Department for Transport

Provisional Road Traffic Estimates Great Britain: October 2016 - September 2017

Provisional estimates show rolling annual motor vehicle traffic has increased to a record high for the ninth consecutive quarter.

The **provisional figure,** of 325.5 billion[1] vehicle miles travelled on Great Britain's roads in the year ending September 2017, was 1.0% higher than the previous year. Rolling annual motor vehicle traffic has now increased each quarter in succession for over four years.

In this publication

About provisional traffic estimates

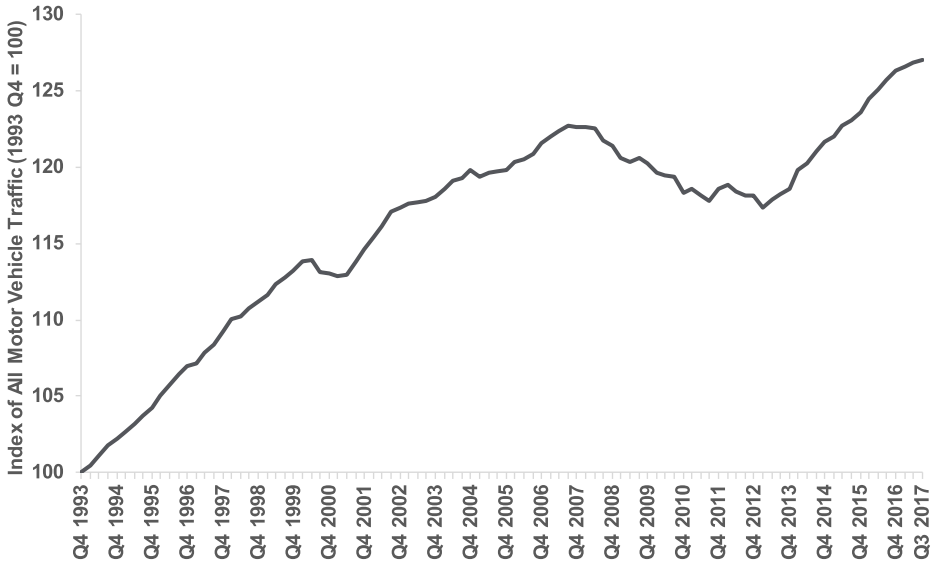
This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for October 2016 to September 2017. Provisional estimates are published quarterly and remain provisional until after they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year. Final annual estimates for 2017 are due to be published in May 2018. These provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a network of around 200 automatic traffic counters. Final annual figures also incorporate manual traffic count data.

Traffic shows a seasonal pattern at the national level, being highest in summer and lowest in winter. This publication focuses on rolling annual traffic totals, which better illustrate medium and long term trends in traffic.

Footnote:

1. One billion = 1,000 million

Chart 1: Rolling Annual Index of Road Traffic in Great Britain, from 1993



Compared to the previous year, in the year ending September 2017:

- **Car traffic increased** by 0.9% to a record 253.7 billion vehicle miles.
- **Van traffic continued to rise**, increasing by 3.0% to a record 50.1 billion vehicle miles.
- **Lorry traffic** fell by 1.5% to 16.5 billion vehicle miles.
- **Traffic rose on all road types** apart from urban 'A' roads, where it decreased slightly by 0.7%. Minor rural roads had the largest percentage increase, of 2.0%.
- **New record traffic levels** were seen on motorways (68.2 billion vehicle miles) and minor rural roads (46.2 billion vehicle miles).

