

Would You Convert Your Car From Wheels To Tracks?

Many people that haven't given up on automated transportation during crisis find themselves wondering if their vehicle will be able to navigate over rough terrain. As roads fall into worse disrepair, or are destroyed completely, wheeled vehicles may not work very well, even if there is enough fuel and spare parts to keep them running.

Rubber tires can be a weak point in prepper transport plans, so it may be worthwhile to consider converting the vehicle to one that runs on tracks.

Before spending money on conversion parts and tools, think about the advantages and disadvantages first!

Let's count them together in the following article!

Better Traction than Wheels

If you have ever tried to drive a vehicle in mud, ice, snow, or even a few inches of water, then you know that navigating can be very difficult. Just about anything that decreases traction between the road and the tires can lead to skidding, sliding, and absolute disaster.

Vehicles with tracks on them have much better traction. Aside from increased surface area for gripping complex surfaces, the tracks are also wider, which increases stability.

Even a fairly small track vehicle can move more easily over large potholes or other surfaces that would ruin the drive train of a wheeled vehicle. Larger track vehicles can find their way across just about any surface as long as the rearward track has something to grip onto while the front moving ones grab onto something else.

For example, if you want to go off road and encounter a sewage ditch, most cars and trucks would get stuck in it. A track vehicle can slide right over the ditch and move on almost as if it had been on steady ground the entire time.

While the vehicle itself may shift around a lot, it will still keep moving forward because the tracks will be able to grip just about any surface and use it for traction. Even if you do get stuck in a track vehicle, it may be easier to back out because moving the tracks in reverse will give more traction along surfaces that worked before.

Better Weight Distribution

To understand how weight distribution works, think about swimming and suspension bridges.

The surface of water has something called “surface tension”, a very thin film of atoms and molecules at the surface of the liquid that are positioned closer together than they are deeper into the liquid. Now think about a paper clip. If it is all folded up, it will sink no matter how carefully you try to rest it in a bowl of water. But if you open up the paper clip (which doesn’t change it’s weight, but causes the weight to be distributed over a greater area) and gently place it on top of the water, it will float.

By the same token, if you are unable to swim, you can still float by laying face up, spreading your arms and legs out and arching your back so that you have as much surface area as possible.

In a similar fashion, suspension bridges work because the weight of the upper support structures serves to redistribute the weight of the pavement below them in relation to the pilings that reach into the water.

Most people will be trying to drive cars with just four wheels

on them. All of the weight of the vehicle plus anything it is carrying must be supported by these wheels. This, in turn means that if you are trying to drive through mud or something else that gives way easily, the vehicle will sink, in part, because there is too much weight concentrated in a small area.

Now consider a situation where you have an extra large pickup truck, or some other truck that has tires arranged so that they are doubled up on each axle. Even though this increases the amount of surface area to distribute weight across, there may still be too much weight in a small area.

Even if you go up to sixteen wheels, the weight distribution will be higher than what you would get with a track vehicle. This is one of the reasons why track vehicles can get past muddy areas while wheeled vehicles with the best traction systems will still get stuck.

Always remember that when you have a belt moving across a surface, large weights get distributed across the entire track instead of just resting the focal point created by tires.

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Kits That Let You Switch Between Wheels and Tracks Are Available

Realistically speaking, there is no such thing as being able to take an under powered or small vehicle and turn it into something that has the durability and power of a military tank. If you have a conventional four wheeled vehicle, it may be possible to add a track system to the axles on an “as needed basis”. Basically, all you need to do is take the tires off, and then mount the additional wheels and tracks onto the hubs.

Even though these systems won't give you as much weight

redistribution as a track that runs from front to back, they will still work better than the tires you are using now. Right now, on average, a small passenger car exerts 30 psi on the pavement, while a track system would only put around 3 psi. If you are moving through mud or snow, this will give you a very clear advantage.

When purchasing a track kit for your vehicle, bear in mind that your vehicle will handle very differently once the kit is installed. You will need to practice a good bit in different terrains so that you know what can and can't be done using this kit. This practice should include at least some off-road muddy conditions as well as snow, ice, and city driving.

If you find that there are areas better handled with tires, be sure to include when and where to change the tracks for tires so that you can have the best of both systems.

Video first seen on [AD Boivin](#).

