



Department for Transport

Provisional Road Traffic Estimates

Great Britain:

October 2017 - September 2018

Provisional estimates show motor vehicles travelled 327.1 billion vehicle miles in Great Britain for the year ending September 2018.

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About provisional traffic estimates

This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for October 2017 to September 2018. Provisional estimates are published quarterly and remain provisional until after they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year. These provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a network of around 300 automatic traffic counters. Final annual figures also incorporate manual traffic count data.

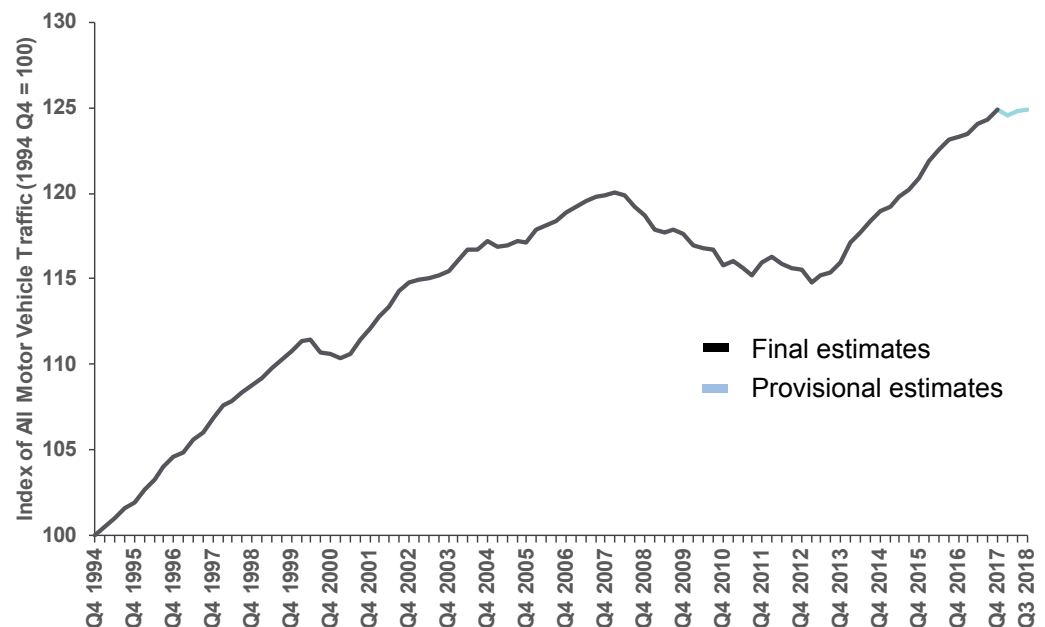
Traffic shows a seasonal pattern at the national level, being highest in summer and lowest in winter. This publication focuses on rolling annual traffic totals, which better illustrate medium and long term trends in traffic.

Key Findings

Compared to the year ending September 2017, in the year ending September 2018:

- ▶ **All motor vehicle traffic remained broadly stable** (increasing slightly by 0.4%).
- ▶ **Car traffic remained broadly stable** at 252.5 billion vehicle miles. Van traffic increased by 4.3% to 52.2 billion vehicle miles, and lorry traffic by 1.5% to 17.2 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Traffic on minor roads increased** by 0.6% and traffic on Motorways and 'A' roads remained broadly stable.

Chart 1: Rolling Annual Indices of Road Traffic in Great Britain from 1994



Compared to the last quarter's rolling annual figures (for the year ending June 2018), in the year ending September 2018 overall traffic levels remained the same. See the Summary Figures on [page 2](#) for more information.

Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending September 2018 compares to that in the year ending June 2018, 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](#).

	Vehicle Miles (Provisional)	Percentage change from...				
		Last Quarter (Provisional)	Last Year	Five Years Ago	Ten Years Ago	Twenty Years Ago
		Year ending Jun 2018	Year ending Sep 2017	Year ending Sep 2013	Year ending Sep 2008	Year ending Sep 1998
↔ is used for negligible changes, defined as: • 0.5% or less for 0-5 years • 5% or less for 10 years and over	Year ending Sep 2018					
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	327.1 billion	↔ 0.0%	↔ 0.4%	↑ 8.3%	↔ 4.7%	↑ 15.3%
Cars and Taxis	252.5 billion	↔ -0.2%	↔ -0.4%	↑ 5.6%	↔ 2.6%	↑ 10.0%
Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV)	52.2 billion	↑ 1.1%	↑ 4.3%	↑ 24.2%	↑ 24.8%	↑ 66.7%
Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV)	17.2 billion	↔ 0.3%	↑ 1.5%	↑ 10.6%	↔ -4.6%	↔ 0.4%
Motorways	68.0 billion	↔ 0.0%	↔ 0.4%	↑ 9.1%	↑ 9.6%	↑ 30.2%
'A' Roads	147.2 billion	↔ 0.1%	↔ 0.4%	↑ 8.1%	↑ 5.5%	↑ 12.8%
Minor Roads	111.9 billion	↔ -0.1%	↑ 0.6%	↑ 8.0%	↔ 1.0%	↑ 10.7%

About Rolling Annual Figures

Rolling annual comparisons provide insightful evidence into the nature of road traffic in Great Britain.

