GM Canada: Too Early To Know Camaro Impact

Craig Wong, The Canadian Press

OTTAWA - It is too soon to say how many, if any, jobs will be lost due to a shift in production of the new Camaro in 2015 from Oshawa, Ont., to a factory in Michigan, General Motors Canada president Kevin Williams said Tuesday.

Williams, speaking in an interview from the floor of the Detroit Auto Show, suggested, for example, that an increase in sales of other cars being assembled in Oshawa could take up some the slack.

"It is too early in any manner to think of that decision on Camaro as being a huge volume or economic or employee impact on Oshawa," he said.

"Oshawa is playing a prominent role in launching the all-new Chevrolet Impala. It is a significant contributor to General Motors within Cadillac with the all new XTS that is being manufactured there."

The Canadian Auto Workers union has suggested 1,000 jobs could be lost as a result of the Camaro decision when production of the next generation of the muscle car moves to the United States.

Williams wouldn't predict how many cars GM would continue to produce in Oshawa after Camaro production ends, but said he saw opportunity for growth for the Buick Regal, Chevrolet Impala and Cadillac XTS that are also made at the plant.

"Obviously market demand is the predictor, but we're going to use that facility to optimize our position on those vehicles," he said.

"That's how we're focusing across the entire globe to ensure that we have the right efficiency and cost structures to support what we are trying to do.

Chris Buckley, president of the Canadian Auto Workers local in Oshawa, said the union will meet with company executives next week to demand GM replace every job lost as a result of the loss of Camaro production.

He said it becomes more expensive for GM to produce cars at the Oshawa factory if it isn't being used to its full capacity.

"It gets less expensive when you fully utilize and max out your production capabilities in your assembly plants," Buckley said.

"General Motors has never been so small and will continue to shrink. My biggest fear is General Motors has no long- term vision for its Canadian operations and we will continue to get smaller and that should be alarming to everyone."

2012 was a rough year for GM in Canada.

The U.S. automaker saw its sales slip nearly seven per cent compared with 2011 in a year that the industry made overall gains of nearly six per cent.

GM also saw its market share slide to 13.5 per cent from 15.3 per cent the previous year.

However Williams said the company is focused on profitability and sustainability more than market share and sales volumes.

Williams said the company is working hard to improve things like the opinion of its brands, customer service and residual values.

"Those are the kinds of things that give us a lot of hope as we go into the future," he said.

Williams said the company is not going to do business the same way it did before the financial crisis and restructuring.

"There are other competitors in the marketplace that may want to put as much as 30, 40, 50 per cent of their vehicles in fleets to make a market share number. That's not the new GM."