

Parisians vote in anti-SUV parking and pollution referendum

February 4 2024, by Pierrick YVON, Marie DHUMIERES



Cars weighing more than 1.6 tonnes would be slapped with swingeing parking charges if the vote passes.

Polling stations opened in Paris on Sunday for a referendum on tripling parking costs for hefty SUV-style cars, a campaign that has drivers'

groups up in arms against city hall.

Some 1.3 million Parisians are eligible to cast their ballot on the change, which would see cars weighing 1.6 tonnes or more charged 18 euros (\$19.50) per hour for parking in central areas, or 12 euros further out.

Fully [electric cars](#) would have to top two tonnes to be affected, while people living or working in Paris, [taxi drivers](#), tradespeople, health workers and people with disabilities would all be exempt.

"The bigger they are, the more they pollute," Paris' Socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo said in December to justify the step.

On her watch, the city has pedestrianized many streets, including the banks of the river Seine, and built a network of cycle lanes in an effort to discourage driving and reduce harmful transport emissions.

Environmental group WWF has dubbed SUVs an "aberration", saying they burn 15 percent more fuel than a classic coupe and cost more to build and purchase.

City hall has further pointed to safety concerns about taller, heavier SUVs, which it says are "twice as deadly for pedestrians as a standard car" in an accident.

The vehicles are also singled out for taking up more public space—whether on the road or while parked—than others.

Paris authorities say the average car has put on 250 kilograms (550 pounds) since 1990.

Hidalgo, whose city will this summer host the 2024 Olympics, rarely misses a chance to boast of the environmental credentials of the town

hall and its drive to drastically reduce car use in the center.

35 mn euros per year

But drivers' groups have attacked the scheme, with Yves Carra of Mobilite Club France saying the "SUV" classification is "a marketing term" that "means nothing".

He argued that compact SUVs would not be covered by the measures, which would however hit family-sized coupes and estate cars.

Conservative opposition figures on the Paris council say this imprecise targeting of the referendum "shows the extent of the manipulation by the city government".

Even among fuel-burning cars, "a new, modern SUV... does not pollute more, or even pollute less, than a small diesel vehicle built before 2011", said a drivers' group 40 million automobilists.

Maud Gatel, an MP from the centrist MoDem party, said that "if this was really about limiting pollution, there would be a distinction made between [internal combustion](#) and hybrid or electric vehicles".

The wide range of exemptions would leave almost 27 percent of SUVs in Paris unaffected by the higher parking fees, she added, citing figures from research firm AAA Data.

Hidalgo's transport chief David Belliard, of the Green party, says around 10 percent of vehicles in Paris would be hit by the higher parking fees, which could bring in up to 35 million euros per year.

Paris's anti-SUV push has not gone unnoticed elsewhere in France, with the Green party mayor in Lyon planning a three-tier parking fee for both

residents and visitors from June.

The last city referendum in Paris, on banning hop-on, hop-off rental scooters from the capital's streets, passed in an April 2023 vote—but only drew a turnout of seven percent.

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