

Earlier this week the government announced they will ban the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid vehicles from 2035, bringing forward the original date by five years. Ian Johnston, CEO of EV charging network, Engenie, discusses the challenges and opportunities that this target will bring.



Since 2017, when a ban on petrol and diesel cars was first introduced by the UK government, there has been growing calls for the policy to have more ambition. This week, those calls were answered as the government brought forward its ban.

On Tuesday February 4 the government, having resisted calls for more stringent anti-ICE (internal combustion engine) policies for three years, brought its ban forward from 2040 to 2035.

The move was announced almost a year after the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) formally advised that the ban be brought forward to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, and just weeks after an election dominated by an environmental policy arms race between rival parties competing for the ever-growing climate-conscious vote. This meant that the change of date, as radical as it was, wasn't wholly unexpected. The real surprise? Hybrids. The decision to include hybrids and plug-in hybrids (PHEVs) in the ban came as quite a shock to many in the industry, not least for those who had, as recently as late 2018, been offered generous subsidies for these alternatives to dedicated ICE vehicles.

However, considering a series of studies – also announced this week – reported that PHEVs could actually be emitting more CO₂ than equivalent petrol-only cars due to extra battery weight, it seems to be a policy that has considered the real impact of hybrids and the scale of change needed for net-zero emissions by 2050.

Hybrids have played an important role by getting drivers used to electric motoring but with pure electric vehicles (EVs) approaching cost parity and achieving longer range, they are no longer needed as much as they once were.

Chris Stark, Chief Executive of the CCC, also pointed out that cars are typically on UK roads for 14 years, meaning a ban – inclusive of these polluting hybrids – must happen by 2035 in order to get them off the road in time for Net Zero by 2050.

2035 – what does it mean and how do we get there?

Despite being welcomed by environmentalists and authoritative organisations such as the CCC, a number of motoring groups and manufacturers have described the move as *'a date without a policy'*.

So, we have a date to focus our minds but what do we need to *do* to get there? Perhaps the most prominent criticism levelled at the new policy is that public charging infrastructure is not yet ready to cope with mass electric vehicle (EV) adoption.

However, this is far from the truth. The private sector has done a great job of developing a huge number of public-access EV chargers in populated areas. In fact, as of last year, there are more public-access EV charging points than petrol stations.

The industry is also rising to the challenge of creating a truly open-access network to give drivers the best possible experience. Regulation, due to come into force this spring, is primed to enshrine this interoperability between charging networks in law.

Yet an issue remains. While the more commercially viable areas of the country which benefit from higher customer demand – shopping centres, retail parks, supermarkets, car parks etc. – have been well served by the private sector, other, more rural, areas of the country with less customer demand naturally deliver less return on investment and are therefore less likely to attract private investment.

The result is under-developed infrastructure in these areas. *This* is where the government can give real substance to its new target. By offering direct support to these areas, in particular, we can ensure that the rollout of chargers is a strategically managed programme, aimed at enabling mass EV adoption in all areas of the UK.

The idea that there are virtually no public charging points to cater for EV owners is just one misconception that plagues the country's efforts to develop an established EV market. That's why a sustained effort to educate the general public on EVs is needed. If the government is committed to achieving its 2035 target, it must take responsibility for dispelling myths – i.e. lack of charging points, misconceptions about charging behaviour, range anxiety etc. – and educating on benefits i.e. the ease of home charging, lower fuels costs, zero emissions, minimal maintenance and superior driving experience.

Supply and demand

Finally, and perhaps most frustratingly for early adopters of EVs, there is the issue of EV supply. There's no doubt that demand for EVs is skyrocketing. In fact, the market for EVs is set to expand from 3.4% of all vehicles sold in 2019 to 5.5% in 2020. Despite this, drivers are often discouraged by long waiting times for new vehicles – something that's severely inhibiting the growth of this burgeoning market.

To tackle this issue, and thus help meet the 2035 target, the UK must cultivate an attractive trading environment for EV suppliers. One effective way to do this is to encourage OEM investment in UK-based supply chains – namely battery Gigafactories.

This will keep costs down for OEMs by shortening supply chains for the UK market and make a compelling case for them to prioritise UK EV deliveries over other countries.

The 2035 target is no mean feat and we have certainly planted an ambitious stake in the ground. The industry has already done much of the hard work but only by continuing to implement meaningful actions and gaining government support in key areas can we give the new target real substance and credibility.