



Boris Johnson's climate plan is not ambitious enough to reach UK's net-zero target

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There is further coverage of the UK government's proposed 10-point plan to raise climate ambition. After full details of the plan were published late on Wednesday afternoon, quick-fire analysis by [Carbon Brief](#)'s deputy editor Dr Simon Evans suggests that it is "not ambitious enough to reach the government's near-term climate goals, or its target of net-zero emissions by 2050", the Independent reports. The paper explains: "Analysis by Dr Evans shows that the measures outlined in Mr Johnson's 10-point plan are unlikely to reduce the UK's greenhouse gas emissions enough to be in line with the fourth or fifth budgets." Evans tells the Independent that "there's a gap between the government plans, even with this new set of proposals, and meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets, and there's a second gap between the fourth and fifth carbon budgets and the path we would need to follow to hit net-zero". [[Carbon Brief](#) reported on the UK's progress towards its forthcoming carbon budgets earlier this year.] [Climate Home News](#) says the "back of the envelope" calculation by Evans suggests that the proposed measures "would close just over half the emissions gap to stay within the UK's carbon budgets to 2032". Going into more details, the [i newspaper](#) says that "the government says the new strategy will shave 180m tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂e) off the UK's emissions between 2023 and 2032". However, the government's "own projections say 331Mt CO₂e of emissions savings are needed to put the UK on course to meet its interim climate targets for the same dates", the paper says, and then "even more would be needed to get the UK on track for net-zero emissions, because those interim targets were set before the UK adopted its net-zero emissions goal". Evans tells the paper that although the government has put in place the "building blocks" of future emissions savings with the plan, it will not cut emissions fast enough in the short term. He adds: "It is definitely a problem if we aren't meeting those [targets]... The pathway we take to net-zero really does matter." [BusinessGreen](#) also reports on the analysis by Evans, noting that: "The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) was considering a request for comment on the emissions calculations at the time of going to press, but the government insists it plans to deliver more green policy and funding over the coming year in the run up to COP26, the crucial UN climate summit it is set to host in Glasgow in November 2021."

In other coverage of the plan, the [New York Times](#) reports that Boris Johnson's initiatives on climate change and military spending "have little in common except that both are likely to please a very important new person in Mr Johnson's life: President-elect Joseph R Biden Jr." And the [Daily Telegraph](#) asks whether the 10-point plan "will really create 250,000 jobs?"

Also in the UK, [DeSmog UK](#) reports that campaigners are demanding the UK government rejects “greenwash” by excluding all major polluters from sponsorship of next year’s COP26. And the [Financial Times](#) reports that “US conglomerate General Electric is in talks to set up a wind turbine factory on the UK’s north-east coast, creating at least 3,000 roles and delivering the government an early victory in its drive to develop green jobs in former industrial areas”.

New analysis suggests that greenhouse gases generated by the US economy will drop to their lowest level in at least three decades. The findings, by Bloomberg New Energy Finance, suggest that US emissions were expected to drop by 9.2% compared to last year, but will actually drop by 6.4% “after taking into account the unusually extreme forest fires that swept the West Coast and Rocky Mountains earlier this year”. The Post adds that “an economic rebound in 2021 could further negate the drop in greenhouse gas emissions” and “without the impact of the coronavirus, greenhouse gas emissions this year would have been only 1% lower than 2019”. The BloombergNEF study notes that “the economic disruption of 2020 has inadvertently put the US back on track to meet the commitments it made under the 2016 Paris Agreement”, reports the [Hill](#).

Meanwhile, [Reuters](#) reports that the Trump administration yesterday proposed to loosen safety regulations for the oil industry in the Arctic Ocean off Alaska to ease the way for petroleum extraction in the region. The newswire continues: “The proposal would revise a suite of Obama-era rules crafted to improve safety in the extreme conditions of the Arctic after a Shell drilling rig ran aground there in 2012. The company later abandoned oil exploration in the region and there are no active drilling operations there.” The rule “has little chance of being finalised”, notes the [Hill](#): “It faces a 60-day comment period after which the Department of the Interior must respond to comments before issuing a final rule. That would put the onus on the incoming Biden administration to withdraw the rule”. At the same time, [Bloomberg](#) reports that “a group of investment firms, conservationists and indigenous groups have called on some of the world’s biggest insurers to cease supporting oil and gas projects in the US Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, even as the Trump administration advances plans to auction drilling rights in the Alaska wilderness”.

Also in North America, [Reuters](#) reports that Canada yesterday unveiled measures to toughen its stance on global warming and ensure the country hit a goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. The outlet adds: “Under draft legislation presented on Thursday, governments will – from 2030 – have to present rolling five-year targets for cutting emissions rather than setting a goal many decades away that could be ignored by subsequent administrations.”

