

EU prepares to send petrol cars to the scrap heap

July 8 2021, by Daniel Aronsson



Motorised road transport represents 15 percent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions.

The European Commission wants to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035, under a massive plan to fight climate change unveiled Wednesday.

According to one of a dozen draft laws revealed in Brussels, emissions from motor vehicles must fall by 55 percent by 2030 and drop to zero by 2035.

"As a result, all new cars registered as of 2035 will be zero emission," the statement announcing the plan said.

This would in practice mean that all cars and light vans sold from that date will be battery-powered electric cars, which currently represent less than a tenth of new registrations in the EU.

The move is sure to be fiercely opposed by some in the industry lobby as it makes its way through an intense negotiating and drafting process and scrutiny in the European parliament.

The European Automobile Manufacturer's Association (ACEA) said it supported efforts to make the EU carbon neutral by 2050, as envisaged by draft climate laws.

"However, banning a single technology is not a rational way forward at this stage," it added, referring to plans to reduce road traffic emissions to zero by 2035.

Pressure group Transport and Environment welcomed the plan as a "turning point" for green motoring.

But executive director William Todts warned: "The problem is carmakers will only have to start selling those cleaner cars in 2030.

"Our planet cannot afford another nine years of big talk but little action from the auto industry."

And there is caution among member states like France, Germany, Spain

and Italy which have a large sectors manufacturing traditional combustion engine vehicles and hybrids that support hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Politicians fear that motorists will see fuel prices rising as a result of carbon levies and as they are pushed to sell their gas-guzzlers and buy new electric cars.

The recent "yellow vest" protests in France demonstrated the kind of populist fury that environmental controls on motoring can provoke.

But European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen insisted the transition was vital if Europe is to meet emissions reduction targets and that the public was rallying behind it.

"About a dozen of the large automotive companies both in Germany and elsewhere in Europe have announced that they are going to switch their fleet to exclusively emission-free vehicles," she noted.

"We see that people want these developments, there's been a huge increase in the number signing up for electric vehicles," she said, noting that the US market has tripled over the past year.

Oliver Zipse, president of the ACEA lobby group and chief executive of BMW, stressed that the plan would "only be successful with mandatory targets for the ramp-up of charging and refuelling infrastructure in all member states.

"This will be essential to charge the millions of electric vehicles that European automakers will be bringing to market in the coming years," he said.

Economic fallout

Motorised road transport is Europeans' most common way of getting about, but it represents 15 percent of the bloc's greenhouse gas emissions, and Brussels aims to be carbon-neutral by 2050.

Economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has hit the road vehicle market hard, but electric cars have been an exception, with growth accelerating.

Battery-powered cars represented eight percent of new registrations in western Europe in the first five months of this year, with 356,000 new vehicles, more than in all of 2019.

The impending new regulations will increase this trend, as they will not only spell doom for classic petrol and diesel motors but effectively force out hybrid and hybrid-rechargeable models.

These had once been seen as a transitional technology, a key product for an industry that boasts of employing 14.6 million workers in Europe.

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