

Brussels, 16 March 2026

Subject: Joint civil society and cities letter on the revision of the CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans

Dear Climate and Environment Ministers of the European Union,

Cars are responsible for 14% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Europe and air pollution is still linked to over 182,000 deaths in the EU per year, according to the European Environment Agency with a strong exposure of the EU population in urban areas. The solution to both climate damage and toxic air pollution is already available and is soon to become the go-to option for consumers to reduce their mobility costs. Light-duty electric vehicles offer the opportunity to cost-effectively replace the polluting internal combustion engine (ICE) and usher in a new era of zero-emission mobility.

For more than a decade, EU CO₂ standards for cars have been the single most effective policy instrument to reduce road transport emissions, improve air quality and drive the transformation of Europe's automotive industry. They are not only a climate tool. They have become the backbone of Europe's industrial strategy for clean mobility, giving direction to investments in electric vehicles, batteries, charging infrastructure and European manufacturing capacity. The clarity and predictability of the targets have triggered unprecedented industrial investments and positioned Europe on the path toward zero-emission mobility. These investments are now trickling down with a renewed perspective for consumers to find affordable electric vehicles, at a time where high prices pushed many of them away from the new car market.

However, despite their proven effectiveness, the EU CO₂ standards for cars and vans have been subjected to sustained pressure from some industries. In December 2025, the European Commission reopened the regulation and proposed a revision that would significantly lower its ambition through the removal of a phase out date and the introduction of multiple new flexibilities. This shift risks weakening one of the EU's most effective climate instruments, jeopardising industrial, societal, and environmental progress made to achieve the EU's competitiveness and resilience objectives. At a time of escalating climate and energy crises, weakening the car CO₂ standards would be a serious mistake that undermines Europe's strategic autonomy and prolongs its dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Overall, flexibilities will lead manufacturers to postpone action, leading to higher emissions and undermining investment certainty in batteries, charging networks and across the e-mobility value chain. The proposed flexibilities open the door to biofuels and e-fuels which have no role in decarbonising cars and vans and should be excluded from the regulation. Averaging compliance over 2030-2032 would, in practice, slow down the electric vehicles market at the moment when it needs to scale up rapidly.

We therefore call on national governments to:

- Reject any weakening of the 2030 target ambition to secure rapid mass adoption of electric cars,
- Support the end of the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2035 to ensure that the regulation remains aligned with the EU's climate and industrial objectives.

Yours sincerely,

T&E
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Eurocities
Polis
ERS
EEB
International Federation of Pedestrians

VCÖ – Mobilität mit Zukunft (Austria)
Bond Beter Leefmilieu (Belgium)
Les Chercheurs d'Air (Belgium)
Veblen Institute for Economic Reforms (France)
Réseau Action Climat (France)
Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme (France)
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Germanwatch (Germany)
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