United Nations secretary-general Antonio Guterres yesterday urged the European Union to lead global efforts by setting a new climate change target next month, Reuters reports. Speaking to the European Council on Foreign Relations by videoconference, Guterres said: “I urge you to continue to lead with concrete and ambitious near-term commitments.” He added that a summit hosted by the UN and UK in December would be a “clear opportunity” for the EU to present the new target. Guterres also called on the EU to drop coal for good, reports [Politico](#). “There must be no new coal, and all existing coal in the European Union should be phased out by 2030 in OECD countries, and by 2040 elsewhere,” he said, adding: “The coal industry is going up in smoke, as

investors see more stranded assets and voters see more harmful pollution and climate damage.” The Financial Times reports that “the EU is in danger of missing a deadline to finalise the bloc’s ambitious 2030 climate goals by the end of the year, with fears that talks will be derailed over Poland and Hungary’s ongoing budget spat with Brussels”. The paper continues: “A long-awaited decision that had been expected next month to toughen the bloc’s target on cutting emissions – aiming to bring them down by 55 per cent by 2030 – risks being snarled up in delays to approving the bloc’s next long-term budget. That could mean billions of green transition aid no longer being available next year for those economies reliant on fossil fuel.” It adds that “Warsaw and Budapest this week vetoed the approval of the bloc’s next budget and recovery package worth €1.8tn, which contains substantial support for the EU’s climate transition”.

Meanwhile, Reuters reports that the European Commission unveiled plans yesterday “to transform its electricity system to rely mostly on renewables within a decade and increase its offshore wind energy capacity 25-fold by 2050”. The newswire continues: “Renewable sources like wind and solar provide roughly a third of EU electricity today, but the EU says that share will need to expand to about two-thirds by 2030 to put the bloc on track for its plan to become climate neutral by 2050.” In its offshore renewable energy plan, the EU says its targets required 60 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind by 2030 and 300GW by 2050, Reuters says, noting that this is a five-fold increase by 2030 and a 25-fold increase by 2050 from the bloc’s current offshore wind capacity of 12GW”. Politico notes that “the Commission estimates that 25-fold jump in capacity will cost nearly €800bn”.

In other European news, Reuters reports that EU ombudsman has said that the European Commission granted priority status to natural gas projects without properly assessing their impact on climate change. Reuters also reports that Spain will spend €1.5bn from a European economic recovery fund over the next three years in developing “green” hydrogen production. And Bloomberg reports that Spain’s energy firms have told their government that “Spain could become a renewable hydrogen powerhouse but will need public funding and a favourable regulatory framework”.

EDF Energy has confirmed it will begin shutting down the 45-year-old reactors at Hinkley Point B nuclear power plant in Somerset within the next two years, earlier than scheduled, reports the Guardian. The paper explains that, although the defuelling was originally scheduled for 2023, the date was brought forward after “cracks were discovered in the graphite core of the reactor” and that “‘defuelling’ will begin no later than July 2022”. Reuters reports that “the condition of the reactor cores was to be expected at this point of the plant’s life”. The outlet adds that that a new plant being built by EDF, Hinkley Point C, “is expected to start generation in 2025”. The Times also reports on this story, adding that the Hinkley Point B plant “started generating in 1976 and was due to close in 2016 but in 2012 EDF secured an extension until March 2023”. BBC News also has the story.

The three heatwaves this summer in the UK led to an estimated 2,556 excess deaths in England, reports the Press Association via the Express and Star. People aged 65 and over made up “the vast majority of those who died”, the outlet says, with 2,244 excess deaths in this age group. According to Public Health England, the number of people dying this summer was “comparable

to the 2,234 excess deaths seen during the 2003 Europe-wide heatwave and the 2,323 who died in the heatwave in 2006". The publication reports that the August heatwave, which lasted for 11 days, was "by far the worst, with 1,734 excess deaths". (See [Carbon Brief's](#) guest post from the Met Office for more on the August heatwave.) The outlet also emphasises the link between extreme heat and climate change, stating that "climate change is increasing the likelihood of periods of extreme heat, including tropical nights when the temperature never drops below 20C, which were seen in August this year". Dr Friederike Otto, acting director of the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford, tells the outlet that the likelihood of heatwaves in Western Europe has increased by more than 10 times in the last few summers. [Reuters](#) also runs the story, featuring a quote from Dr Otto that "heatwaves are the extreme weather events for which climate change is a real game-changer in most parts of the world, but particularly in Europe". The newswire also states that "high temperatures alone could not explain all the deaths," and questions whether the pandemic "may have served to amplify the impact of the heat", as people may have hesitated to seek medical help for fear of catching Covid-19 in hospitals.

New research suggests that China's plan to build more coal-fired power "contradicts" its pledge to go carbon neutral by 2060 and risks creating 2tn yuan (\$303.60bn) of stranded assets, Reuters reports. The research – by Beijing-based consultancy Draworld Environment Research Center and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) in Helsinki – warns that China must impose a moratorium on new plants and work to phase out existing ones, with 130 GW already surplus to requirements and "optimal" capacity expected to stand at around 680 GW by 2030. CREA lead analyst Lauri Myllyvirta – who also writes frequently for [Carbon Brief](#) – tells Reuters: "My understanding is that the coal industry is still lobbying for a coal power capacity target for 2025 that would allow for the addition of up to 200 large new coal-fired power plants... Given that half of China's enormous coal capacity is less than 10 years old, and the equivalent of another 100 large plants are already under construction, there is definitely no need for more if the country wants to avoid massive waste of capital." [Climate Home News](#) reports that "China is on track to submit an updated 2030 climate plan to the UN before the end of the year", but also warns that its ambition is "hinging on the trajectory for coal power". Separately, the [Financial Times](#) reports on analysis by the thinktank Ember that finds that China's 5.8% year-on-year rise in electricity demand from May to October was "simply too fast for new wind, solar, hydro and nuclear investment to keep pace".