Easier to Defend

If you happen to believe in the ability of guns to stop bad people from doing bad things, then you probably know that wheeled vehicles can be stopped by shooting out the tires. Since track systems don't require air filling, the tracks should not be damaged by most types of bullets. As long as you use metal tracks made from durable material, your vehicle should keep right on moving no matter how many bullets hit the tracks.

You already know that military tanks weigh much more than a conventional vehicle. When it comes to adding more weight, nothing takes up more than armor plating that will stop bullets, grenades, and other ammo. As a result, if you are interested in a bug out vehicle that will be easy to defend, you will need to consider the ability to add a good bit of

weight in armor.

In many cases, adding a track system will enable you to customize even relatively small vehicles without having to worry about the weight problems commonly associated with wheels. Needless to say, these customizations can also include mounting different kinds of weapons inside or on top of the vehicle.

Can Pull Heavier Loads

If you are accustomed to the sight of tractor trailers, then you may think they are the best for pulling heavy freight. As a wheeled vehicle pulls something along, the tires actually dig in a bit, which causes the vehicle to move closer to the ground. If the weight is heavy enough, and the ground soft enough, a wheeled vehicle will literally dig itself into the ground as the wheels continue to spin.

By contrast, a track vehicle has much more ground surface to grip, and will use it to actually pull the weight forward without the tendency to dig into the ground.

Remember, that as the track advances, a whole new surface area comes into contact with the road as other tracks maintain the forward motion. This increase in surface area can be many times larger than the relatively small spot gripped by each tire.

If you do decide to convert your vehicle to run using tracks, you might pull heavier weights with it. Just make sure that the drive train, suspension, and other parts of the vehicle are strong enough to pull the added weight. As efficient as tracks may be, they cannot make up for weaker metal in parts of the vehicle that might give way under heavier weights.

Suitable Vehicles May be Expensive or Hard to Find

Vehicles that run on tracks come in all shapes and sizes. There are also thousands of people that have taken passenger cars, trucks, school buses, and other vehicles and converted them to run on tracks.

Some of them will never make suitable vehicles for preppers because they are either too under powered, too cheaply made (in terms of vital parts like the drive train, suspension, and transmission), or can't be reworked to meet a variety of prepper goals.

While adding tracks to these vehicles may give you a bit better traction, the tracks cannot compensate for all the shortfalls that are found in most vehicles on the road these days. The ideal vehicle, regardless of whether you add tracks, should have the following features:

- You should be able to live and sleep in the vehicle, or tow a trailer that you can live in. Most passenger sized vehicles that have a large enough back seat are also fuel hogs that will be hard to convert to alternate fuels. While adding tracks may mean you can put a bit more weight on the vehicle, it isn't likely that you will be able to make the inside of the vehicle bigger without spending a lot of money. A larger sized pickup truck might work well enough along with a removable track kit.
- Speaking of [fuel](#) – you should be able to convert the vehicle from gasoline to biodiesel and other fuels.
- The under body of the car should be strong enough to take on extra weight for armor and other defense measures. Most passenger cars simply don't have strong enough suspension and drive trains to do this kind of job. If you want something at or near military grade

armor for your prepper vehicle, you would probably be best served by adding tracks to a Mack truck or an old full sized bus. Needless to say – these vehicles can cost a lot of money even in the used market.

- The engine and transmission must be fast, strong and durable. Did you read about how easy it is for [Tesla vehicles](#) to catch fire in an accident because of the batteries? If so, then you may also be aware of the fact that hybrid vehicles have under powered engines because they are expected to run on an electrical motor at least half the time. Even if you could put a track system on a hybrid, it won't deliver more power or speed. If anything, the vehicle will run a good bit slower and deliver even worse performance in this arena. I would not buy anything less than 6 cylinder engines for a prepper vehicle, and nothing under a 6 (8 cylinders and up would be better) for a track vehicle because of the reduced speed problem.

Too Easy to Spot and Follow

Even though tracked vehicles may not put much pressure on the ground, they do leave distinctive markings. For example, if a track vehicle moves on a lawn, it will tear up all the areas encountered by the edge of the track. If you are the only person in the area with a track vehicle, it will make it very easy to figure out where you passed through.

Once you have a distinctive track pattern, it will be very easy for others to follow you. Here are just a few things that a good tracker may be able to figure out as they follow your trail:

- If you stop to repair tracks or put them back online, it will show in the trails left behind. Depending on how many times you stop, anyone following you may be able to figure out when you and your vehicle are most

vulnerable, and for how long.

