



Department for Transport

Contributory factors to reported road accidents 2014

About this article

This article presents the scope and limitations of the information on contributory factors collected as part of the national road accident reporting system, and presents results from the tenth year of collection.

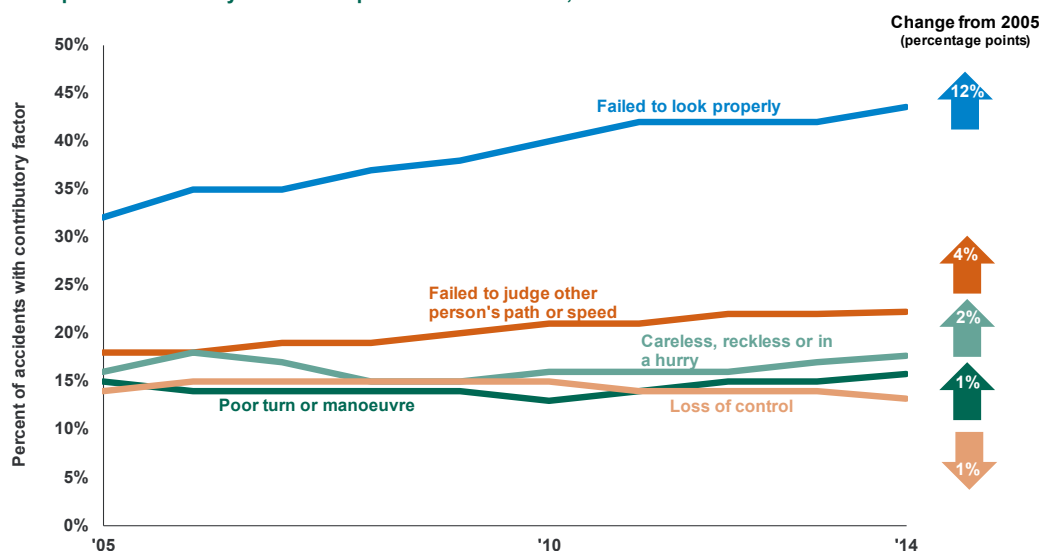
Contributory factors have been developed to provide some insight into why and how road accidents occur.

In this article

- Introduction [p2](#)
- Road accidents [p3](#)
- Road type [p6](#)
- Pedestrians [p6](#)
- Vehicles [p7](#)
- Casualties [p8](#)
- Speed [p9](#)
- Annex [p11](#)
- Background notes [p12](#)

- Since recording began for contributory factors in 2005, **failed to look properly** has remained the most frequently reported contributory factor for both reported road accidents and casualties.
- In 2005 **failed to look properly** was recorded in 32 per cent of accidents. In 2014, this proportion increased by more than ten percentage points to 44 per cent.

Top five contributory factors in reported road accidents, GB: 2005 to 2014



- The contributory factor **loss of control** is frequently reported in fatal accidents: it was reported in 35 per cent of fatal accidents in 2005 and 32 per cent in 2014. Failed to look properly is the most commonly reported for serious accidents, reported in 37 per cent of serious accidents in 2014.
- In accidents where a **pedestrian** was **killed** or **injured**; **pedestrian failed to look properly** was reported in 59 per cent of accidents and **pedestrian careless, reckless or in a hurry** was reported in 29 per cent of accidents.

From 2005 all police forces in Great Britain have been reporting contributory factors as an integral part of the STATS19 collection system. The contributory factors system has been developed to **provide some insight into why and how road accidents occur**. Contributory factors are designed to give the key actions and failures that led directly to the actual impact to aid investigation of how accidents might be prevented. The factors are **largely subjective, reflecting the opinion of the reporting police officer**, and are not necessarily the result of extensive investigation. Some factors are less likely to be recorded since evidence may not be available after the event.

While this information is valuable in helping to identify ways of improving safety, **care should be taken in its interpretation**. For example, contributory factors such as driver/rider using a mobile phone, impaired by drugs and impaired by alcohol have a few caveats that should be borne in mind.

In 2013, at least one driver or casualty was allocated the **impaired by alcohol** contributory factor in a total of 128 fatal accidents. However the final estimate for the number of fatal drink drive accidents in 2013 was 230. **Drink drive** figures are based on coroners' and procurators' fiscal reports which means drivers or riders involved in an accident are tested for alcohol whereas contributory factor data is based on the judgement of a reporting officer which might not include a breath test (for instance, in cases where drivers might be badly injured).

