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Trump proposes weaker vehicle mileage rules, cutting climate policies

The proposal would significantly reduce fuel economy requirements, encouraging vehicles that burn more fuel.

By News Agencies

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United States President Donald Trump has announced a proposal to weaken vehicle mileage rules for the auto industry, loosening regulatory pressure on car makers to control pollution from petrol-powered cars and trucks.

The plan was announced on Wednesday. If finalised next year, it would significantly reduce fuel economy requirements, which set rules on how far new

vehicles need to travel on a gallon (3.8 litres) of petrol, through the 2031 model year.

The rules will increase Americans' access to the full range of petrol vehicles they need and can afford, officials said. The administration projects that the new standards would set the industry fleetwide average for light-duty vehicles at roughly 34.5 miles (65.5km) per gallon in the 2031 model year. That frees up car makers to produce larger vehicles like sports utility vehicles, which are more profitable than smaller cars.

The move is the latest action by the Trump administration to reverse policies from the era of former Democratic President Joe Biden that encouraged cleaner-running cars and trucks, including electric vehicles (EVs). Burning petrol for vehicles is a major contributor to planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions, and in the US, it is the largest contributor.

Trump announced the plan at a White House event that included top executives from the three largest US automakers, who have praised the planned changes. The auto industry has complained that the Biden-era rules were difficult to meet.

Since taking office in January, Trump has relaxed auto tailpipe emissions rules, repealed fines for automakers that do not meet federal mileage standards and terminated consumer credits of up to \$7,500 for electric vehicle purchases.

Split response

Ford CEO Jim Farley said in a statement that the planned rollback was “a win for customers and common sense”.

“As America’s largest auto producer, we appreciate President Trump’s leadership in aligning fuel economy standards with market realities. We can make real progress on carbon emissions and energy efficiency while still giving customers choice and affordability,” Farley said.

Stellantis CEO Antonio Filosa said the automaker appreciates the administration’s actions to “realign” the standards “with real-world market conditions”.

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“Gutting the [petrol-mileage] programme will make cars burn more gas and American families burn more cash,” said Katherine Garcia, director of the Sierra Club’s Clean Transportation for All programme.

“This rollback would move the auto industry backwards, keeping polluting cars on our roads for years to come and threatening the health of millions of Americans, particularly children and the elderly,” she said.

Major carmakers will save more than \$35bn in technology costs through 2031 under a broad rollback of vehicle fuel economy standards, the Trump administration said.

General Motors would save \$8.7bn from 2027 through 2031, while Ford and Chrysler-parent Stellantis would each save more than \$5bn, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said. Hyundai would save \$4.6bn, Subaru \$3.8bn, and Toyota \$2.3bn, it said.

But at the same time, fuel costs for drivers are expected to soar, and US drivers are expected to pay up to \$185bn more through 2050, the NHTSA reported.

False EV claims

Trump has repeatedly pledged to end what he falsely calls an EV “mandate”, referring incorrectly to Biden’s target that half of all new vehicle sales be electric by 2030. EVs accounted for about 8 percent of new vehicle sales in the US in 2024, according to Cox Automotive.

No federal policy has required auto companies to sell EVs, although California and other states have imposed rules requiring that all new passenger vehicles sold in the state be zero-emission by 2035. Trump and congressional Republicans blocked the California law earlier this year.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy urged his agency to reverse existing fuel economy requirements, known as Corporate Average Fuel Economy, soon after taking office. In June, he said that standards set under Biden were illegal because they included the use of electric vehicles in their calculation. EVs do not run on petrol. After the June rule revision, the traffic safety agency was empowered to update the requirements.

Under Biden, automakers were required to average about 50 miles (81km) per gallon of petrol for passenger cars by 2031, compared with about 39 miles (63km) per gallon today.

The Biden administration also increased fuel-economy requirements by 2 percent each year for light-duty vehicles in every model year from 2027 to 2031, and 2 percent per year for SUVs and other light trucks from 2029 to 2031. At the same time, it called for stringent tailpipe rules meant to encourage EV adoption.

The 2024 standards would have saved 14 billion gallons of petrol from being burned by 2050, according to the NHTSA's 2024 calculations.

Abandoning them means that in 2035, cars could produce 22,111 more tonnes of carbon dioxide per year than under the Biden-era rules. It also means an extra 90 tonnes a year of deadly soot particles and more than 4,870 tonnes a year of smog components – nitrogen oxides and volatile organic carbons – going into the air in the coming years.

Mileage rules have been implemented since the 1970s energy crisis, and over time, automakers have gradually increased their vehicles' average efficiency.

The proposal must undergo public comments over a 45-day period before it can be finalised.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2025/12/3/trump-proposes-weaker-vehicle-mileage-rules-cutting-climate-policies>