



Department for Transport

Road Lengths in Great Britain 2018

In 2018, the total road length in Great Britain was estimated to be 246,700 miles.

About this release

This annual release presents estimates for road lengths in Great Britain maintained at public expense.

These estimates are based on information from a range of sources, including Ordnance Survey and local authorities. The majority of the data relate to the time point of April 2018. Detailed statistical tables can be accessed online via the [road length statistical series](#).

There were 31,800 miles of **major road** in Great Britain in 2018, consisting of:

- 2,300 miles of motorway (99% trunk, 1% principal)
- 29,400 miles of 'A' road (18% trunk, 82% principal)

There were 214,900 miles of **minor road** in Great Britain in 2018, consisting of:

- 18,800 miles of 'B' road
- 53,400 miles of 'C' road
- 142,700 miles of 'U' road

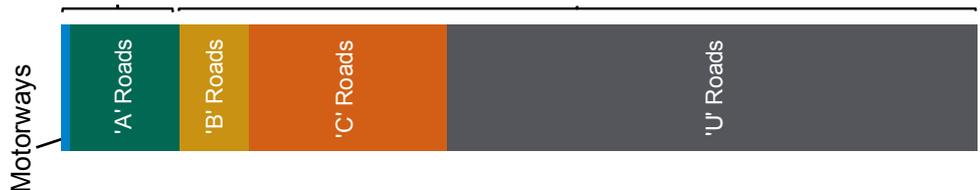
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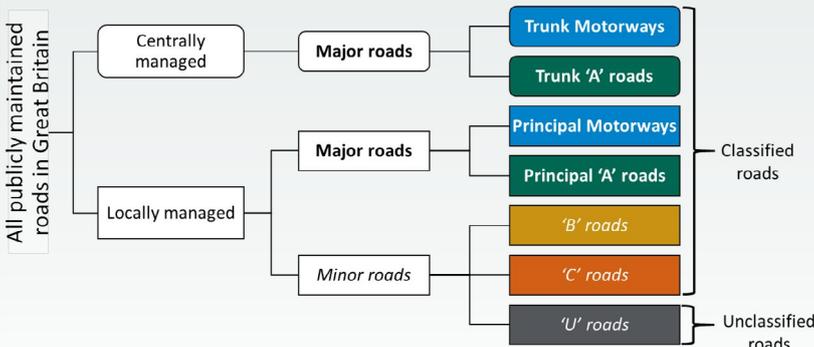
Road length in Great Britain in 2018, by road type

Major Roads - 13% of total road length (31,800 miles)

Minor Roads - 87% of total road length (214,900 miles)



Roads in Great Britain



By length, most roads in Great Britain are **managed locally** (by a local highway authority or Transport for London). This includes **all minor roads** ('B', 'C' and 'U' roads), and **some major roads** (principal 'A' roads and motorways).

The rest of the **major roads** (trunk motorways and 'A' roads) are **managed centrally** by Highways England (formerly the Highways Agency), Transport Scotland, and the Welsh Government.

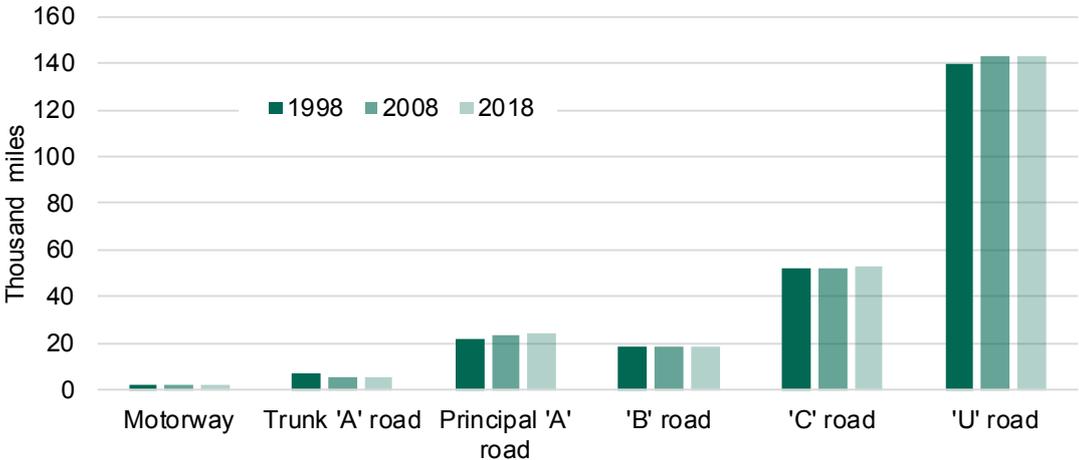
Motorways, 'A', 'B' and 'C' roads are **classified** roads, and 'U' roads are **unclassified**. 'U' roads are typically residential streets or rural lanes.

