in NZ on greenhouse emissions and road crash injuries. We explore also the effects of more, bigger, heavier, and more powerful vehicles on the quality of public spaces and the experience of those who use these spaces. We will summarise work done on the promotion of the double cab ute in this country, contrasting the themes that run through advertising images and commercial messaging with driver surveys and studies of driver behaviour. The increasing average mass of the New Zealand vehicle fleet, embodied in the double cab ute but apparent in other vehicles also, challenges climate goals, urban efficiency, and health and safety plans such as Vision Zero. There is clearly a need for integrated solutions that will protect the health and sustainability of the New Zealand transport system.