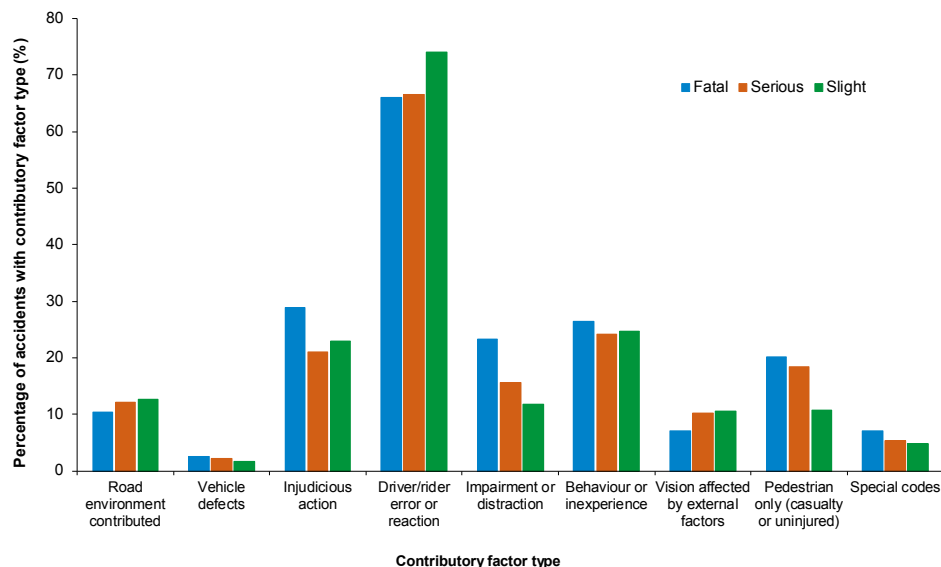
The same applies to contributory factors on **drug use**. Until the introduction of roadside drug screening in 2015, reporting officers were unable to test for drug use at the scene of accident. Instead they had to pass their judgement and allocate an **'impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)'** contributory factor. In 2014, the impaired by drugs contributory factor was reported for only 3 per cent of fatal accidents and 1 per cent of serious accidents. We will look closely at the 2015 data to see if the number of drivers allocated this factor has increased following the introduction of the new [drug driving offence](#).

Contributory factors on **mobile phone use** are generally under-reported because it is difficult for the reporting officer to allocate a **driver using mobile phone** contributory factor in certain situations. For example; in **non-fatal accidents**, the drivers involved may not give accurate details of the accident and there may not be enough evidence to suggest that the driver was using a mobile phone. In 2014, the driver using mobile phone contributory factor was reported in only 1 per cent of fatal accidents and 0.5 per cent of serious accidents. Yet the [Department's own survey](#) suggests that 1.6 per cent of drivers use hand-held mobile phones whilst driving. It is unlikely that mobile phone use in accidents will be lower than the general driving prevalence as [research](#) shows that they are a considerable distraction to drivers.

Contributory factors recorded for accidents

Chart [RAS50001](#) shows the percentage of accidents with contributory factors in each category. Only reported accidents where a police officer attended the scene and reported at least one contributory factor were considered.

Chart 1: RAS50001 Contributory factor type, Reported accidents by severity, GB: 2014



Tables

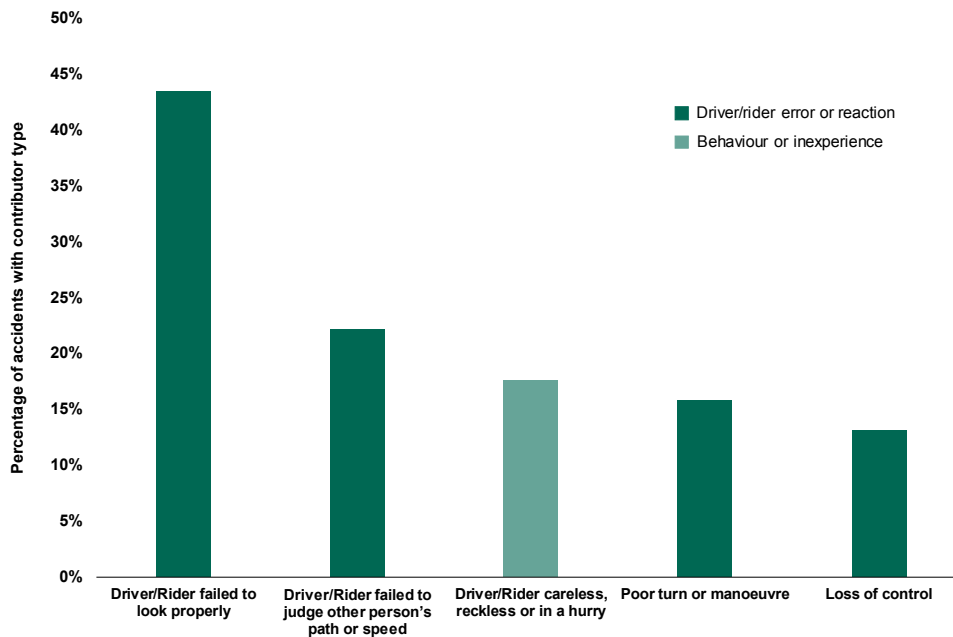
- Contributory factor, Reported accidents by severity, Great Britain latest available year: [RAS50001](#).

