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Trump to Gut Mileage Requirements Obama Brokered With Automakers

Ryan Beene and Jennifer A. Dlouhy
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(Bloomberg) -- The Trump administration will dramatically relax automobile emissions and fuel economy standards so that only modest efficiency gains are required through 2026, according to people familiar with the matter.

In a rule to be announced as early as Tuesday, the administration will require automakers to boost the fuel efficiency of new vehicles each year by a 1.5% fleet-average starting in 2021, said three people, who asked not to be named discussing the measure ahead of its release. The required improvements are far more modest than requirements for roughly 5% annual gains under rules charted during the Obama administration.

The final regulation's release will conclude a years-long effort to dismantle the ambitious standards, which supporters have called the most effective policy ever enacted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change.

The Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Transportation Department in August 2018 proposed capping the standards after 2020 instead of rising to a roughly 50-mile-per-gallon fleet average midway through this decade. That proposal argued easing mileage standards would reduce vehicle prices and make it easier for consumers to replace older, less-efficient cars with newer, safer vehicles, avoiding thousands of traffic fatalities in the process.

The administration has scaled back those earlier safety estimates as it abandoned the initial plan to freeze the standards and is now requiring modest 1.5% annual improvements instead. Under the new approach, far fewer highway fatalities would be averted than originally projected, according to a draft of the final rule obtained earlier this month by Democratic Senator Tom Carper's office, which released a summary of its contents to reporters.

"This rule utterly fails to deliver any of its promised benefits of safer, more affordable fuel-efficient cars," Carper said in a statement after reviewing the draft rule. "It is likely to be overturned by the courts and subject automakers to years of costly litigation and confusion in the process."

A spokesman for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Transportation Department agency responsible for the regulation, declined to comment.

The EPA and Transportation Department already concluded a major portion of the push last fall when it stripped California of its authority to regulate tailpipe greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles, sparking a flurry of lawsuits by the state and others challenging the move.

The car rule comes as part of a broader Trump administration effort to dial back environmental regulations, including mandates on power plants and oil wells.

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