AEGPL Memo on Car Emissions Tests: State of play

Background

The protection of our environment is a priority for the European Union. Vehicles put on the European market have to comply with certain emissions standards as part as the overall EU type approval regime. In particular, regulations on emission limit standards Euro 5 and 6 for cars and vans have introduced new stricter emission limits for the main pollutants. In parallel, the EU has also set CO2 emission reduction targets for new vehicle fleets to help mitigating climate change.

The European Commission also aims at improving testing procedures to increase their accuracy in assessing the performance of the vehicles in real world conditions. To do so, the Real Driving Emissions (RDE) test procedure, measuring regulated pollutants using on-board portable emissions measurement systems on real roads, is currently being developed.

How is it now?

The Regulation on the type approval of vehicles with respect to emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles (link) provides that:

- Tests are carried out in a laboratory under specific conditions
- Maximum 80 mg/km NOx emissions allowed for diesel vehicles (Euro 6)

What will change?

The car emission regulations grant the European Commission the power to adopt implementing acts detailing technical specifications. Such acts are adopted through the so-called “comitology” procedure by the Commission assisted by a technical body made of representatives from EU member states named the TCMV. Two RDE regulations have already been adopted following this procedure, providing that:

- RDE will start applying to new models in September 2017
- From 2017 to 2020, cars on the roads will be allowed to exceed the NOx laboratory standard by 110% i.e. up to 168 mg/km of NOx
- After 2020, cars on the roads will be allowed to exceed the NOx laboratory standard by 50% i.e. up to 120 mg/km of NOx

What’s next?

Concerned about the flexibility granted to manufacturers, several political groups in the European Parliament tried to veto the RDE regulation. However, they did not manage to gather sufficient support to force the European Commission to review the full text but only got its commitment to consider stricter RDE limits in the long term. The RDE regulation will therefore enter into force in the first half of 2016 as initially foreseen.
The work on RDE is not over. More technical provisions, including on particles and market surveillance have yet to be developed, which will certainly raise the European Parliament interest again in the broader context of the Volkswagen scandal and air pollution peaks across Europe.

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