- The contributory factor category **driver/rider error or reaction** was the most frequently reported category, involved in 73 per cent of all accidents reported to the police in 2014. It was also the most frequently reported category for each severity of accident.
- **Behaviour or inexperience** and **injudicious action** (which includes **travelling too fast for conditions, following too close** and **exceeding speed limit**) were the next most frequently reported categories, involved in 25 and 23 per cent of all accidents respectively. The equivalent figures for fatal accidents, for both of these contributory factors, were higher at 27 and 29 per cent respectively.
- Pedestrian contributory factors can be attributed to an injured or uninjured pedestrian involved in the accident. These factors were reported in 12 per cent of all accidents and 20 per cent of fatal accidents in 2014.

Table [RAS50001](#) shows the percentage of reported road accidents in which each contributory factor was reported, including a breakdown by accident severity.

- Four of the five most frequently reported contributory factors in road accidents were in the category driver/rider error or reaction. Across all reported road accidents; **failed to look properly** was the most frequently reported contributory factor (44 per cent of accidents). This was followed by **failed to judge other person's path/speed** (22 per cent of accidents) and **careless, reckless or in a hurry** (18 per cent of accidents).

Chart 2: RAS50001 Top five contributory factors in reported accidents of all severities, GB: 2014



- The most frequently reported contributory factor for fatal accidents was **loss of control** which was reported for 32 per cent of fatal accidents in 2014. Loss of control was the second most commonly recorded contributory factor for serious accidents (18 per cent).
- In the category **behaviour or inexperience; careless, reckless or in a hurry** is the most common contributory factor reported in accidents. In 2014, 18 per cent of fatal accidents and 17 per cent of serious accidents were allocated the careless, reckless or in a hurry contributory factor.
- As contributory factors are based on the judgement of reporting officers, there could be some issues concerning the preconceptions of officers. For instance, they may be more likely to allocate the factor **learner or inexperienced driver** to **young driver/riders** compared with **older driver/riders**. In 2014, 21 per cent of young drivers aged 17 to 19 involved in accidents were allocated the learner or inexperienced driver contributory factor compared with less than 1 per cent of older drivers aged 30 to 39.
- In contrast, drivers aged 20 and over are more likely to be viewed as driving in a careless or reckless manner than be viewed as being inexperienced. Although younger drivers are most frequently allocated this contributory factor (11 to 14 per cent of 17-29 year old drivers), the proportion of drivers aged 30 or older who are judged to be careless, reckless or in a hurry remains between 6 and 9 per cent for all age groups. Aggressive driving shows a similar pattern, being more prevalent in younger drivers.
- The one factor that shows a different pattern is nervous driving. The peak ages for nervous drivers are in the younger groups, presumably learner drivers or people without much experience, and drivers aged 70 or over. The older drivers may have more experience behind the wheel, but could be more likely to be nervous and concerned about their own reaction times and eyesight.

- It is possible that police officers can subconsciously classify similar driving behaviours as these separate contributory factors (inexperience, recklessness, aggressiveness and nervousness) depending on the age, gender and attitude of the driver they see.

Chart 3: Selected behaviour and experience contributory factors by driver age, GB: 2014

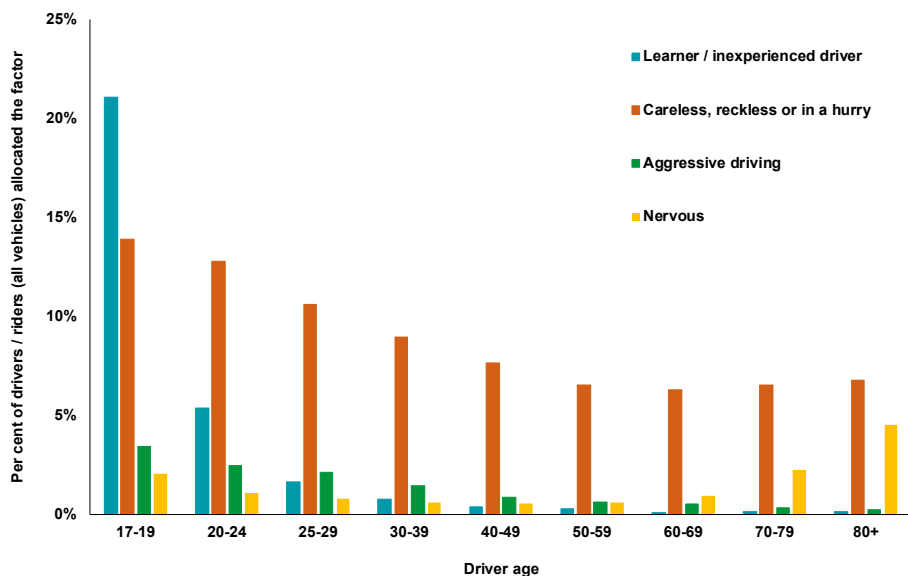


Table [RAS50002](#) compares the ten most frequently reported contributory factors for vehicle drivers or pedestrians in the previous five years.

