

## Briefing

# Wrong turn: why watering down the zero emissions mandate endangers Carbon Budget Seven

June 2026

### Summary

The government looks to be bowing under pressure to water down the zero emissions vehicle (ZEV) mandate. This policy is the central pillar to reducing emissions from cars and vans, which make up nearly a fifth of the UK's total emissions.

Currently, the ZEV mandate ensures that 80 per cent of new car sales and 70 per cent of new van sales will be zero emission by 2030. However, the government is reportedly set to start a consultation on reducing the targets to 50 per cent.

Our analysis finds that this watering down could leave us needing to remove the equivalent of an extra 70 million tonnes of carbon dioxide during the seventh carbon budget period (2038-42). It's not clear if the government has an alternative plan for how to address these extra emissions and remain compliant with climate targets.

### The key policy for cutting car and van emissions

Cars and vans make up about 18 per cent of the UK's total emissions, making them particularly important to decarbonise if we are to reach net zero by 2050. The main policy lever to reduce emissions from cars and vans is the ZEV mandate.

The ZEV mandate is a UK regulation that sets rising annual targets for zero emission car and van sales, with all new vehicles required to be zero emission by 2035. Last year the government revised the ZEV mandate to reinstate the 2030 petrol and diesel car ban, permit hybrid sales until 2035, and give manufacturers greater flexibility to comply.

The mandate currently enforces a target of [80 percent ZEV sales by 2030 for cars](#), and a [70 percent target for vans](#). 100 per cent of new sales must be ZEVs by 2035.

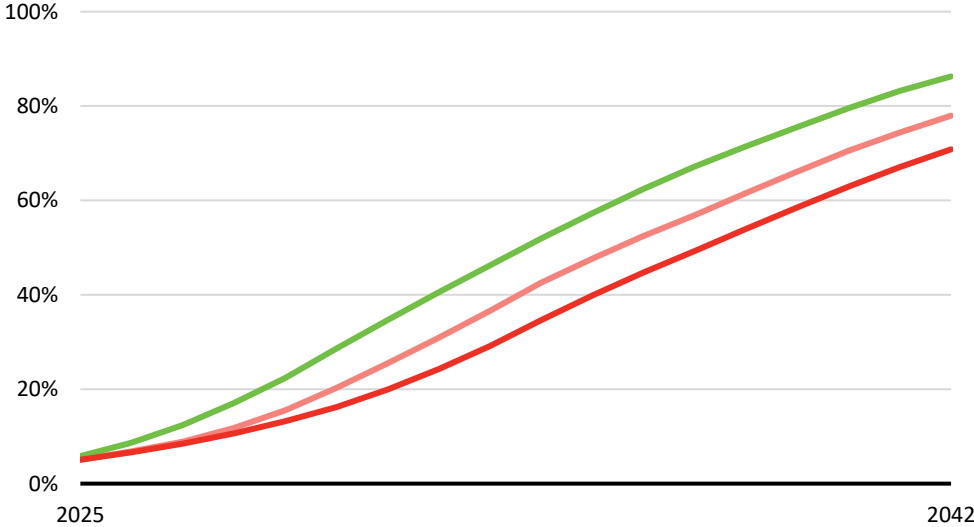
However, the [government is set to reduce the target for cars](#) to as low as 50 percent in 2030, while maintaining the 2035 phaseout date.

### Future climate targets are under threat

We modelled the makeup of the UK car and van fleets under the rumoured reduced ZEV mandate to 2042, which is the end of the UK’s seventh carbon budget.<sup>i</sup>

It leaves us with a severe reduction in the proportion of the fleet that is electric, both compared to the original ZEV mandate and the Climate Change Committee’s (CCC) balanced pathways for cars and vans.

Projected proportion of the UK car fleet which is battery electric under the **CCC balanced pathway**, the **current ZEV mandate**, and the **reduced ZEV mandate**



Fewer ZEVs on the road compared to the CCC’s balanced pathway means millions more hybrid, diesel and petrol vehicles burning over three million extra tonnes of petrol and diesel every year from 2030.

That will equate to cars and vans emitting 70 million tonnes more carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e) between 2038 and 2042 than they would have under the CCC’s balanced pathway. Carbon Budget Seven (CB7) allows for 535 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e, so the reduced ZEV mandate could push total emissions 13 percent over the CB7 limit.

## The zero emission mandate is central to meeting carbon budget seven

Reviewing the mandate again will only increase uncertainty for manufacturers, consumers, charge point operators and the wider ZEV supply chain. Rather than cutting ambition at a time when the benefits of ZEVs are clear and the market is growing rapidly, the government should reaffirm its commitment to be a world leader on ZEVs.

Watering down the ZEV mandate will make it materially more difficult to achieve our legally binding climate commitments. Reducing emissions from cars is vital for delivering savings over the next 16 years. Every petrol or diesel car sold now locks in decades of emissions, which is why a weak ZEV mandate is a risk we cannot afford.

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<sup>i</sup> We used the DfT and DVLA's VEH1111 dataset which provides a breakdown of cars and vans on the road and new registrations by fuel type as the historical basis for our modelling. We assumed a steady number of new vehicles being registered in each year to 2042.

For the weaker ZEV mandate, we modelled diesel and petrol vehicle registrations reducing to zero by 2030, with battery vehicles increasing to 50% of registrations, and hybrids making up the remainder. Between 2030 and 2035 we modelled the share of both car and van sales for battery vehicles increasing to 100% of sales while hybrids fall to zero. From 2035, 100% of sales are assumed to be battery electric vehicles. We assumed that the number of vehicles of each type leaving the national fleet each year either followed existing trends or were retired after a 15-year lifespan. Using historic data, sales, and vehicles leaving the fleet we built up a projection of the national fleets of cars and vans to 2042.

Using our figures for the national fleet under the weaker ZEV mandate, we calculated the amount of fuel that would be needed in each given year. We also calculated the amount of fuel required if the UK followed the CCC's balanced pathway. We did not consider differences in fuel consumption between diesel, petrol and hybrid vehicles, given that even the most efficient hybrids are only marginally more efficient than petrol or diesel vehicles.

We calculated the extra fuel required under the reduced ZEV mandate compared to the balanced pathway, and converted this into CO<sub>2</sub>e using DESNZ's Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2025 publication.