Trends Over Time

In 2018, there were 246,700 miles of road in Great Britain. This was 1,600 more miles than a decade earlier in 2008, and 5,200 more miles than in 1998.

This change was largely driven by an increase in 'C' and 'U' roads, where there had been an increase of 1,000 miles (1.8%) and 3,400 miles (2.4%) respectively since 1998. This may in part be due to new housing development and the roads built to support these. This equates to a total increase of 4,400 miles of minor roads over the 20 year period, as the length of 'B' roads remained broadly stable.

Chart 1: Road length by road type in Great Britain, 1998, 2008, and 2018 in miles [\[RDL0103\]](#)



There were 800 more miles of major road in Great Britain in 2018 than in 1998. This includes 200 more miles of motorway, all of which was trunk.

Overall, the length of 'A' roads increased by 600 miles. However, the length of principal 'A' roads increased by 2,500 miles, while the length of trunk 'A' roads decreased by 1,900 miles. This largely reflects the Government's de-trunking programme where centrally managed roads were transferred over to local authorities, with most transfers carried out between 2001 and 2003.

Interpreting these statistics

	✓	✗
Which roads are included?	These statistics cover all roads maintained at public expense, whether managed centrally or locally.	The statistics do not cover any privately maintained minor roads or off road tracks or alleys.
What does 'length' mean?	Road length statistics in this release are based on 'route miles' (as opposed to 'lane miles').	Road length statistics do not reflect the width or number of lanes on sections of road.
Do we know why road length has changed?	<p>We can identify a number of contributing factors to the differences we see. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> roads that have been built, opened and adopted. roads that have been reclassified (e.g. from a 'B' road to an 'A' road). roads that have been permanently closed. improvements or changes to underlying data sources. 	It is not possible to use the figures in this release to separately identify the impact of each factor that affects the overall length of the road network.

Road Length by Country

Of the 246,700 miles of roads in Great Britain in 2018, 188,800 miles (77%) of road were in England, 36,800 miles (15%) were in Scotland, and 21,000 miles (9%) were in Wales. Table 1 shows the varying composition of each country's road network by road type.

Table 1: Composition of road length (thousand miles, %) by country in 2018 [\[RDL0101\]](#)

	Major Roads						Minor Roads						Total			
	Trunk		Principal		All major roads		'B' Roads		'C' Roads		U' Roads				All minor roads	
	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%	Miles (000's)	%		
England	4.5	2	17.8	9	22.3	12	12.4	7	40.6	22	113.5	60	166.5	88	188.8	100
Scotland	2.1	6	4.6	12	6.7	18	4.6	12	6.7	18	18.9	51	30.1	82	36.8	100
Wales	1.1	5	1.7	8	2.7	13	1.9	9	6.1	29	10.3	49	18.3	87	21.0	100
Great Britain	7.7	3	24.1	10	31.8	13	18.8	8	53.4	22	142.7	58	214.9	87	246.7	100

Values may not sum due to rounding

The Strategic Road Network (SRN) includes all trunk motorways and 'A' roads in England. In 2018, the SRN was 4,500 miles long and made up 2% of total road length in England. By comparison, there were a higher proportion of trunk roads in Scotland and Wales at 6% and 5% respectively. In addition, a higher percentage of the road network in Scotland consisted of principal roads (12%) compared with England and Wales in 2018 (9% and 8% respectively), leading to major roads accounting for a higher proportion of roads in Scotland than England or Wales.