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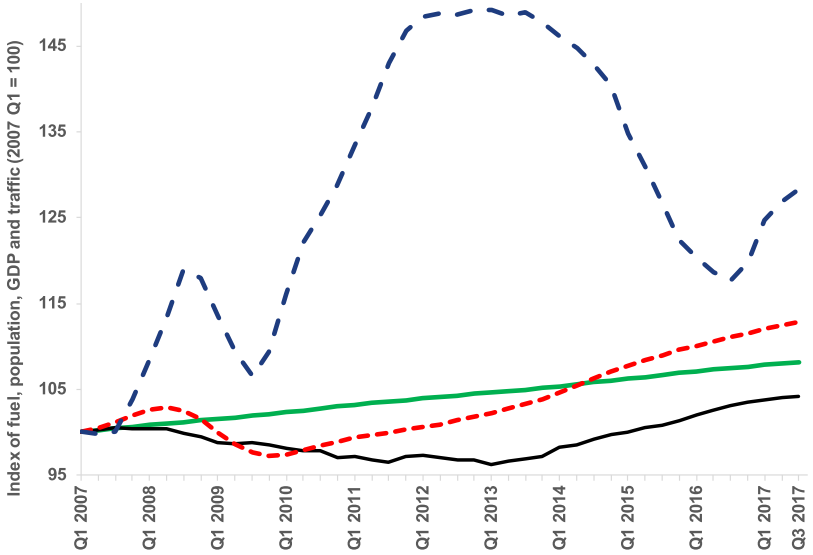
In Context

Road traffic trends are affected by a wide range of factors, including population levels, personal travel choices, and the demand for goods and services. The increase in traffic over the last four years is likely to reflect the growth both in the UK economy[2] and population[2] over the same period, and also the decline in average fuel prices[3] from mid-2013 until February 2016.

Chart 2: Index of rolling annual motor vehicle traffic in Great Britain, UK GDP, GB population and UK unleaded petrol prices, from 2007



% Change from year ending September 2013
(4 years ago)

UK GDP	9.3%
GB Population (projected)	3.0%
UK Petrol Price	-13.8%
GB Motor vehicle traffic	7.4%

Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending September 2017 compares to that in the year ending June 2017, and across a range of earlier years. More information on our provisional estimates, along with our TRA25 series of provisional traffic estimate tables, can be found online here.

⇔ is used for negligible changes[4]	Vehicle Miles (Provisional)	Percentage change from...				
		Last Quarter	Last Year	Five Years Ago	Ten Years Ago	Twenty Years Ago
	Year ending Sep 2017	*Year ending Jun 2017*	*Year ending Sep 2016*	*Year ending Sep 2012*	*Year ending Sep 2007*	*Year ending Sep 1997*
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	325.5 billion	⇔ 0.1%	↑ 1.0%	↑ 7.5%	⇔ 3.6%	↑ 17.2%
Cars and Taxis	253.7 billion	⇔ 0.1%	↑ 0.9%	↑ 5.5%	⇔ 2.2%	↑ 12.3%
Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV)	50.1 billion	↑ 0.6%	↑ 3.0%	↑ 21.7%	↑ 21.2%	↑ 68.5%
Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV)	16.5 billion	⇔ -0.3%	↓ -1.5%	↑ 5.8%	↓ -8.7%	⇔ -0.5%
Motorways	68.2 billion	⇔ 0.3%	↑ 0.8%	↑ 9.5%	↑ 9.3%	↑ 35.4%
Rural 'A' Roads	94.5 billion	⇔ 0.0%	↑ 1.4%	↑ 8.4%	↑ 5.9%	↑ 21.0%
Urban 'A' Roads	49.7 billion	⇔ 0.0%	↓ -0.7%	↑ 1.9%	⇔ -2.6%	⇔ -0.9%
Rural Minor Roads	46.2 billion	⇔ 0.3%	↑ 2.0%	↑ 14.7%	↑ 6.7%	↑ 24.5%
Urban Minor Roads	66.9 billion	⇔ 0.1%	↑ 1.4%	↑ 4.2%	⇔ -2.2%	↑ 7.8%

Footnotes:

2. Economic and population data are sourced from the Office for National Statistics, available here and here respectively.

3. Fuel price data is sourced from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, available here.

4. 0.5% or less for 0-5 years, 5% or less for 10 years and over

Vehicle Type

Provisional estimates indicate that car and van traffic increased, while lorry traffic fell, over the last year.

Compared to the previous year, in the year ending September 2017:

Car and taxi traffic increased by 0.9% to a new high of 253.7 billion vehicle miles. Car traffic has grown consecutively every quarter since June 2013, however, this quarter is the first in the last 15 to have an annual increase of less than 1%.