Boris Johnson's 10-point climate change plan will "do him more good than the planet", the Economist says. The pledge is "probably not enough to get Britain to net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050", the outlet says, and there is the "same combination of bold ambition and modest detail". For example, Johnson "favours exciting industrial ventures such as battery gigafactories, zero-emission aeroplanes and carbon capture and storage... but has provided little money for dull, useful things like grants for home insulation. He mentioned a carbon tax, but provided no details". But while the plan is "unlikely to save the planet", it could "help revive his fortunes", the outlet says: "Environmentalism usefully unites the Conservative tribes. Old-fashioned shire Tories who fancy themselves stewards of the land like it; so do centrist "one-

nation” types who want to court younger voters. And Mr Johnson larded his plan with appeals to the working-class Midlands and northern English voters who pushed him to victory last year.”

In other reaction to the plan, Financial Times European economics commentator Martin Sandbu writes in the “Free Lunch” newsletter that “we should remain sceptical” about the 10-point plan “until we see a detailed commitment to a rising path of carbon taxes and an acknowledgment and solution to any regressive distributive effects”. While Daily Telegraph business columnist – and chair for the public understanding of economics at the US libertarian thinktank the Cato Institute – Ryan Bourne warns that the 10-point plan will “bring significant near-term economic costs”. For example, he writes, “the investments required in the energy network to incorporate electric vehicle charging will bill into multiple billions of pounds alone”. He concludes: “Yes, climate change is real and a difficult challenge. Yet nobody is helped by pretending the transition to a low-carbon economy won’t be painful.”

Writing in the Evening Standard, James Kirkup – director of the Social Market Foundation and writer for the Spectator – warns that there is a “huge question” around charging points for electric vehicles. He says: “Social Market Foundation research to be published soon reveals that more than a third of renters live in properties where there is no scope to install a charging point.”

In the Conversation, the co-directors of the Centre for Climate Repair at the University of Cambridge write that “we will certainly need to deploy greenhouse gas removal approaches at scale” in addition to the measures in the plan. While the measures “are welcome”, the UK “needs to put more effort into activities which go beyond turning the CO2 taps off”.

Finally, an editorial in the Independent, as well as various letters to the Times and Daily Telegraph, also comment on the plan. For more on the media reaction to the plan, see Carbon Brief’s comprehensive wrap-up piece.

Separately, Sian Berry – co-leader of the Green Party and candidate for Mayor of London – writes in the Independent that a “smart, fair, privacy-friendly road charging would be a game changer for the climate”.

Several outlets respond to story in the Financial Times – on the paper’s frontpage yesterday – that suggested “unnecessary” emails were making a substantial contribution to the UK’s carbon emissions. BBC News technology reporter David Molloy writes that “when you send an email – or anything else – it goes along a chain of energy-burning electronics”. However, he adds, “a single email’s effect on such massive infrastructure is tiny”. Molloy continues: “The Financial Times report says the officials promoting this idea referred to a press release from renewable electricity firm Ovo Energy from one year ago. It claimed that if every British person sent one fewer than you email a day, it would save 16,433 tonnes of carbon a year, equivalent to tens of thousands of flights to Europe. The problem, however, is that even if the sums involved roughly worked out, it would still be a splash in the pond.” In addition, Prof Chris Preist, professor of sustainability and computer systems at the University of Bristol, tells Molloy that even with a reduction in email volume, “your laptop will still be on, your wi-fi will still be on, your home internet connection will still be on, the wider network will still use roughly the same amount of energy”. Preist notes: “There will be a small saving in the data centre hosting the email,

particularly if it allows them to use a few less servers. But the carbon saved will be far far less than 1g per email.” Elsewhere, Independent climate correspondent Daisy Dunne and i newspaper staff writer Ruchira Sharma also respond to the claims in the FT story.

Permafrost soils store huge amounts of carbon, which could be released if climate change promotes thaw. Currently, modelling studies predict that thaw in boreal regions is mainly sensitive to warming, rather than changes in precipitation or vegetation cover. This study shows that permafrost thawing is controlled strongly by soil moisture and thus the balance between evapotranspiration and precipitation. Under dense canopy cover, high evapotranspiration means a 30% increase in precipitation causes less thaw than a 1C increase in temperature. However, disturbance to vegetation promotes greater thaw through reduced evapotranspiration, which results in wetter, more thermally conductive soils. In disturbed forests, increases in precipitation rival warming as a direct driver of thaw, with a 30% increase in precipitation at current temperatures causing more thaw than 2C of warming. The authors suggest that thaw cannot be considered to be controlled solely by rising temperatures.