The composition of the minor road network varied too, with a higher proportion of 'B' roads in Scotland, 'C' roads in Wales, and 'U' roads in England compared to Great Britain as a whole.

Scotland and Wales estimates

Scotland and Wales produce their own estimates of length.

Scotland - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/statistics/#>

Wales - <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Transport/Roads/Lengths-and-Conditions>

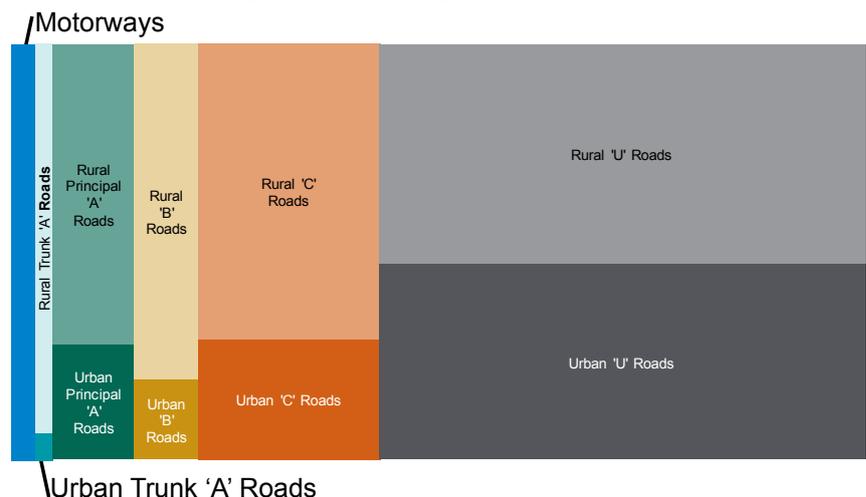
Only 'C' road estimates are used in this series. Further detail in the methodology note.

Rural / Urban Breakdowns

In 2018, by length, the majority of roads in Great Britain were rural, with 76% of 'A' roads, 81% of 'B' roads, 71% of 'C' roads and 53% of 'U' roads classified in this way.

Just as the composition of the road network by road type varied between England, Scotland and Wales, so did the proportion of urban and rural road length. England had a lower proportion of minor roads classified as rural (57%) than Scotland (68%) or Wales (77%). England also had the lowest proportion of rural 'A' roads out of the 3 countries.