- The top ten factors have broadly remained unchanged in the past five years, although there are some notable changes.
- The largest increase was in **failed to look properly** which was recorded for 42 per cent of vehicle drivers in 2010 and 46 per cent in 2014.
- The largest decrease was in **slippery road (due to weather)** which was recorded for 13 per cent of vehicle drivers in 2010 and 8 per cent in 2014.

Table [RAS50002](#) Contributory factors allocated to vehicles or pedestrians in reported accidents, Great Britain, 2010-2014

Contributory factor reported for vehicle or pedestrian ^{1,2,3}	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Driver/Rider failed to look properly	50,847	42	51,946	44	51,168	45	48,038	44	53,259	46
Driver/Rider failed to judge other person's path or speed	27,304	23	27,106	23	26,566	23	25,411	23	27,551	24
Driver/Rider careless, reckless or in a hurry	19,242	16	19,797	17	18,219	16	18,594	17	20,883	18
Poor turn or manoeuvre	16,453	14	17,101	14	17,306	15	16,542	15	18,916	16
Loss of control	18,180	15	17,091	14	16,282	14	15,260	14	15,350	13
Pedestrian failed to look properly	12,078	10	11,631	10	11,055	10	10,462	10	10,888	9
Slippery road (due to weather)	15,250	13	10,014	8	11,565	10	10,218	9	9,802	8
Sudden braking	9,662	8	9,517	8	8,938	8	8,271	8	8,768	8
Following too close	9,052	7	8,658	7	8,413	7	7,934	7	8,330	7
Travelling too fast for conditions	10,302	9	8,868	7	8,896	8	7,677	7	7,921	7
Total number of accidents¹	120,827	100	118,403	100	114,696	100	108,934	100	115,673	100

¹ Includes only accidents where a police officer attended the scene and in which a contributory factor was reported.

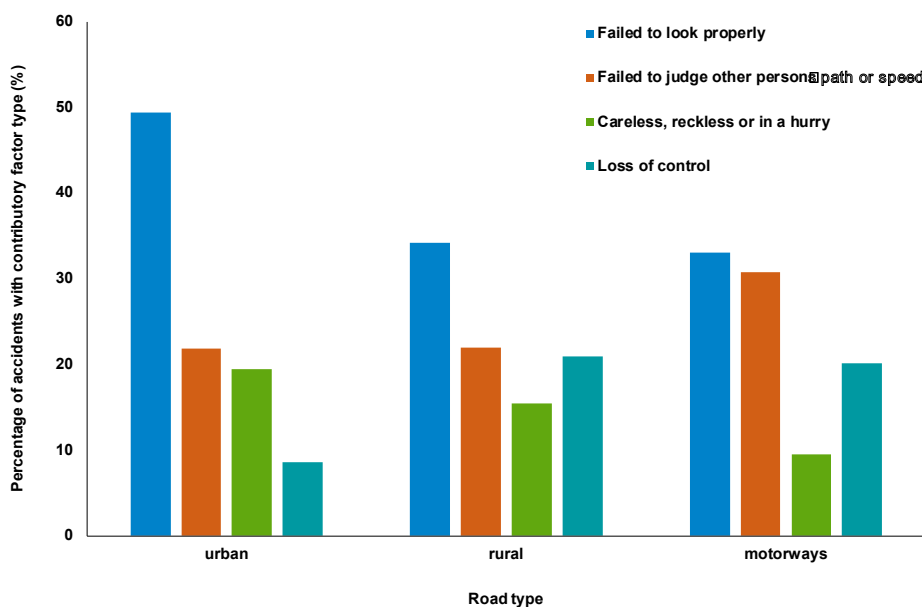
² Includes only the ten most frequently reported contributory factors. Factors not shown may also have been reported.

³ Counts the number of participants for which a contributory factor is reported. If two participants in an accident have the same contributory factor, this will be counted twice.

Contributory factors for road accidents by road type

- The contributory factor category **driver/rider error or reaction** was also the most commonly reported category in all accidents reported to the police across all road types.
- **Failed to look properly** was the most frequently reported contributory factor for every road type; allocated to 49 per cent of accidents on **urban roads**, 34 per cent of accidents on **rural roads** and 33 per cent of accidents on **motorways** in 2014.
- The most common contributory factors allocated to fatal accidents on all road types were **failed to look properly** and **loss control**. Failed to look properly was recorded for 30 per cent of fatal accidents on urban roads, 21 per cent of fatal accidents on rural roads and 21 per cent of fatal accidents on motorways. Loss of control was more commonly recorded for fatal accidents on rural roads and motorways, 38 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. These differences are likely to be as a result of the nature of the road types. Motorways and rural roads have higher speed limits and it is the high speed (and sinuosity of rural roads) that can lead to loss of control.
- **Pedestrian** associated contributory factors were more common on urban roads. This is mostly due to the higher concentration of pedestrians on these roads. Twenty-five per cent of fatal accidents on urban roads involved a pedestrian that failed to look properly and a further 12 per cent a pedestrian that **failed to judge a vehicle's path or speed**.