(2) Year ending June 2018												(1) Year ending September 2018														
(3) Year ending September 2017												(1) Year ending September 2018														
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
2016						2017						2018														
Final estimates												Provisional estimates														

Comparison with the previous quarter: (1) against (2)

Comparison with the previous year: (1) against (3)

All motor vehicle traffic remained the same in the first comparison, and remained broadly stable (increasing slightly by 0.4%) in the second comparison.

Note that both (1) and (2) contain data from February and March 2018 when there were adverse weather conditions, including the "Beast from the East".

Vehicle Type

Provisional estimates indicate that van and lorry traffic increased over the last year, and car traffic was broadly stable.

In the year ending September 2018:



Car and taxi traffic was broadly stable at 252.5 billion vehicle miles (bvm) (decreasing slightly, by 0.4%) compared to the year ending September 2017. Car traffic rolling annual estimates were level with those for the year ending June 2018.



Van traffic increased by 4.3% to 52.2 bvm compared to the year ending September 2017. For the last five years, van traffic has been the fastest growing traffic type (in percentage terms).



Lorry traffic increased by 1.5% to 17.2 bvm compared to the year ending September 2017. This continues the slow increase seen in lorry traffic over the last 5 years. However, this figure remains lower than the peak value recorded just over 10 years ago, just before the recession started in 2008.

