# Easing of UK electric vehicle sales rules sparks fears of rising emissions from hybrids



The recent easing of vehicle sales regulations in the UK raises significant concerns about the future of electric vehicle (EV) adoption and carbon emissions. According to the Climate Change Committee (CCC), this shift could lead to a significant increase in the number of plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) on British roads, potentially undermining emissions reduction efforts that are crucial for meeting climate targets.

In April, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced new flexibilities in the government’s Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate, a policy designed to compel car manufacturers to increase their sales of fully electric vehicles. Originally intended to enforce strict sales targets, the mandate was altered following extensive lobbying from the car industry, which argued that the requirements were economically unsustainable. As a result, the CCC warns that this relaxation may ultimately result in the sale of up to 500,000 additional PHEVs—vehicles that, while partially electric, still rely on petrol or diesel engines and thus emit higher levels of carbon compared to fully electric counterparts.

Experts have questioned the CCC's conclusions, suggesting that the government’s assumption—that manufacturers would not exploit these new flexibilities—may be misguided. Critics argue that the changes only serve to shift the focus away from fully electric vehicles and risk hampering the UK's progress towards its environmental objectives. Tim Dexter, the vehicle policy manager for Transport & Environment, emphasises that these alterations compromise climate goals and could lead to increased costs for consumers, as the EV transition becomes less comprehensive.

Despite the criticisms, government officials claim that the revisions are minor and pragmatic. Heidi Alexander, the transport minister, insisted that the impact on carbon emissions from these changes would be negligible. However, the CCC's letter to transport ministers highlighted a fundamental flaw in the government's analysis: it overlooked the potential for manufacturers to significantly increase PHEV sales at the expense of fully electric vehicles.

Moreover, the CCC expressed disappointment that the deadline for banning new petrol and diesel van sales was extended from 2030 to 2035, reiterating the need for stricter timelines to meet climate targets. The Department for Transport defended its approach, stating that balancing flexibility for manufacturers with firm commitments to phasing out traditional combustion engine vehicles is essential for protecting jobs while progressing towards a low-emission future.

This regulatory leniency comes at a time when the electric vehicle market is witnessing a surge. Early 2025 saw a 28% increase in EV sales across Europe, driven largely by the availability of affordable models from new entrants such as BYD. Despite this growth, concerns remain that the relaxation of regulatory standards in both the UK and Europe could stall the momentum needed for a comprehensive transition to electric transport.

The automotive industry is currently grappling with the implications of these policy changes, particularly in light of trade disruptions affecting global supply chains. Smaller manufacturers, like those producing supercars, received exemptions from stringent sales targets to provide them with breathing room. Nevertheless, the overarching concern persists that reduced regulatory pressures may dampen innovation and investment in cleaner technologies essential for achieving both environmental and economic sustainability.

As stakeholders continue to debate the best path forward, the CCC's warnings resonate in an industry that is at a pivotal crossroads. The measure of success will not only be the number of EVs on the road but also a conscious shift towards genuinely sustainable transport solutions, free from the compromises that could undermine the broader objectives of carbon neutrality and environmental protection.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/13d9d0d3-25d9-42d4-a82b-1b083580c717), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/95b9bfbd-78eb-4875-be3c-5bd051e1f177)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/britain-eases-electric-vehicle-sales-targets-automakers-2025-04-06/), [[6]](https://apnews.com/article/3aabb665fe0fd3935a370b499a8c5d02)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/f11f61a6-fa5b-46cb-8b87-5351546750c3)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/29/weakening-of-sales-rules-may-lead-to-fewer-electric-cars-on-uk-roads-says-climate-adviser> - The UK's Climate Change Committee (CCC) has expressed concern that recent relaxations in vehicle sales regulations could result in fewer electric vehicles (EVs) on the roads and higher carbon emissions. The government introduced 'flexibilities' into the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandate, allowing more plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) to be sold. Experts warn that this could lead to an increase of up to 500,000 additional PHEVs on UK roads by 2030, potentially undermining emissions reduction efforts.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/13d9d0d3-25d9-42d4-a82b-1b083580c717> - European electric vehicle (EV) sales surged by 28% in early 2025, driven by affordable models and new entrants like BYD and Jaecoo. However, industry leaders express concerns that softened EU and UK emissions regulations might undermine the transition to electric transport. The relaxed rules could reduce urgency and investment in EV rollouts, potentially slowing the adoption of cleaner vehicles and impacting emissions targets.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/95b9bfbd-78eb-4875-be3c-5bd051e1f177> - In response to U.S. trade tariffs, the UK government adjusted its electric vehicle (EV) targets, allowing the sale of full and plug-in hybrids until 2035. While maintaining the phaseout of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030, the government reduced fines for manufacturers failing to meet EV targets and introduced credit flexibility for firms reducing overall emissions. These changes aim to support the UK car industry amid international trade disruptions while maintaining progress toward emissions goals.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/britain-eases-electric-vehicle-sales-targets-automakers-2025-04-06/> - On April 6, 2025, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a relaxation of electric vehicle (EV) sales targets for automakers to help mitigate the impact of U.S. trade tariffs. While maintaining the goal to phase out new petrol and diesel cars by 2030, the government extended the sale of full hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles until 2035. Exemptions from mandate targets were also introduced for small-volume manufacturers like McLaren and Aston Martin to protect the UK’s supercar and engineering sectors.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/3aabb665fe0fd3935a370b499a8c5d02> - The UK Labour government plans to consult on sales targets for automakers amid the transition to electric vehicles, following Stellantis' decision to close its van factory in Luton, affecting 1,100 jobs. The closure resulted from the stringent zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) mandate, which requires 22% of manufacturers' sales fleet to be purely electric in 2024, increasing to 28% in 2025. The government intends to review and possibly adjust the ZEV mandate as part of their broader plan to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/f11f61a6-fa5b-46cb-8b87-5351546750c3> - UK vanmakers are urging the government to halt fines for missing 2024 EV sales targets due to stagnant zero-emission van sales, which have only reached 5.7%, well below the 10% target. Ford and Stellantis, major players in the UK van market, warn that fines could stifle further EV development and have already led to job cuts. They advocate for continued incentives to boost EV sales, such as grants for electric van buyers, fearing that without these measures, EV adoption will remain low due to concerns over charging downtime and infrastructure.