

‘What if we just gave up cars?’

Cop26 leaders urged to dream big

by [Oliver Milman](#)



A new agreement would phase out fossil fuel vehicles but activists want a focus on public transport, walking and cycling.



PARENTS TAKE A PICTURE OF THEIR CHILDREN ON A CAR-FREE ROAD JUST AS LOCK-DOWN ENDED IN TOKYO, JAPAN. CAR USE HAS NOW SURGED AGAIN AROUND THE WORLD. PHOTOGRAPH: YUSUKE HARADA/NURPHOTO/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

Governments and car manufacturers have coalesced at the Glasgow climate talks around new targets to drastically ramp up the use of electric vehicles. But activists at the summit have urged a more fundamental question – what if we just gave up all types of cars?



With [the new goal of phasing out new sales of gasoline and diesel cars within 20 years](#), dozens of countries and car companies have used Cop26 to extol the rise of electric vehicles as a way to slash planet-heating emissions.

CAR FIRMS AGREE AT COP26 TO END SALE OF FOSSIL FUEL VEHICLES BY 2040

“This is a massive transformation,” said Omar Alghabra, transport minister for Canada, one of the 24 countries to sign on to the new pledge. Alghabra spoke on Wednesday on a panel of government officials and business leaders in the vast Glasgow convention centre, a multicolored Envision formula-E race car perched in the foreground on a podium. “We see this as a massive opportunity for job creation,” he added.

Cynthia Williams, environmental policy manager at Ford, one of the carmakers to join the agreement, called for government support to help spread a new wave of electric vehicles around the world.

“We need these vehicles now, we need actions to match our ambitions,” she said. “One of the key things we will need to accelerate the electrification revolution is incentives. We need infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure. This is needed to get more people in the vehicles, leaving no one behind.”

While this grand vision would cut emissions – transport is responsible for about a fifth of the world’s carbon pollution and electric vehicles are much cleaner than fossil fuel-powered cars – climate campaigners have called on governments to have a deeper rethink about the role of cars.

At a series of protests held on Wednesday, activists urged greater funding for public transport and walking and cycling paths, arguing that a promised “green revolution” away from cars during the Covid pandemic has failed to materialize in most cities.

Nancy Henderson, a protester who lives in Glasgow, said that cycling flourished during lockdown but that many people have switched back to cars as they don’t feel safe cycling in traffic.

“That’s an issue with electric cars, people will still feel unsafe with them around,” she said. “It doesn’t actually change the issue of congestion and the number of cars on our streets. Going electric doesn’t change the blight of cars in our cities. We are still isolated in our little booth, not communicating, not meeting other people.”

Henderson said many Glaswegians were resentful of the smart card public transport passes given to [Cop26](#) delegates, which enable unlimited use of trains and buses during the conference. “No one else around here has ever got one of those smart cards,” she said. “It marginalizes people when you don’t have good public transport.”

Environmental critics of electric cars argue that they still clog up cities and are dangerous to cyclists and pedestrians. While they are vastly less polluting than traditional cars, lithium is mined in often controversial circumstances for the batteries used by electric vehicles, and dust from car brakes and tyres still give off a certain amount of air pollution.

At a separate pro-cycling protest held on Wednesday, the designated day to focus on transport at the Cop26 talks, activists held signs reading “Electric cars are a Cop out” and “Car car car blah blah blah”.

Iona Shepherd, of the GoBike and Pedal on Parliament groups, who organized the protest, pointed out that “active travel is not even on the table for discussions” at the climate summit.

“At the conference electric cars are taking centre stage, while our sustainable form of transport – by far the cheapest and easiest way to cut emissions from transport – doesn’t even get a mention,” she said.

“We need the Cop to force through better investment and political will for sustainable transport modes if they are serious about the Paris agreement to limit warming to 1.5C.”

Electric vehicle numbers are still dwarfed by those of gasoline and diesel cars around the world but sales have been climbing in recent years and exploded following the pandemic outbreak.

Global sales are expected to surpass 5m this year, an increase of more than 80% over the past decade.

Electric vehicle purchases in China, the US and Europe – the top three auto markets – surged by 160% in the first half of 2021 from a year earlier, aided by the enthusiastic backing of political leaders. [..}

There should be a rethink of this strategy, activists outside the summit say. “Whilst we recognize the important contribution electric vehicles will have in reducing carbon emissions in the future, we need to reduce emissions now,” said Paul Tuohy, chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport.

“Persuading more people to swap at least some journeys from cars to public transport will have immediate benefits for the climate.”

Vocabulary:

to give up sth. - etwas nicht mehr benutzen/
nicht mehr machen

to phase out sth. - etwas auslaufen
lassen, etw. beenden

fossil fuel – fossiler Kraftstoff

focus – die Aufmerksamkeit

car manufacturer - Autohersteller

to coalesce – sich vereinigen, sich verbinden

target – das Ziel

to ramp up – aufstocken, ausweiten, erhöhen

summit – der Gipfel, die Versammlung

to earch a question – eine Frage aufwerfen,
eine Frage stellen

gasoline – das Benzin

dozen – das Dutzend., 12

*COP = Conference of the parties (parties, hier
die Unterzeichnerstaaten des Paris
Klimaabkommens)*

to extol – loben, preisen, rühmen

to slash – (stark) verringern

transformation – die Veränderung,
Verwandlung

transport minister – Verkehrsminister

to sign – unterschreiben

pledge – die Zusage, Zusicherung, das
Versprechen

panel – der Ausschuss, das Forum, das
Gremium

vast – riesig, sehr groß

envison – Modell?

to perch – hinsetzen, hinstellen,

job creation – Schaffung von Arbeitsplätzen

environment – die Umwelt

environmental policy manager –
Umweltbeauftragte

to join – sich beteiligen an, mitmachen

to spread – verbreiten

to match – angleichen, aufeinander abstimmen

to accelerate – beschleunigen

incentive – Anreiz

to leave no one behind – niemanden
zurücklassen

to be responsible – verantwortlich sein für

carbon pollution – CO2 Emmissionen

climate campaigner – Klima-Aktivist

to rethink sth. – etwas überdenken, neu
denken

to held sth. – etwas abhalten, stattfinden

to earch – fordern

to fail – ausbleiben, ausfallen

to flourish – erblühen, aufblühen

to switch – wechseln

issue – das Problem

congestion – der Stau

blight – die Verschandelung

booth – die Bude

resentful = jealous – neidisch

smart card – die Chipkarte

to enable – ermöglichen, berechtigen

unlimited – unbegrenzt

to marginalize – ausgrenzen

to clog up – verstopfen

pedestrian – Fußgänger

vastly – erheblich

to mine – abbauen

controversial – umstritten

dust – der Staub

brake – Bremse

tyre – Reifen

certain – beträchtlich

amount – Menge, Betrag

to designate sth. – etwas vorsehen für

sign – Schild

to point out – ausführen

to take centre stage – im Mittelpunkt stehen

sustainable – nachhaltig

by far – bei Weitem

mention – die Erwähnung

to force – dazu zwingen

to limit – begrenzen

are still dwarfed by those... - sind
verschwindend gering verglichen mit...

recent years – vergangene Jahre

to surpass – übertreffen

5m = 5 millions

to increase – ansteigen, anwachsen

decade – Jahrzehnt

purchase – Kauf, Erwerbung, Anschaffung

to surge – ansteigen

to aid – unterstützen

backing – Hilfe, Unterstützung

to persuade sb. – jemanden überzeugen

to swap sth. – etwas tauschen

journey – die Fahrt

immediate – unmittelbar