Chart 2: Road length by road type in Great Britain, in 2018



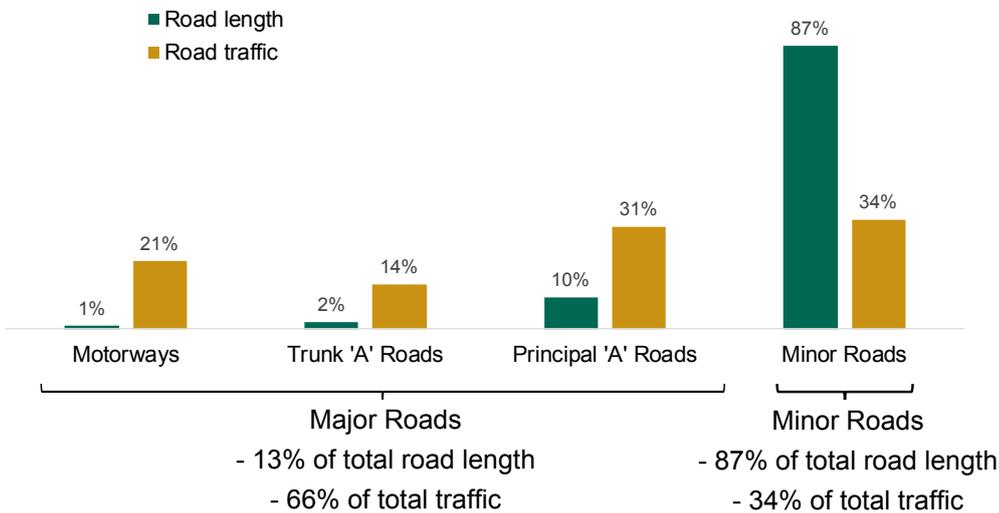
Rural / Urban classifications

The classifications in this release are based on the latest definition published by the Office for National Statistics for England and Wales (using 2011 census), and the 2013/14 definition published by the Scottish Government for Scotland. See [p.5](#) for more information.

Traffic and Road Length

While minor roads made up 87% of the road length in Great Britain, they carried 34% of the total traffic in 2018. On the other hand, major roads accounted for 13% of total road length, carrying the remaining 66% of total road traffic.

Chart 3: Percentage of road traffic and road length accounted for by each road type in Great Britain, in 2018



Road Traffic Statistics in Great Britain

DfT road traffic statistics are published separately at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics>

The SRN (all trunk 'A' roads and motorways in England) was 4,500 miles long and made up 2.4% of total road length in England in 2018. By contrast it carried 34% of road traffic in England.

Background Information

Methodology change - roundabouts

There has been a change this year in the way roundabout length is measured. Previously road links for roundabouts were halved in the road length formula. For this year's release however, the full length of the road link has been included in the calculation. This will have a relatively minor impact on the figures as roundabouts account for a small proportion of the road network in Great Britain.

Road Length Consultation in England (R199b)

Up to 2012 and in 2015 and 2018, the Department for Transport (DfT) conducted a road length consultation exercise (named R199b) with local authorities in England to compare records for the roads they manage with those held by DfT. The data from the R199b exercise may be used by Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in calculating future Local Government Finance Settlements and in devising government policy over the funding of local government. The data also enables DfT to validate road length data, identify changes to the road network and assist with the production of the annual Road Length estimates for the statistical release. Further information can be found on the [guidance page](#).

Rounding

Figures quoted in this publication are rounded to the nearest 100 miles. Raw differences and percentage changes are always calculated from unrounded numbers.

Urban / Rural Methodology

For 2017, the Department improved the methodology used to calculate urban and rural road lengths, so that urban and rural road length estimates are calculated consistently across major and minor roads, and are more precise. Data for years prior to 2017 are still based on the older classification (2001 for England and Wales). More information can be found at the following links:

- 2011 ONS definition, for England and Wales:
bit.ly/2011ONSDefn and bit.ly/2011ONSMethodology
- Scottish Government 2013-14 Classification:
bit.ly/201314ScotlandUrbRurDef

Strengths and Weaknesses

As road length estimates are based on information from a range of sources, the final estimates are reliant on all of these sources being accurate and up to date. Some of the changes between years may be due to improved accuracy of data sources rather than actual changes to the road network.

Further Information about this Release

- Technical and methodological information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-network-size-and-condition-statistics-guidance>.
- Data tables: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-network-size-and-condition>.
- For anything else, please email road.length@dft.gov.uk

National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance to ensure customer needs are met.

Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found in the pre-release access list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-network-size-and-condition-statistics-pre-release-access-list>

Next Publication

The next update, Road Lengths in Great Britain 2019, is due to be published in April/May 2020.

Future Road Length Statistics Publications

The Department is continuing to assess how the [OS MasterMap Highways Network dataset](#) can be used to produce improved estimates of road length in future. We will update users of these statistics in due course. If you have any questions in the meantime, please email road.length@dft.gov.uk.

The product is continuously being developed with Ordnance Survey (OS), GeoPlace and other stakeholders. This work coincides with the withdrawal of OS's Integrated Transport Network (ITN) product and migration to Highways which took place on 31 March 2019. More detail on the nature of the migration can be found at the following link: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/help-and-support/products/itn-highways-migration.html>



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