

Position

The future of the commercial vehicle industry

What matters now



What the commercial vehicle industry needs now to maintain its technological leadership, jobs and industrial location

Commercial vehicles are the backbone of the European economy. They transport goods and people over short and long distances every day of the year. In the transport sector, climate-friendly commercial vehicles are a key lever for sustainably reducing CO₂ emissions in road transport. But without a radical change in the truck and bus sector, Europe's climate targets will not be achievable.

The commercial vehicle industry stands for highly innovative technology, hundreds of thousands of jobs and industrial value creation in Germany. Targeted impetus is now needed to enable it to secure its global technological leadership in the long term while contributing to the achievement of climate targets. Care must be taken to ensure that comparable rules and conditions apply throughout Europe and that EU measures do not further disadvantage the domestic commercial vehicle industry in global competition but rather strengthen it.

1 Bring forward the review of fleet legislation, create extensive flexibility and adjust penalties to reflect reality

The industry has delivered: vehicles, technologies and investments in new production facilities are in place. What is missing are suitable framework conditions (e.g. charging and H₂-tank infrastructure, incentives for the purchase and operation of zero-emission vehicles, low charging and H₂-costs, emissions trading, CO₂-tolls, etc.). Therefore, the review of CO₂-fleet regulations for heavy commercial vehicles should be carried out as quickly as possible and well before the legally stipulated deadline. Progress should be regularly reviewed at the political level, and all targets achieved to date in the development of the associated charging and H₂-refuelling infrastructure should be fully evaluated.

In addition, we advocate for extensive flexibility in the design of CO₂-regulation and a fair, proportionate adjustment of the penalty system. The penalties for failing to meet CO₂-fleet limits are now many times higher than for passenger cars, even though the development of infrastructure and the creation of framework conditions are stagnating. The current penalties jeopardise the transformation and Germany's position as an industrial location.

2 Closing the "road" financing cycle: making incentives unbureaucratic, predictable, fair and equitably financed

Tax depreciation models are not a solution for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the transport industry. Among other things, incentives are needed to support competitive operating costs for zero-emission commercial vehicles in the freight industry and to rapidly develop the associated charging and H₂-refuelling infrastructure (in public spaces and depots). These must be reliable, long-term and easy to implement. The needs of SMEs must be taken into account. The additional toll revenue resulting from the CO₂-component should be earmarked for a specific purpose – this will close the "road" financing cycle.

3 Strengthen depot infrastructure: networks, charging points, subsidies

The electrification of commercial vehicle fleets can only succeed with an efficient charging infrastructure at the operators' locations. Priority must be given to grid connections, construction cost subsidies and the promotion of charging points. The same applies to H₂-refuelling infrastructure. The necessary approval procedures must be significantly accelerated. It is crucial to focus on the practical needs of freight forwarders and logistics companies, including the shared use of infrastructure within freight forwarding networks. Grid operators and local authorities should be obliged to provide the necessary connection capacities in a timely manner. This requires government support.

4 Fair framework conditions: secure toll exemption, reduce costs for CO₂-neutral energy sources, including electricity

In order for zero-emission drives to survive in the market, the costs of electricity and hydrogen must be economically viable. We welcome the extension of the toll exemption for zero-emission commercial vehicles until at least mid-2031 and a reduction in the electricity tax for all consumer groups, including commercial vehicle fleet operators, as key levers for market ramp-up.

The energy tax must be revised so that charging electricity, hydrogen (equal treatment of fuel cells and hydrogen engines required) and renewable fuels are exempt from tax for as long as possible or taxed at no more than the EU minimum tax rate.

Another crucial framework condition for the successful ramp-up of zero-emission vehicles is the comprehensive adaptation of 96/53/EC on weights and dimensions (VDA position: including a 4-tonne increase in the permissible gross vehicle weight, including one tonne of additional weight on the drive axle for zero-emission vehicles, and an adjustment of the axle loads from 24 tonnes to 27 tonnes for three-axle semi-trailers).

5 Accelerate the expansion of public charging and hydrogen refuelling infrastructure and specifically integrate motorway service areas

In addition to tenders for unmanaged rest areas, targeted subsidies are needed for alternative infrastructure at motorway service stations, particularly due to the delays at managed rest areas. A comprehensive, reliable public charging and H₂-refuelling infrastructure is essential for the road freight transport of the future.

The Europe-wide development plan for charging and H₂-refuelling infrastructure for commercial vehicles, including buses and refrigerated trailers, must be massively accelerated and expanded nationwide. To this end, the AFIR requirements must be revised and adapted to the anticipated demand for alternatively powered commercial vehicles in 2030 and beyond.

6 Take renewable fuels into account in regulations

Technology neutrality is an important approach for climate-neutral road freight transport. In addition to electrification, renewable fuels (hydrogen, RFNBOs, biofuels) must also be taken into account in selected regulations. We propose that CO₂-neutral fuels be taken into account by including a correction mechanism in the CO₂ Regulation (EU) 2019/1242 in order to take into account the CO₂ reduction contribution of an increasing share of CO₂-neutral fuels in the regulation (EU) 2019/1242 in order to recognise the CO₂-reduction contribution of an increasing share of CO₂-neutral fuels in the transport sector. Such an approach must include all available CO₂-neutral fuels in accordance with the Renewable Energy Directive (RED).

The EU Commission has also been tasked with examining the role of a method for approving heavy-duty vehicles that run exclusively on CO₂-neutral fuels. The VDA will accompany the process.

7 Introduce emissions trading via ETS-2 and market-based CO₂-pricing

The full economic efficiency of zero-emission drives can only be realised with market-based CO₂-pricing of fossil fuels. The European Trading System (ETS-2) must now be implemented quickly, in line with market conditions and across the EU. This is the only way to create fair competitive conditions for all logistics companies across Europe, the necessary investment incentives and planning security for climate-friendly technologies. ETS-2 should therefore be introduced as planned in 2027 and replace national pricing in accordance with the BEHG. In the long term, the integration of ETS-1 and ETS-2 should be pursued.

8 Targeted promotion of electric buses, expansion of charging infrastructure, public sector role model

Electric and hydrogen buses are an important component and, at the same time, an important flagship for technology, both in urban transport and, more recently, in the long-distance and coach sector. In order for our manufacturers to secure their technological leadership in Europe, targeted promotion of the charging and H₂-refuelling infrastructure at depots, bus depots and stops is needed, as well as a new purchase subsidy scheme. This also applies explicitly to coaches and long-distance buses, which have hardly been considered to date.

The public sector must set an example in this regard. The use of climate-neutral buses must become standard in the awarding of public transport contracts and in procurement. This will promote industrial value creation, jobs and clean technologies.

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The German Association of the Automotive Industry (VDA) brings together around 620 manufacturers and suppliers under one roof. Its members develop and produce cars and trucks, software, trailers, superstructures, buses, parts and accessories, as well as a constantly evolving range of mobility services.

We represent the interests of the automotive industry and stand for modern, future-oriented multimodal mobility on the path to climate neutrality. The VDA represents the interests of its members vis-à-vis politicians, the media and social groups.

We work for electric mobility, climate-neutral drives, the implementation climate targets, securing raw materials, digitalisation and networking, and German engineering. In doing so, we are committed to a competitive business and innovation location. Our industry ensures prosperity in Germany: more than 740,000 people are directly employed in the German automotive industry.

The VDA is the organiser of the largest international mobility platform IAA MOBILITY and IAA TRANSPORTATION, the world's most important platform for the future of the commercial vehicle industry.

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