

EU's 2035 combustion engine ban set to be scrapped after industry pressure

► Brussels plans policy reversal ► Reprieve under certain conditions ► Totemic element of climate law

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ALICE HANCOCK AND HENRY FOY — BRUSSELS KANA INAGAKI — LONDON

Brussels is planning to scrap the EU's 2035 combustion-engine ban, allowing carmakers to make a limited number of petrol and diesel-fuelled cars after the ban was meant to come into effect.

The original ban was set to force carmakers to cut production of all combustion engine vehicles to zero by 2035.

But under a revision of the law to be proposed by the European Commission today, European manufacturers would be allowed 10 per cent of 2021 emissions levels if they meet certain conditions.

According to two officials involved in the talks, these may include using green steel to produce vehicles. The bloc may also allow EVs to make use of range extenders — small backup fuel engines — which were set to be banned in 2035.

But the conditions are still being discussed by policymakers before the proposal's presentation, and any change would have to be endorsed by EU governments and the European parliament before becoming law.

The combustion-engine ban was seen as a totemic part of the bloc's Green Deal climate law. Carmakers heavily opposed it, arguing that it would be impossible to meet because of the slow take-up of EVs and patchy charging infrastructure.

Governments including Germany and Italy have also been highly critical of the ban, with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz saying on Friday that he supported its easing. "The reality is that there will still be millions of combustion engine-based cars around the world in 2035, 2040 and 2050," he said.

The EU's move may increase pressure on Britain's Labour government to follow suit, even as the UK has said that it will not dilute its own plans to shift all new-car sales to EVs from 2035.

Other countries have supported enforcing the ban. In a joint paper in October, Paris and Madrid said the proposed move "must not be called into question" and that the future of the European car industry "will be electric".

They did, however, advocate for flexibility such as "super credits" for cars made with European materials to ease pressure on the industry, which is also battling an influx of cheap Chinese EVs.

The commission was set to revisit the rules next year but brought forward the review under pressure from industry. It declined to comment on the talks.

The changes come as sales of EVs in the EU have risen 26 per cent from January to October this year, accounting for 16 per cent of the new-car market, according to European car industry body Acea. The strong growth has been driven by more affordable models from both European and Chinese carmakers.

Environmental groups have argued that scrapping the 2035 ban would widen the gap between the west and China, which has led the transition.

“Scrapping the ban would be a major mistake for Europe,” said Simone Tagliapietra, senior fellow at Brusselsbased think-tank Bruegel. “It would do little to help carmakers, as electrification is the future of the industry, and it would seriously undermine what is left of Europe’s reputation as a global climate leader.”

But manufacturers from BMW and Renault to Stellantis have argued the pace of transition has been slower than expected. Thomas Schäfer, chief executive of the Volkswagen brand, said “the future is electric” on Friday. But he added: “On the way there, you need a bit more flexibility to make sure you can deliver what customers actually want.”