

Biden targets half of US car sales to be zero-emission by 2030

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US President Joe Biden announced a new target for zero-emission car sales on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington on August 5, 2021.

With executives from the Detroit automakers watching, President Joe Biden on Thursday announced a target for half of all cars sold in the

United States to be zero-emission vehicles by 2030.

Biden cast the move as a way to compete with China and other countries that have invested in [electric vehicles](#) (EV), while also transforming the US transportation sector, which is the biggest source of the country's carbon emissions.

Speaking at the White House before an array of electric cars, Biden called them "a vision of the future that is now beginning to happen, a future of the automobile industry that is electric, battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric, fuel cell electric."

"It's electric and there's no turning back. The question is whether we'll lead or fall behind," he said.

News of the announcement drew modest praise from environmentalists, who stressed the need for additional measures given the worsening climate situation.

The Sierra Club's Katherine Garcia called the target a "meaningful signal to manufacturers," but said it should be raised to 60 percent and be supplemented with "the strongest clean car standards possible."

Significantly increasing US usage of electric vehicles—which accounted for only about two percent of 2020 car sales—is expected to depend on expanding charging stations and other infrastructure, as well as convincing Americans to buy the cars.

The "Big 3" US automakers—General Motors, Ford and Stellantis—have all significantly expanded their EV investments, making the target "most likely achievable" by 2030, Jessica Caldwell of auto website Edmunds.com said.

"But what's possibly the biggest hurdle ahead is consumer acceptance: What will it take for Americans to be willing to change their car ownership habits to go electric?" Caldwell said.

Infrastructure debate

In a joint statement, the Detroit manufacturers expressed their "shared aspiration to achieve sales of 40-50 percent" of the vehicles, but said the shift "can be achieved only" with initiatives such as consumer incentives to buy EVs and new infrastructure like a charging network.

While Biden has proposed an infrastructure plan that would include many of those programs, not all have made it into the Senate's bipartisan compromise bill viewed as having the best chance of passing in Congress.

The United Auto Workers (UAW), one of the country's largest auto worker unions, rallied behind the move.



Electric car sales account for only two percent of the overall US market, compared with 10 percent in Europe.

"The members of the UAW, current and future, are ready to build these electric cars and trucks and the batteries that go in them," President Ray Curry said in a statement released by the Biden administration.

Left out of the Washington launch event was Tesla, Elon Musk's company that has been credited with accelerating the popularity of EVs in the United States and leads in domestic sales.

Musk has however been criticized for tactics seen as anti-union, and White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the companies invited to the White House "are the three largest key players of the United Auto

Workers."

"Yeah, seems odd that Tesla wasn't invited," Elon Musk tweeted.

Measured praise

Although the 50 percent figure would not exceed what many American manufacturers were already considering, it is a steep target for the United States as a whole.

While around 10 percent of European car sales are of EVs, they account for less than two percent in the United States, the International Energy Agency said last year.

Environmental Defense Fund President Fred Krupp praised the announcement as positioning the United States to compete in the emerging transportation economy.

"Countries around the world are racing to eliminate pollution from their cars and trucks," Krupp said.

Americans, he added, "can win this race, and our prize will be good jobs, savings at the gas pump for American families, cleaner air and a safer climate."

But the Natural Resources Defense Council's Simon Mui said more aggressive action was needed immediately "given how climate change has already turned our weather so violent."

The target is Biden's latest repudiation of the policies of his predecessor Donald Trump, and he also intends to beef up fuel economy rules and emissions regulations the former president rolled back.

Current emissions standards, which date from March 2020, require manufacturers to improve by 1.5 percent the energy efficiency of their vehicles between 2021 and 2026, less than the five percent demanded under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama.

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