Long term trends

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

All Motor Vehicles 15.3%



10.0%

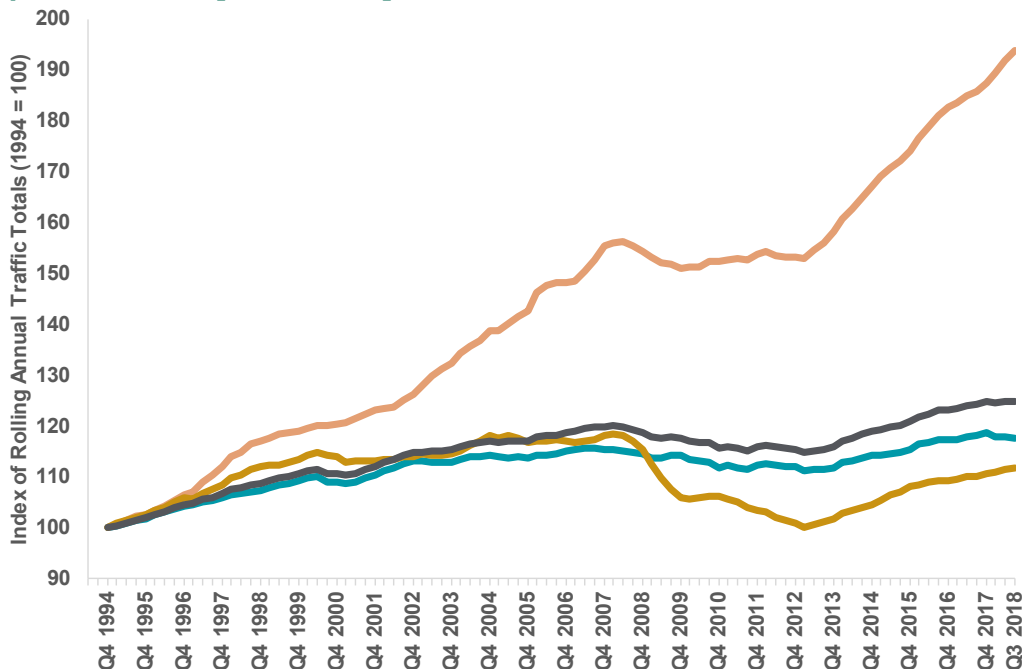


66.7%

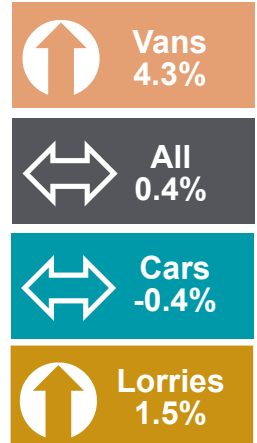


0.4%

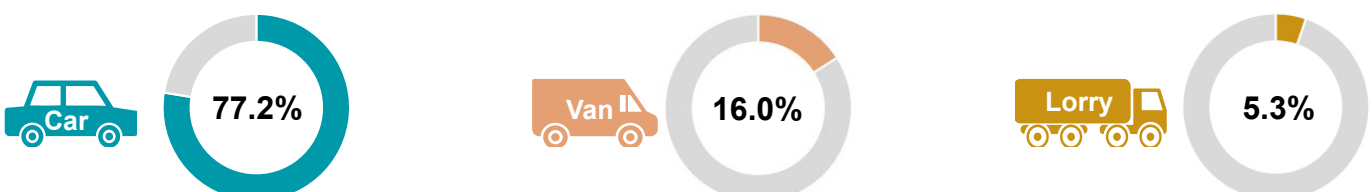
Chart 2: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1994 [TRA2501b]



% Change from year ending September 2017...



Share of traffic by vehicle type, in the year ending September 2018



Road Type

Provisional estimates remained broadly stable on motorway and 'A' roads and increased slightly on minor roads

Compared to the year ending September 2017, in the year ending September 2018:

- **Motorway traffic** was broadly stable at 68.0 bvm (slight increase of 0.4%).
- **'A' road traffic** was broadly stable at 147.2 bvm (slight increase of 0.4%).
- **Minor road traffic** increased slightly by 0.6%, to 111.9 bvm.

Long term trends over the last 20 years

Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.

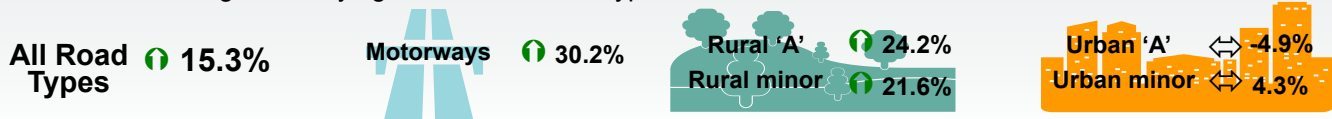
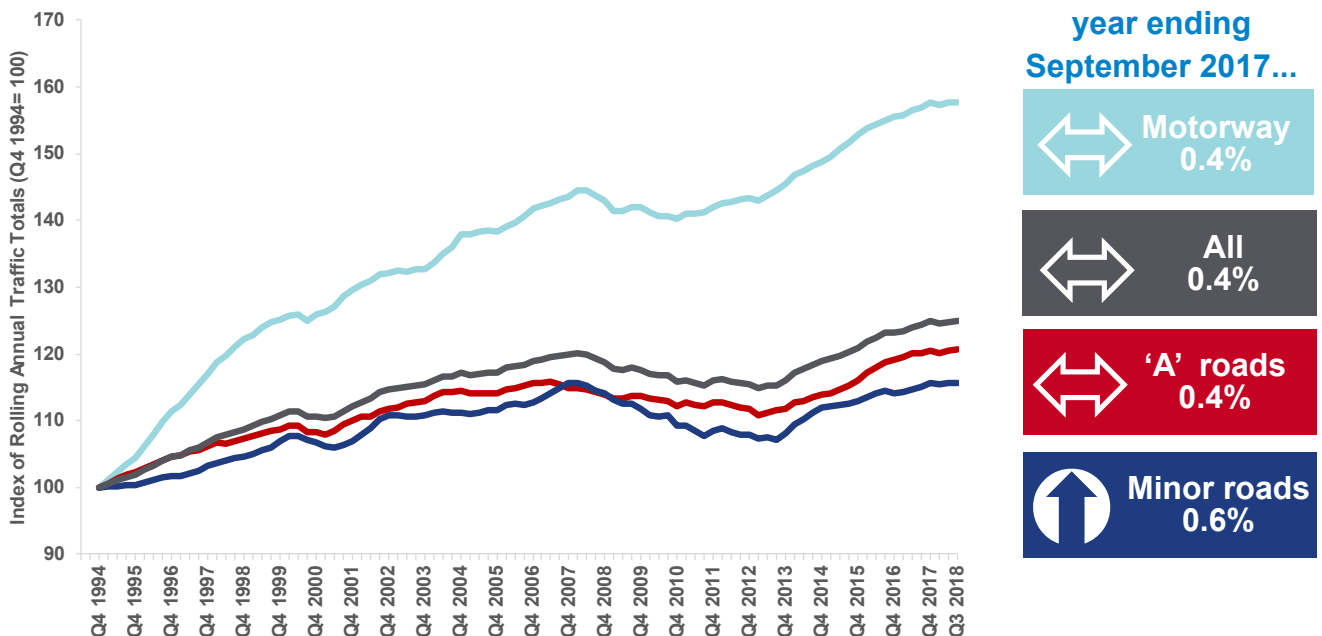
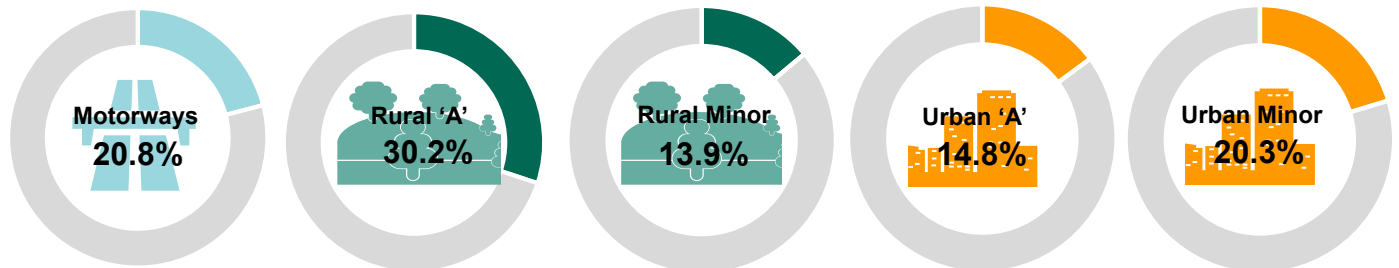


Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1994 [TRA2502b]



Share of traffic by road type, in the year ending September 2018



Urban / Rural Changes in 2017

The classification presented in this release has been updated in 2017. As the 2016 and earlier figures are based on the older definition, year-on-year comparisons should be treated with caution. Road traffic statistics are calculated by using vehicle counts and road length data, and so changes to the road length statistics impact on the road traffic estimates. Updates to the urban/rural definitions applied to the road lengths, so that they are based on the latest definitions. Further information about these improvements can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/road-lengths-in-great-britain-2017

Glossary

	Term	Definition
	<i>Billion</i>	A thousand million
	<i>bvm</i>	Billion vehicle miles
	<i>Great Britain</i>	England, Wales, and Scotland
	<i>Index Number</i>	Comparing changes over time from a selected base year, often across multiple indicators where they cannot be directly compared
	<i>Q1</i>	Quarter 1: 1st January to 31st March. Similar for other quarters
	<i>Traffic</i>	Total distance travelled by vehicles, combining the number of vehicles on the road and how far they drive
	<i>Vehicle miles</i>	The units that traffic is measured in. Three vehicles travelling for four miles each would account for 12 vehicle miles worth of traffic
Vehicle Types	<i>Lorry / HGV</i>	A goods vehicle over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight
	<i>Van</i>	A goods vehicle under 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight
Road Types	<i>Major</i>	'A' roads and Motorways
	<i>Minor</i>	'B', 'C' and unclassified roads
	<i>Rural</i>	Roads within an area with a population of under 10,000 people
	<i>Urban</i>	Roads within an area with a population of 10,000 or more people

Road Traffic Methodology Review

The Department for Transport's Road Traffic Statistics Team have conducted a review of the traffic estimates for Great Britain. This methodology was first implemented in the Q1 2018 publication.

The aim of the review was to seek opportunities for innovation and efficiencies in the production of traffic statistics, without degrading their quality in terms of accuracy and reliability, timeliness and meeting user needs.

The result of this review was the implementation of a more robust method for producing provisional road traffic estimates. The methodology improvements are:

- New stratification categories.
- Innovations in the processing and imputation of data from the Department for Transport's automatic traffic counters.
- Improvements to the benchmarking, weighting, and sample ratio calculation of the provisional quarterly estimates

These methodology improvements have been applied to all data presented in this publication. This has resulted in an improvement of the robustness of the statistics, and the trends have remained very similar. Further guidance is available in the Technical Note that accompanies this publication: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/road-traffic-statistics-methodology-review

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.gov.uk.

Sources, strengths and weaknesses of the data

Provisional estimates are based on data from around 300 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.

All motor vehicle traffic	2016				2017			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Provisional estimates at time of publication	318.4	319.3	320.0	-	324.3	325.1	325.5	-
Final estimates	319.3	320.9	322.5	322.9	323.5	324.9	325.7	327.1
<i>Difference (%)</i>	<i>-0.3</i>	<i>-0.5</i>	<i>-0.8</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>-0.1</i>	<i>-</i>

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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