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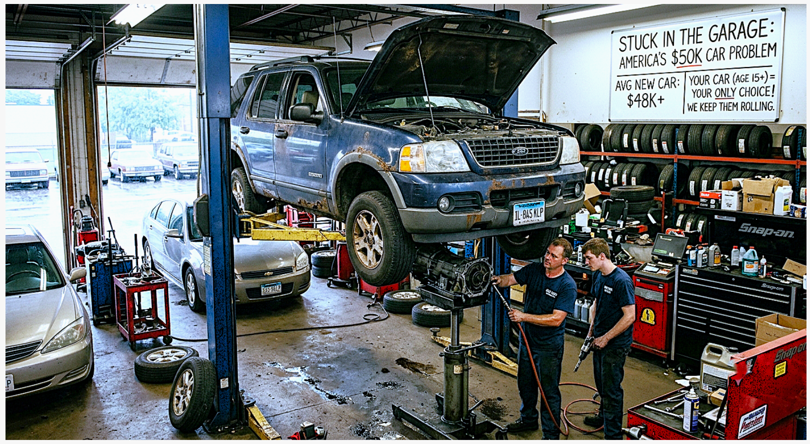
America's $50,000 Car Problem: New Report: Record-Old Vehicle Fleet Is Straining Households and Auto Repair Shops Alike

The Average U.S. Car Turns a Record 12.8 YO, MyTSV Local Business Report: the Economics Reshaping the Auto Repair Industry — Offers Consumers a Practical Path



Keeping your older vehicle running is often the smartest financial move in today's market. Find expert maintenance tips and automotive insights to keep your car rolling at mytsv.com.

DEERFIELD, IL, UNITED STATES, July 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new local business report from MyTSV, a video-first business directory and media platform serving the Chicago metropolitan area, documents a structural shift in American vehicle ownership: as new-car affordability collapses, U.S. drivers are holding onto older vehicles longer than at any point in modern history — transforming the neighborhood auto repair shop from a routine-maintenance stop into what the report describes as a financial emergency room for millions of households.

The report, titled "Stuck in the Garage: Inside America's $50,000 Car Problem," is available in full on the MyTSV blog at https://mytsv.com/blogs/stuck-in-the-garage-inside-americas-50000-car-problem-543

New Vehicles Are Now Out of Reach for a Growing Share of Households

According to data released by Kelley Blue Book, a Cox Automotive brand, the average transaction price for a new vehicle stood at $49,220 in May 2026, after touching an all-time high of $50,326 in December 2025. Combined with elevated auto loan interest rates, the report finds that for a significant portion of American households, purchasing a new vehicle has moved from a routine milestone to a financial impossibility.

A Record-Old National Fleet

The consequence, according to the report, is a "zombie fleet" phenomenon: vehicles that would once have been traded in are instead being kept on the road well past the point manufacturers designed them to require only routine service. S&P Global Mobility's most recent analysis found the average age of a light vehicle in the United States reached 12.8 years in 2025 — a record high and the eighth consecutive year the figure has increased. Passenger cars specifically now average 14.5 years old. For the first time since the 1970s, the number of passenger cars on U.S. roads has fallen below 100 million, even as the total vehicle fleet has grown to approximately 289 million.

Repair Costs Are Outpacing Inflation

The report finds that this aging trend is colliding with a repair market where costs have risen sharply. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index data shows that motor vehicle maintenance and repair costs have climbed approximately 43.6% since January 2019, consistently outpacing headline inflation, with more recent BLS data showing that gap widening further through 2025. For households, that means a single major repair — a failed transmission, a timing belt, a structural issue — can arrive as an unplanned expense running into the thousands of dollars.

Illinois Drivers Face an Added "Rust Belt Tax"

The report gives particular attention to the Chicagoland and Illinois suburban market MyTSV covers, where heavily salted winter roads accelerate frame corrosion, brake line failure, and suspension damage in vehicles once they reach 12 to 15 years old — often doubling the labor time required for repairs compared to drier climates. The report also documents a growing pattern of "triage maintenance" among Illinois vehicle owners, who increasingly delay service until a warning light appears or a vehicle stops running, a habit that frequently turns an affordable early repair into a catastrophic, multi-system failure.

Full Waiting Rooms, Squeezed Margins

Despite high demand, the report finds independent repair shops are not simply thriving on the surge in business. Owners cite sourcing affordably priced parts as their top operational challenge amid ongoing supply chain volatility, while a persistent, multi-year shortage of technicians trained to diagnose increasingly computerized, hybrid, and electric vehicles has pushed labor costs — and in turn, customer bills — steadily higher. The report notes that the shops adapting most successfully are differentiating not on price, but on transparency, using digital inspection tools such as photo and video updates from the service bay, along with repair-now, pay-later financing options, to build trust with financially stressed customers.

"The neighborhood auto shop has quietly become one of the most important financial safety nets for the American middle class," said Aybek, co-founder of MyTSV. "People aren't holding onto their cars by choice — they're doing it because a new vehicle is no longer a realistic option for a huge share of households. Our goal with this report was to lay out that economic reality clearly, and to help both consumers and the local repair shops that serve them navigate it with better information."

A Practical Guide for Consumers

Beyond the economic analysis, the MyTSV report includes a consumer-facing maintenance guide aimed at helping owners of vehicles ten years or older avoid catastrophic repair bills — covering fluid maintenance intervals, winter rust prevention, driving habits that protect the transmission and suspension, and how to distinguish routine wear from safety-critical warning signs. The full guide is available alongside the report at the link above.

About the MyTSV Local Business Report

The report is part of MyTSV's ongoing coverage of the economic pressures facing local businesses and households across the Chicago metropolitan area, drawing on public economic data, government statistics, and MyTSV's own reporting on local service businesses throughout the Northwest suburbs.

About MyTSV

MyTSV is a video-first local business directory and media platform serving the Chicago metropolitan area, with a focus on the Northwest suburbs of Illinois. Co-founded by Aybek and Evgeny "Eugene" Kolkevich, MyTSV helps local businesses — from auto repair shops to restaurants and service providers — build modern digital visibility through video content, SEO-optimized business listings, and local press coverage, including in both English and Russian. More information, along with the full report, is available at MyTSV.com.

Sources and References

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S&P Global Mobility, "U.S. Vehicle Age Rises Again to 12.8 Years in 2025" — press.spglobal.com
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Price Index, Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Repair (Series CUUR0000SETD) — bls.gov / fred.stlouisfed.org
Full MyTSV report: "Stuck in the Garage: Inside America's $50,000 Car Problem" — https://mytsv.com/blogs/stuck-in-the-garage-inside-americas-50000-car-problem-543

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