

Will you change cars – and boilers?

The EU, the US under Mr Biden and the UK all want people to dump their petrol and diesel cars and buy electric or go by train. They also want us to scrap our gas boilers for home heating and install heat pumps or all electric systems.

They also want us to do this in the next ten years. The enthusiasm for tougher targets to reduce “carbon footprints” means governments have to move on from forcing companies to change their energy use patterns to hit modest targets, to requiring everyone to change our habits to get closer to net zero.

In the UK there are an estimated 25 million gas heating systems in homes. It is going to be a vast task, and a very expensive operation to take all these out and replace them with something else this decade. Many people will object they do not have the money to make the change, or do not wish to have the disruption of replacement when their existing product is just fine. Some may decide to renew their gas boiler with another just before they are banned as they like that product and are wary of the new.

To make the switch happen government and business together have to come up with a great offer which makes people think the replacement is better than the old, and that the net cost of the change is worthwhile or subsidised. It would be better to leave the gas boiler as a legal product until there is a very popular range of other options which most people want to buy.

Governments are also keen to ban the diesel and petrol cars that have served us well over the last century. True greens do not want us to have individual transport other than a bicycle, but governments accept that many people need cars to get to work, to take children to school, to go to the shops and lead normal social lives. They urge us to buy the battery electric alternative.

So far this year in the UK diesel and petrol car sales are down 780,000 whilst battery cars are up by just 47,000. Some of that is of course CV 19 related, but some is the very trend government wants. It is deeply damaging to employment in our car factories and showrooms. Again it is good advice to say first help the industry find and promote popular non fossil fuel products. Only then think about banning the products people have liked up til now.