# UK’s plug-in hybrid policy risks stalling electric vehicle progress and climate goals



The trajectory of the UK’s electric vehicle landscape faces significant challenges, particularly due to a recent regulatory shift permitting increased sales of plug-in hybrid vehicles (PHEVs) until 2035. While touted as a flexible transition towards greener transport, this policy risks undermining the nation's climate targets and the credibility of its burgeoning electric vehicle industry.

PHEVs, often marketed for their eco-friendly credentials, have been found in practice to emit considerably more CO₂ than official figures suggest. While lab tests claim emissions as low as 30-50g/km, independent studies reveal that real-world emissions can be two to four times higher—often between 120g/km and 180g/km—primarily because many drivers fail to charge their vehicles regularly. Surveys indicate that between 65% and 85% of PHEV owners neglect routine charging, reverting instead to petrol, which significantly undermines their environmental benefits.

In contrast, the European Union is moving forward with stringent regulations, including plans to triple the average CO₂ rating for hybrids by 2028 to reflect actual use more accurately. The UK, however, remains anchored to outdated emissions figures, creating a scenario where manufacturers benefit from lax regulations—encouraging the proliferation of hybrids while delaying the critical shift toward zero-emission vehicles. This regulatory divergence may jeopardise the UK's homegrown electric vehicle industry, as manufacturers anticipate uncertainty and slow investments in necessary infrastructure and technology.

For consumers, the potential financial implications of this shift are stark. As reliance on petrol increases among hybrid owners, many will likely face escalating fuel costs, which could turn the initial allure of PHEVs into a financial burden. The higher upfront costs associated with PHEVs, which are generally 10-20% more expensive than traditional petrol and diesel options, further complicate the economic case for these vehicles.

Experts highlight that the government’s optimism about PHEVs rings increasingly hollow. By extending lifelines to hybrid vehicles, policymakers risk not only stalling progress towards cleaner air but also perpetuating a cycle of pollution that contradicts the very essence of their climate commitments. The situation calls for a critical examination of the assumptions underlying current regulations, as well as a clear demand for stronger accountability based on real-world data.

Moreover, critics contend that the current approach to hybrids is tantamount to greenwashing, allowing both manufacturers and the government to project an image of environmental progress without implementing necessary reforms. The disparity in emissions data raises pressing questions about the integrity of the UK’s climate policy and whether it can feasibly meet its net-zero goals.

As the UK navigates these turbulent waters, it faces a pivotal choice: recalibrate its policies to align with real-world emissions data or risk falling further behind in the race toward sustainable transport. Among the challenges lie broader implications for urban air quality and public health, particularly in cities adopting Clean Air Zones that favour battery electric vehicles (BEVs) over their hybrid counterparts.

With battery electric vehicles now gaining traction across Europe—where sales of pure BEVs are outpacing PHEVs—the future of the UK's car market may depend on how swiftly and effectively it adapts to growing consumer awareness and regulatory pressure. With evolving sentiments about environmental accountability, the roadmap ahead necessitates clarity and decisive action—transcending mere regulatory compliance to support a genuinely sustainable automotive future.

Driving into an uncertain future, UK policymakers must prioritise strategies that encourage the genuine adoption of low-emission technologies, fostering an environment where sustainable choices are not just available but advantageous for consumers and the planet alike. As the green car narrative continues to unfold, the urgency for thorough reform has never been clearer—underscoring the need for action that matches the scale of the climate crisis at hand.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1
2. Paragraph 2
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraph 4
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 7
8. Paragraph 8

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://macholevante.com/news-en/174338/why-a-loophole-in-the-uks-green-car-policy-could-ignite-a-surge-in-emissions-and-consumer-costs/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.autoexpress.co.uk/news/359622/plug-hybrid-emissions-are-three-times-higher-official-tests-show> - A study by Graz University, commissioned by Transport & Environment, tested three plug-in hybrid vehicles (BMW 330e XDrive, Peugeot 308 Plug-in Hybrid, and Renault Megane E-Tech PHEV) on public roads. The findings revealed that these vehicles emitted between 85g/km and 114g/km of CO₂, approximately three times higher than the official WLTP figures of 27g/km to 37g/km. The study emphasizes the discrepancy between laboratory tests and real-world emissions, urging regulators to base PHEV taxation on actual emissions data.
3. <https://theicct.org/analysis-of-plug-in-hybrid-electric-passenger-car-data-confirms-real-world-co2-emissions-are-two-to-four-times-higher-than-official-values/> - An analysis by the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) and Fraunhofer ISI examined real-world usage data of over 100,000 plug-in hybrid electric vehicles across Europe, North America, and China. The study found that, on average, real-world CO₂ emissions for private drivers in Germany were more than twice the official test values, and for company cars, the deviation was even four times higher. The researchers recommend updating testing procedures and providing fiscal incentives for PHEVs that demonstrate a high share of electric driving.
4. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/plug-in-hybrids-pollute-more-than-claimed-in-cities-and-on-commutes-new-tests-show/> - Transport & Environment conducted tests on the latest generation of plug-in hybrid vehicles, including models from BMW, Peugeot, and Renault. The results indicated that these vehicles emit significantly more CO₂ than advertised, especially on city and commuter routes. The study highlights the need for lawmakers to base PHEV taxation on actual emissions and to stop subsidizing their sale, given their underperformance in real-world driving conditions.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/02/05/revealed-plug-in-hybrid-cars-emit-three-times-co2-real-world/> - An investigation by The Telegraph revealed that plug-in hybrid vehicles, such as the Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV, emit significantly more CO₂ in real-world driving conditions than official tests suggest. The study found that the Outlander PHEV returned 39.1mpg under real-world conditions, compared to an official figure of 148.5mpg. The findings raise concerns about the effectiveness of PHEVs in reducing emissions and question the accuracy of official fuel economy figures.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/environment/2020/11/23/plug-in-hybrids-eight-times-polluting-official-tests-show-engine/> - A study commissioned by Transport & Environment found that popular plug-in hybrid models, such as the Mitsubishi Outlander, Volvo XC60, and BMW X5, emit up to eight times more CO₂ than official tests indicate when operating in engine mode. The research highlights the unrealistic assumptions underlying official tests and calls for a reassessment of how PHEVs are evaluated to ensure they contribute effectively to reducing emissions.
7. <https://thedriven.io/2024/04/18/toyotas-plug-in-hybrids-emit-four-times-more-co2-than-company-claims/> - An analysis revealed that Toyota's plug-in hybrid vehicles emit over four times more CO₂ than the company's official figures suggest. While the official WLTP figures average 22 g/km, real-world data indicates emissions are closer to 93 g/km. This significant discrepancy raises concerns about the environmental benefits of PHEVs and the accuracy of manufacturers' claims regarding their emissions.