Van traffic increased by 3.0% to a record high of 50.1 billion vehicle miles. For the last four years, van traffic has been the fastest growing traffic type (in percentage terms). This is the first quarter where annual van traffic has exceeded 50 billion vehicle miles.

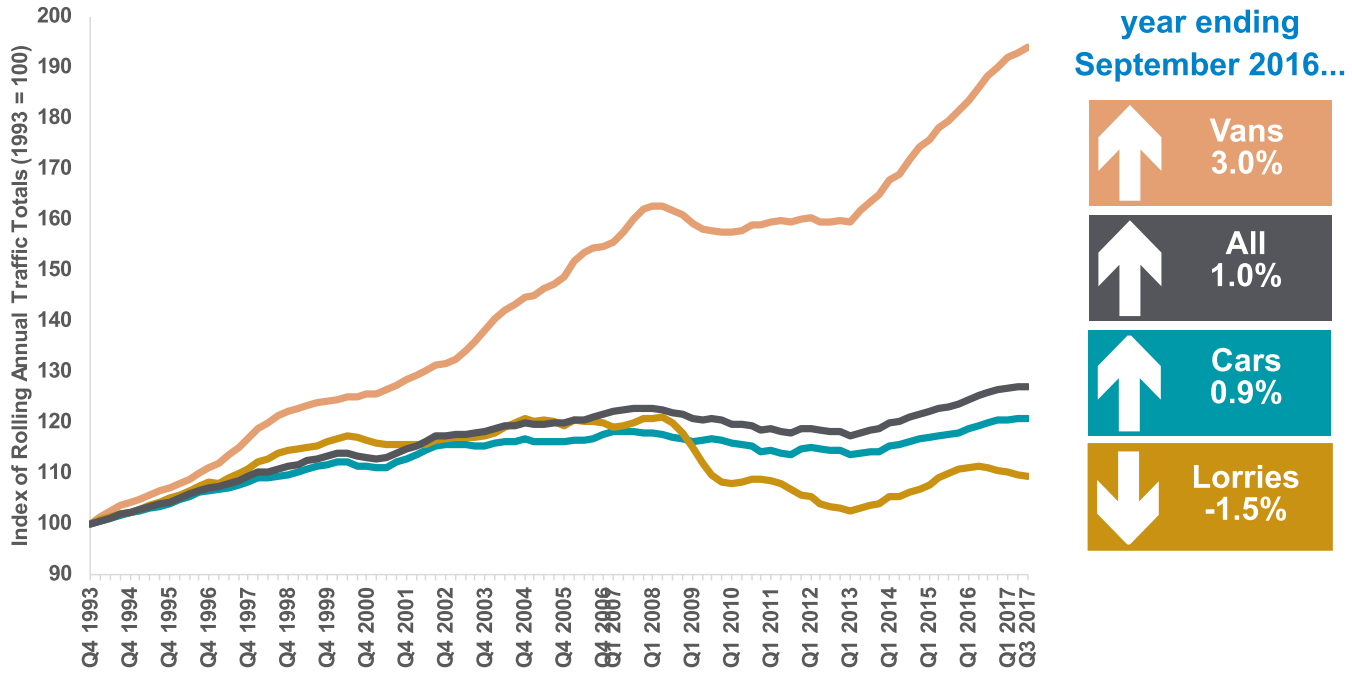
Lorry traffic fell by 1.5% to 16.5 billion vehicle miles. This is the fourth quarter in succession that annual lorry traffic has fallen, whereas car and van traffic have increased consistently during that period.