Chart 4: Top four contributory factors in reported accidents by road type, GB: 2014



Accidents involving pedestrians with contributory factors

Table [RAS50004](#) shows the ten most frequently reported contributory factors allocated to pedestrians in accidents involving pedestrian casualties and accidents involving uninjured pedestrians.

- **Pedestrian failed to look properly** was the most common contributory factor allocated to pedestrians in both accidents involving **injured or killed pedestrians** (59 per cent) and accidents involving **uninjured pedestrians** (53 per cent).
- **Pedestrian careless, reckless or in a hurry** was reported for 42 per cent of accidents involving uninjured pedestrians, whereas this was reported for 29 per cent of accidents involving injured or killed pedestrians.
- Pedestrian casualties aged between **16 and 59** are most commonly allocated the **impaired by alcohol** contributory factor, with those aged between **20 and 39** accounting for over 50 per cent of pedestrian casualties allocated the impaired by alcohol contributory factor.
- On the other hand, **older pedestrian casualties** are more likely to be allocated contributory factors relating to their **wellbeing**. In 2014, nearly 40 per cent of pedestrian casualties that were allocated the **disability or illness, mental or physical** contributory factor were aged **60 and over**.

Table RAS50004: Reported accidents involving pedestrians with contributory factors, Great Britain, 2014

Contributory factor attributed to pedestrian ¹	Number/ percentage			
	Accidents ^{2,3} where contributory factor assigned to injured or killed pedestrian		Accidents ^{2,3} where contributory factor assigned to uninjured pedestrian	
	Number	Per cent ⁴	Number	Per cent ⁴
Pedestrian failed to look properly	10,521	59	199	53
Pedestrian careless, reckless or in a hurry	5,149	29	157	42
Pedestrian failed to judge vehicle's path or speed	3,207	18	50	13
Crossing road masked by stationary or parked vehicle	2,519	14	37	10
Pedestrian impaired by alcohol	1,726	10	23	6
Pedestrian wrong use of pedestrian crossing facility	1,132	6	27	7
Dangerous action in carriageway (eg. playing)	1,015	6	23	6
Pedestrian wearing dark clothing at night	866	5	9	2
Pedestrian disability or illness, mental or physical	479	3	6	2
Pedestrian impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)	207	1	2	1
Total number of accidents	17,743	100	372	100

1 Top 10 most frequently reported contributory factors for injured or killed pedestrians and for uninjured pedestrians.

Factors not shown may also have been reported.

2 Includes only accidents where a police officer attended the scene and in which a contributory factor was reported.

3 Accidents can involve both pedestrian casualties and uninjured pedestrians who were assigned a contributory factor.

4 Columns may not add up to 100 per cent as accidents can have more than one contributory factor.

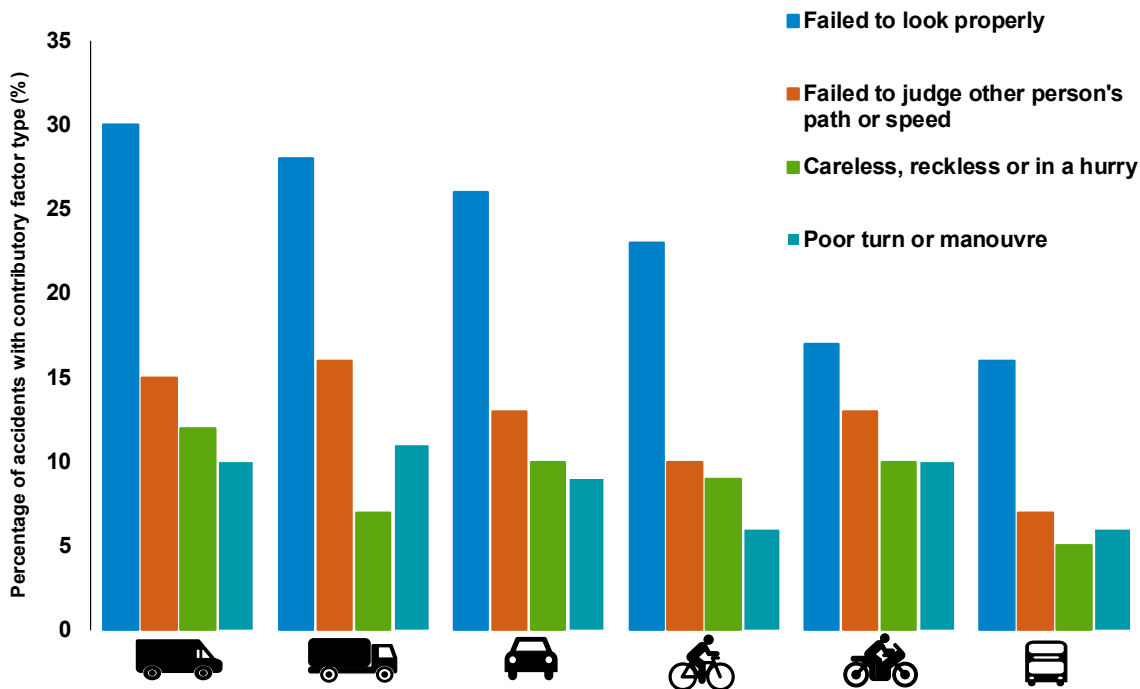
Contributory factors recorded for vehicles

Table [RAS50005](#) shows the percentage of vehicles that had each contributory factor by vehicle type.