- Depending on how many times you stop for fuel, someone following you may be able to calculate fuel efficiency. If these people want to surround you or catch up to you – they may look for a time when you are low on fuel and cannot afford to waste it trying to get away from them. Remember, even if there are hundreds of other vehicles on the road, the tracks left by your vehicle may still be on the shoulder or other areas where they can be easily spotted and read.

Unless track vehicles become far more popular, your bug out vehicle will also stand out in a crowd and be memorable. Anyone that sees your vehicle may conclude that you have a lot of supplies in the vehicle, or that you have other things of value.

No matter whether you drive down a city street or pass through a small town, your vehicle will draw more attention than you may be comfortable with.

Tracks Can be Hard to Maintain

If you think getting a flat after a tire has been in service for several years is a nuisance, then you will be very unhappy with the way track vehicles perform. While it is true that metal tracks cannot be stopped by bullets, they can develop problems during normal driving. In fact, tracks are far less durable than tires, and more inclined to need replacing.

Even if the tracks remain in good condition, that does not mean the track will stay in place while you are traveling. Depending on the track system, it may take several hours to re-align the track on its sprockets. You also need to carry around a good bit of equipment to do the job properly. While you may not need a jack to lift the vehicle up, there are many places where repairing a track system can be difficult.

When it comes to maintenance, also consider the cost of buying new parts. Today, there are only a handful of manufacturers that actually make track systems. Whether you need to buy just a single new plate, a new sprocket, or rubber gear to lessen impact on pavement, all these parts can be very expensive.

Unless you are planning to use the vehicle over rough terrain and know how to handle all the needed repairs, you may be better off sticking with conventional tires. If you do decide to buy a conversion kit that can be removed and installed easily, you may find that it will only get you so far in your journey before you have to switch back to tires.

Cannot Move as Fast or as Quietly as a Wheeled Vehicle

Consider a situation where an earthquake, hurricane, or military invasion has led to some kind of localized or larger scale social collapse. There may still be a chance for you to escape from a city or town, provided you do it as quickly as possible. You probably won't have any "off road" places to drive through until you reach areas near or parallel to larger stretches of main highways or the thruway system.

Until you reach those locations, you will need to move as quickly and inconspicuously as possible. When it comes right down to it, no matter how much you lubricate the tracks and wheel system, they are going to squeak, squeal, and make a lot of noise. Sadly, even if rioters or others looking to steal don't see your vehicle, they will most certainly hear it coming.

Today, many people claim that there is a psychological advantage to using a track vehicle during a crisis. According to these people, tracks are threatening looking, and people may avoid you because they think you can defend yourself with ease.

Now let's say you converted a passenger car to run on tracks. After people stop laughing at the spectacle of something like a hatchback crossed with "Number Five" (remember the movie Short Circuit), their next thought will be to see what you are carrying. While they may be more hesitant to approach a Mack Truck or a bus, rest assured that smaller vehicles will be a target.

Your vehicle will not be able to move fast enough on tracks if others decide to follow you in wheeled vehicles. Unless you can get to a swamp, off the road, or to some other area where wheels do not work well, the lack of speed alone will present a huge problem.

While you may have thought ahead and added armor, it will only be a matter of time before a slow or stopped track vehicle can be breached. Even if you can get to an area where tracks work better, the sound of your vehicle moving along may still make it possible for thieves to follow you at their leisure. They will be guided both by the sound and the tracks that you leave behind.

Converted Vehicles May be Difficult to Steer

No matter whether you are going through a city, trying to turn onto a different road off the highway, or merging onto the thruway, accurate and easy steering is very important. Typically, this is much easier to accomplish with tires because they can be easily moved in the direction that you want to go. By contrast, when you want to move a track system, the entire length of it must shift along and adjust.

When it comes to creating the perfect [bug out vehicle](#), there is no question that changing wheels for tracks has some advantages. Once you look more into the cost of this conversion, however, you may conclude that it is best to buy a

vehicle that already runs on tracks.



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If you have an interest in the kits that convert conventional vehicles to run on tracks, bear in mind that these kits also have some strong and weak points.

Test these kits out to see how well they work, and keep them on-hand for a time of need. You won't be spending thousands of dollars on converting to tracks that cannot be used for routine travel, or buying something that will be more useless than expected in an actual crisis.

Would you convert your car from wheels to tracks? Share your thoughts and experience in a comment below!

*This article has been written by **Carmela Tyrell** for **Survivopedia**.*

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