Long term trends

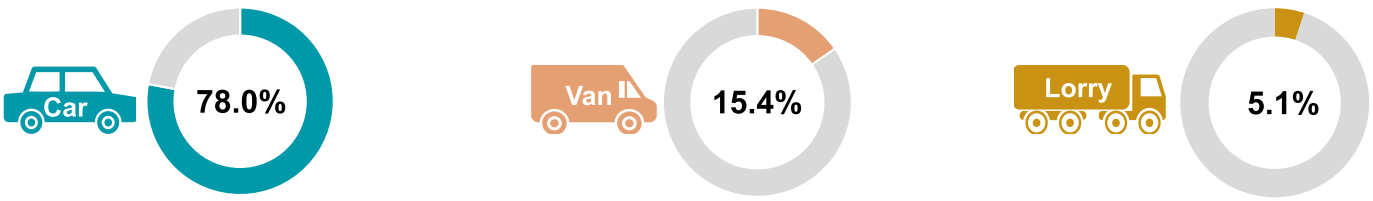
Over the last **20 years**, traffic has increased at varying rates across vehicle types:

All Motor Vehicles ↑ 17.2% | **Car** ↑ 12.3% | **Van** ↑ 68.5% | **Lorry** ⇔ -0.5%

Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1993 [TRA2501b]



Share of traffic by vehicle type, in the year ending September 2017



Road Type

Provisional estimates for all road types, except urban 'A' roads, showed an increase over the last year.

Compared to the previous year, in the year ending September 2017:

- **Motorway traffic** increased by 0.8% to 68.2 billion vehicle miles. Over the last six years, motorway traffic has increased steadily each year.
- **'A' road traffic** showed an overall increase of 0.6%. This was driven by traffic on **rural 'A' roads**, which grew by 1.4% to 94.5 billion vehicle miles. Traffic on **urban 'A' roads** decreased slightly, by 0.7%, to 49.7 billion vehicle miles.
- **Minor road traffic** increased in total by 1.7%, reaching 46.2 billion vehicle miles for rural minor roads, and 66.9 billion vehicle miles for urban minor roads.

Definitions:

Rural and Urban: 'Urban' roads are those within a settlement of 10,000 people or more, following the 2001 Census definition of urban settlements. All other roads are defined as 'rural'.

Minor and Major: Major roads include motorways and 'A' roads. Minor roads comprise 'B' roads, 'C' roads, and unclassified roads.

Long term trends over the last 20 years

Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.