- The contributory factor **driver failed to look properly** was the most commonly recorded contributory factor for all vehicle types except bus or coach (for which sudden braking was the most common).

- Owing to the size and weight of goods vehicles it can be difficult for HGV drivers to perform the safest manoeuvre. In 2014, 11 per cent of HGVs involved in accidents were allocated the **poor turn or manoeuvre** contributory factor.

Chart 5: Top four contributory factors allocated to vehicles in reported accidents by vehicle type, GB: 2014



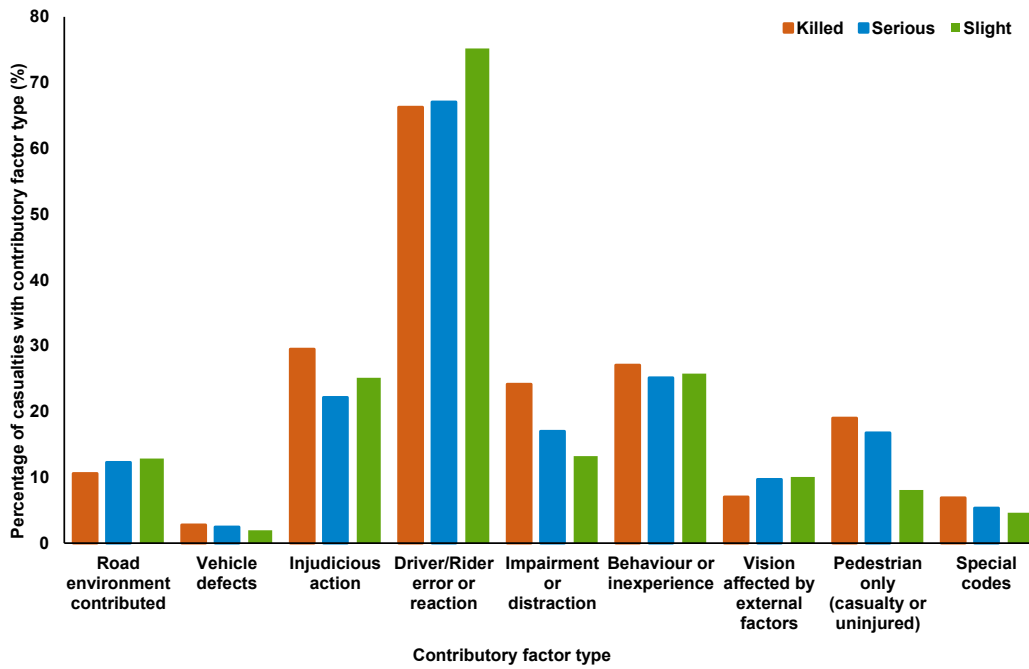
Casualties resulting from accidents with contributory factors

Table [RAS50007](#) shows the number of casualties resulting from reported road accidents with at least one contributory factor allocated, broken down by severity.

There is a similar pattern to that in table [RAS50001](#) which shows contributory factors in reported accidents.

- Failed to look properly** and **failed to judge other person's path or speed** were the most commonly recorded factors for both reported accidents and casualties (44 and 24 per cent of all casualties were assigned these two factors respectively).
- The contributory factors **driver careless, reckless or in a hurry** and **exceeding speed limit** were also commonly recorded for reported road fatalities, 18 and 17 per cent respectively.
- The most common contributory factor assigned to pedestrian only casualties was **pedestrian failed to looked properly**, which was reported for 12 per cent of fatalities and 13 per cent of serious injuries.

Chart 6: [RAS50007](#) Contributory factors, casualties in reported accidents by severity, GB: 2014



Speed as a contributory factor

The two contributory factors that relate to excessive or inappropriate speed are **exceeding speed limit** and **travelling too fast for conditions**. Table [RAS50008](#) shows the reported accidents and casualties by severity where speed was recorded as a contributory factor.

- **Exceeding the speed limit** was reported as a contributory factor for 16 per cent of fatal accidents in 2014, whereas **travelling too fast for conditions** was reported for only 8 per cent of fatal accidents.
- A similar pattern was seen for reported road fatalities. **Exceeding speed limit** was reported for 17 per cent of fatalities and **travelling too fast for conditions** was reported for only 8 per cent of fatalities.
- There was a similar split of 7 per cent in the proportion of serious accidents and seriously injured casualties allocated the **exceeding speed limit** and **travelling too fast for conditions** contributory factors.
- Accidents on **rural roads** are more fatal in nature than accidents on **urban roads**. This is because rural roads have a much higher average speed than urban roads.
- **Exceeding speed limit** was recorded for 19 per cent of fatal accidents on urban roads and 15 per cent of fatal accidents on rural roads.
- In contrast, 14 per cent of fatal accidents on rural roads were allocated the **travelling too fast for**

conditions contributory factor compared with only 7 per cent of fatal accidents on urban roads.