All Road Types ↑ 17.2%

Motorways ↑ 35.4%

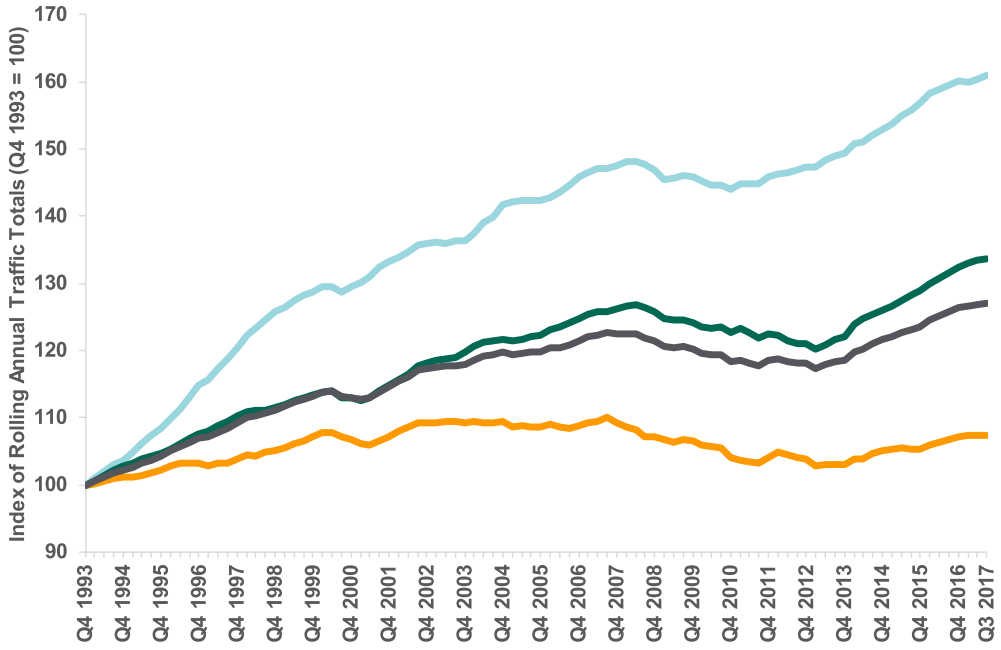
Rural 'A' ↑ 21.0%

Rural minor ↑ 24.5%

Urban 'A' ⇔ -0.9%

Urban minor ↑ 7.8%

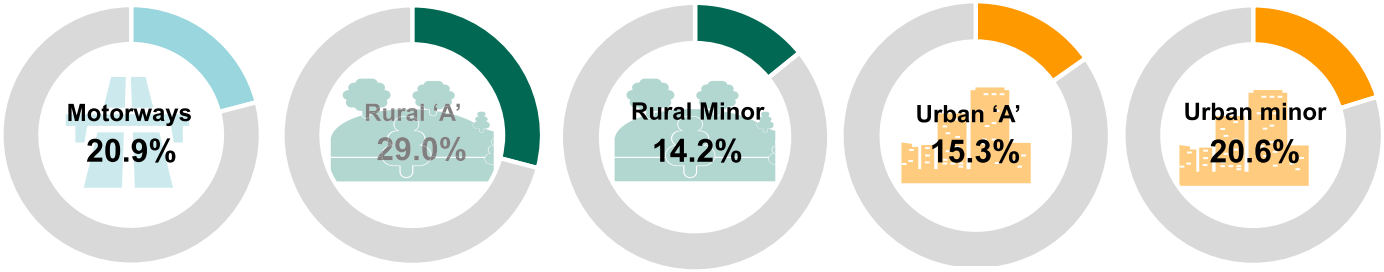
Chart 4: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1993 [TRA2502b]



% Change from year ending September 2016...

- Motorway 0.8%
- Rural 1.6%
- All 1.0%
- Urban 0.5%

Share of traffic by road type, in the year ending September 2017



Vehicle Type and Road Type

Provisional figures for vans on motorways saw the largest percentage increase of 2.9% over the past year.

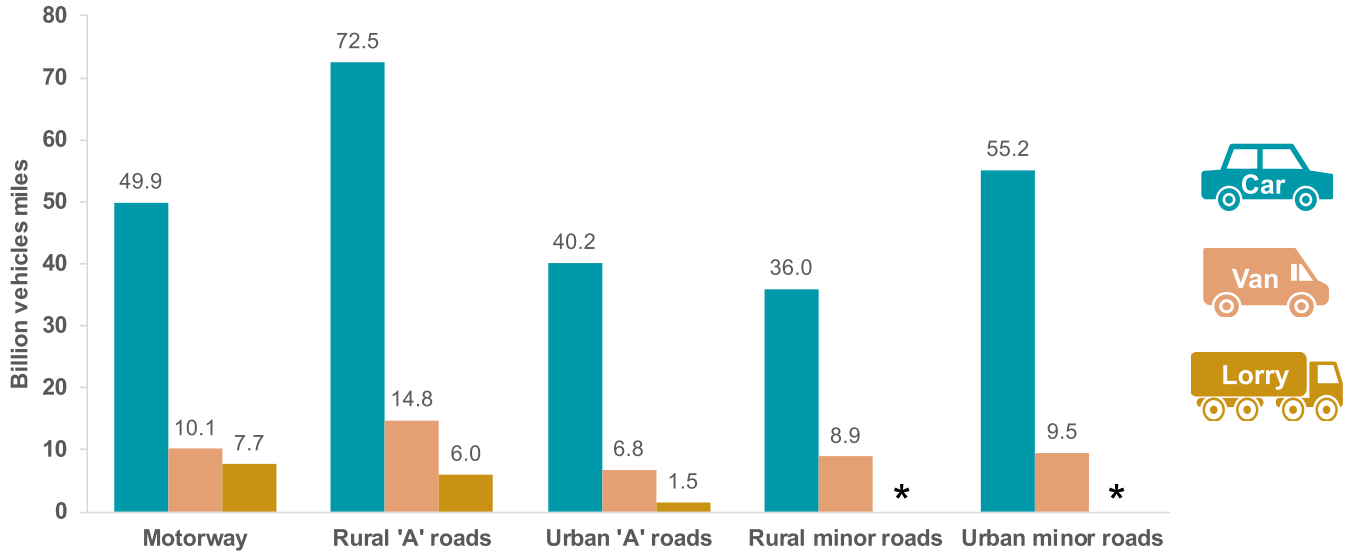
Compared to the previous year, in the year ending September 2017:

Car traffic increased on motorways and on rural minor roads to peak levels of 49.9 and 36.0 billion vehicle miles respectively. The highest percentage increase was for urban minor roads, increasing by 2.1% to 55.2 billion vehicle miles.

Van traffic grew and reached new peaks on all road types, apart from urban roads.

Lorry traffic decreased on urban 'A' roads by 3.9%, and stayed broadly stable on rural 'A' roads. Motorways remained the most common road type for HGV traffic, at 7.7 billion vehicle miles.

Figure 5: Provisional annual vehicle traffic (billion vehicle miles) by road class and selected vehicle types in Great Britain for year ending September 2017 [TRA2503a]



* *Data not published for these breakdowns.*

Note: Provisional traffic estimates are based on a sample of roads. Therefore, estimates split by vehicle and road type may be more prone to change when constrained by the final annual estimates.

Background Information

Users and uses of these statistics

Road traffic data are a key source of management information on the country's infrastructure. Main uses of road traffic statistics are summarised online in our report "Meeting customers' needs: Users and uses of road traffic statistics and data". These include:

- Highways England, Local Authorities (including Transport for London) and devolved governments, who use the data for transport planning, road engineering and policy monitoring at a regional or local level.
- Road accident and safety statistics, who use our annual and quarterly traffic estimates to produce road safety and accident rates, as required for the Strategic Framework for Road Safety.

We welcome **feedback** on any aspects of the Department's road traffic statistics including content, timing, and format. Please send any queries you have by email, to roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

Sources, strengths and weaknesses of the data

Provisional estimates are based on data from around 200 automatic traffic counters and give an indication of changes in traffic levels for different types of vehicle and on different types of road in Great Britain as a whole. Final annual estimates make use of data from around 8000 manual traffic counts in addition to the data from the automatic traffic counters and can estimate traffic levels in local areas and on specific road links, which cannot be produced from the provisional data.

Automatic traffic counters classify vehicle types based on characteristics such as axle-spacing and vehicle length. This creates the possibility for misclassification of vehicles with atypical characteristics, meaning that **provisional estimates** for different vehicle types are less robust than the final estimates which also utilise the more accurate manual count data. The classification algorithms are continually developed to ensure that vehicle classification is as accurate as possible.

Further statistical guidance can be found online here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-traffic-statistics-guidance.

Due to the methodology used to produce provisional traffic estimates, historic figures are subject to revision. However, these revisions are typically minor and will not affect qualitative patterns in the data. Provisional quarterly and annual traffic estimates for all motor vehicles have historically been accurate (typically within 1.5%) when compared with the final estimates, as illustrated in the table below.

Billion vehicle miles/*percentage*

All motor vehicle traffic	2015				2016			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Provisional estimates at time of publication	312.3	314.5	316.1	317.8	318.5	319.3	320.1	320.5
Final estimates	312.6	314.3	315.3	316.7	318.9	320.5	322.1	323.7
Difference (%)	*-0.1*	*0.1*	*0.2*	*0.3*	*-0.1*	*-04.*	*-0.6*	*-1.0*

National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards, as set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-series

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Methodology Review

Methodology changes are being implemented to improve the robustness of our provisional traffic estimates. These changes will be incorporated in the next release. A technical summary of the changes will be available in February 2018. It is expected that these changes will have little impact on historic traffic trends.

Next release

The next road traffic publication will be the final Annual Road Traffic Estimates for the period ending December 2017, which is due to be released in May 2018. Provisional Road Traffic Estimates for Q4 will not be published in Februray 2018. The decision to only publish final estimates for the year ending December 2017 is as a result of user feedback. If you have any comments on this, please contact the Road Traffic team at roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.