- Rural roads are often more sinuous and narrow in nature with blind bends, dips and other distractions which means that it is easier for road users to travel too fast to miss these dangers or fail to slow down when approaching them.

Vehicles with speed as a contributory factor

Table [RAS50009](#) shows the number of vehicles which had the two speed contributory factors allocated by vehicle type.

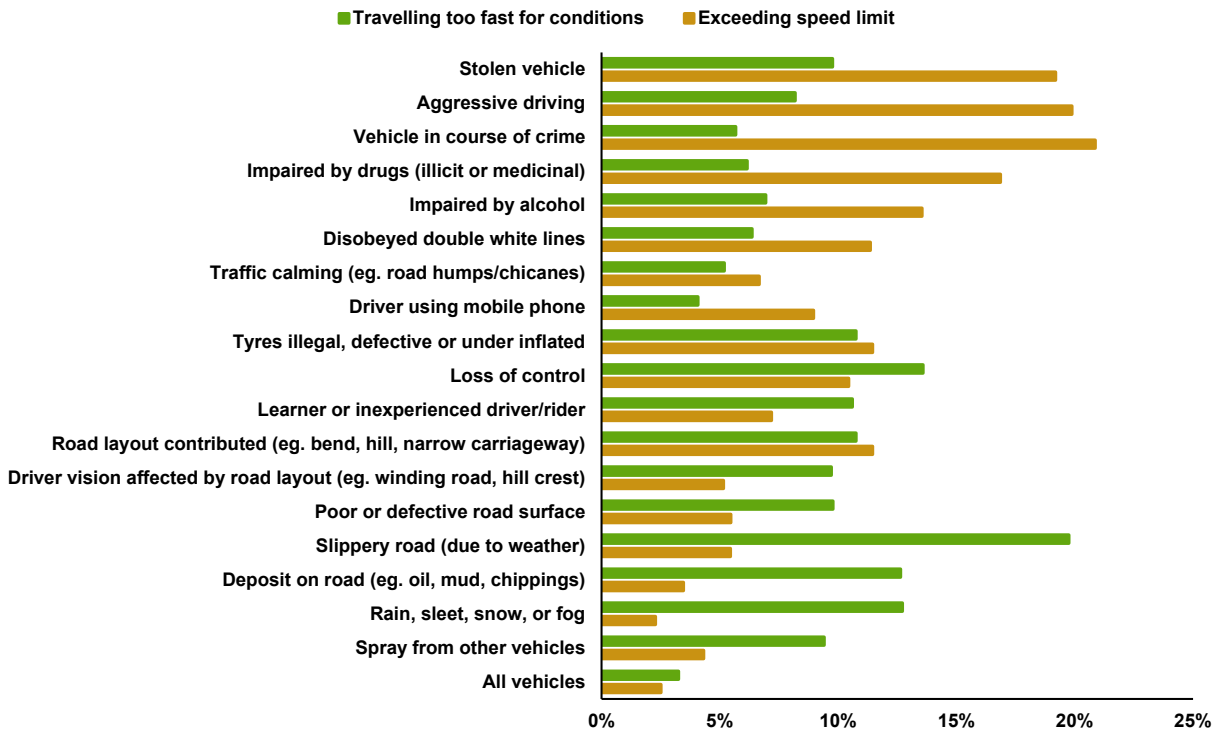
In 2014 there were 12,334 vehicles with either a **travelling too fast for conditions** contributory factor or an **exceeding speed limit** contributory factor allocated to them. These vehicles accounted for 6 per cent of all vehicles involved in accidents with at least one contributory factor

- **Motorcycles** were the most common vehicle type to have both speed factors allocated to them compared to other vehicle types. Five per cent were reported as exceeding speed limit compared to 3 per cent of cars.
- **HGVs** were less likely to have either of the speed factors assigned than other vehicles. Only 2 per cent of HGVs were allocated a travelling too fast for conditions contributory factor. This may relate to HGVs being speed limited or the drivers being professionally trained.

Table [RAS50010](#) shows the association between two speed factors and other contributory factors. In particular the proportion of the speed factors among vehicles with other factors.

- **Exceeding speed limit** is mostly associated with other factors relating to **illegal activities**. This includes 21 per cent of **vehicles in the course of crime**, 20 per cent of vehicles assigned the factor **aggressive driving** and 19 per cent assigned the factor **stolen vehicle** which also had the factor exceeding the speed limit assigned to them.
- **Travelling too fast for conditions** had stronger associations with factors relating to the **road environment** and **bad weather**. Travelling too fast for conditions was also reported for 20 per cent of vehicles assigned the **slippery road (due to weather)** contributory factor and a 14 per cent of vehicles assigned the **loss of control** contributory factor.

Chart 7: [RAS50010](#) Percentage of vehicles with selected contributory factors which also had a speed factor reported: GB 2014



Annex: Accidents included in the contributory factor analysis

For accidents in which a police officer did not attend the scene of the accident it may not be possible for the reporting officer to accurately report the correct contributory factors. As a result, the analysis shown in this article only includes accidents in which a police officer attended the scene and assigned contributory factors. In 2014, 79 per cent of reported road accidents met this criteria.

Accidents which had no contributory factor were excluded from this analysis. At least one contributory factor was recorded in 96 per cent of accidents in which a police officer attended the scene.

Table [RAS50011](#) shows the proportion of accidents and vehicles that satisfied both of the above conditions, shown for different accident severities, road classes and vehicle types.

- In 2014, 93 per cent of fatal accidents satisfied these conditions compared to 77 per cent of slight accidents.
- There were 88 per cent of accidents that occurred on **motorways** which were included in this analysis compared to 81 per cent on **A roads** and 80 per cent on **B roads**.
- The most common vehicle types involved in accidents which were included in the analysis were **motorcycles** (87 per cent), **HGVs** (86 per cent) and **cars** (80 per cent).

Table RAS50011 Reported road accidents and vehicles included in the contributory factor analysis, GB: 2014

Number/ percentage			
Category	Number included in analysis ¹	Total number of accidents	Per cent included in analysis ¹
Accidents: severity			
Fatal	1,543	1,658	93
Serious	18,097	20,676	88
Slight	96,033	123,988	77
Accidents: road class			
Motorways	4,975	5,630	88
A roads	55,034	67,828	81
B roads	14,876	18,573	80
Other roads ²	40,788	54,291	75
Accidents included in analysis	115,673	146,322	79
Category	Number included in analysis ¹	Total number of vehicles	Per cent included in analysis ¹
Vehicles: type			
Pedal cycles	14,820	21,979	67
Motorcycles	18,565	21,378	87
Cars	157,338	195,576	80
Buses or coaches	4,102	6,103	67
Light goods vehicles	11,227	14,043	80
Heavy goods vehicles	5,915	6,873	86
Other vehicles ³	2,005	2,575	78
Vehicles included in analysis	213,972	268,527	80

1 Includes accidents and vehicles involved in accidents where a police officer attended the scene and in which a contributory factor was reported.

2 Other roads includes C roads and unclassified roads.

3 Includes other vehicles types and cases where the vehicle type was not reported.

Background notes

The contributory factor system allows the recording of up to six factors in injury road accidents where the police attended the scene. Multiple factors may be recorded against an individual participant in the accident. These participants include a vehicle, a casualty or an uninjured pedestrian. Factors relating to a driver/rider should be assigned to their vehicle. Any given factor may be assigned to a number of participants. Both accidents and vehicles can have more than one contributory factor attributed to them, therefore percentages in this article will not necessarily add up to 100.

The form used by the police to report contributory factors includes a list of 77 contributory factors. These 77 factors fall into nine categories and these are: Road environment contributed, Vehicle defects, Injudicious action, Driver/rider error or reaction, Impairment or distraction, Behaviour or inexperience, Vision affected by external factors, Pedestrian only factors (casualty or uninjured) and Special codes.

A copy of the form can be found [here](#).

The contributory factors are largely subjective and depend on the skill and experience of the investigating

officer to reconstruct the events which directly led to the accident. They reflect the attending officer's opinion at the time of reporting and are not necessarily the result of extensive investigation. Furthermore, it is recognised that subsequent enquiries could lead to the reporting officer changing his/her opinion. The contributory factors are therefore different in nature from the remainder of the STATS19 data which is based on the reporting of factual information. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the data.

It is important to note that it may be difficult for a police officer, attending the scene after an accident has occurred, to identify certain factors that may have contributed to a cause of an accident. In addition, contributory factors are disclosable in court and police officers would require some supporting evidence before reporting certain factors. As a result some contributory factors may be less likely to be reported. Research¹ comparing this data to the 'On the Spot' (OTS) study found that in general fewer factors were reported per accident by the police in STATS19 than in the more in-depth investigations carried out in the OTS study. In particular the police appeared to be less likely to report factors that appeared to allocate blame for an accident, such as those relating to injudicious action. The factor careless, reckless or in a hurry stood out as being reported considerably more often in the OTS study than in STATS19.

It is also important to note that not all accidents are included in the following analysis of the contributory factor data. Only accidents where the police attended the scene and reported at least one contributory factor are included. Seventy nine per cent of accidents reported to the police in 2014 meet these criteria to be included. Further details of the accidents included in this analysis can be found in the Annex.

1 Linking Accidents in National Statistics to In-Depth Accident Data

<http://www.trl.co.uk/reports-publications/report/?reportid=6626>