Road Traffic Statistics

Statistical Release

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Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates: Great Britain, Quarter 4 2012

This statistical release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain between October and December (Quarter 4) 2012, and provisional annual traffic estimates for 2012.

The provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a national network of around 180 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs). In addition to counting traffic, the ATCs record some of the physical properties of passing vehicles which are used to classify traffic by vehicle type.

Quarterly estimates are provisional until they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year.

The key provisional annual results are:

- The volume of all motor vehicle traffic fell slightly by 0.4 per cent to 302.6 billion vehicle miles in 2012.
- The distribution of motor vehicle traffic across road types in 2012 was broadly similar to that in 2011.

Comparing Q4 (October to December) 2012 with the same quarter in the previous year:

- All motor vehicle traffic increased slightly, by 0.4 per cent, to 76.7 billion vehicle miles.
- Light goods vehicle traffic continued to increase with growth of 3.2 per cent.
- Traffic volume on motorways has increased by 46.6 per cent since quarterly estimates began in 1993; this is the most of any road type.
- Traffic volumes increased overall on rural roads, decreased on urban roads and were broadly stable on motorways when compared to the same period in 2011.

1. Provisional annual estimates

Provisional annual estimates are based on Automatic Traffic Counter data from 2012. Finalised figures will also include manual traffic count data and are due to be published in June 2013.

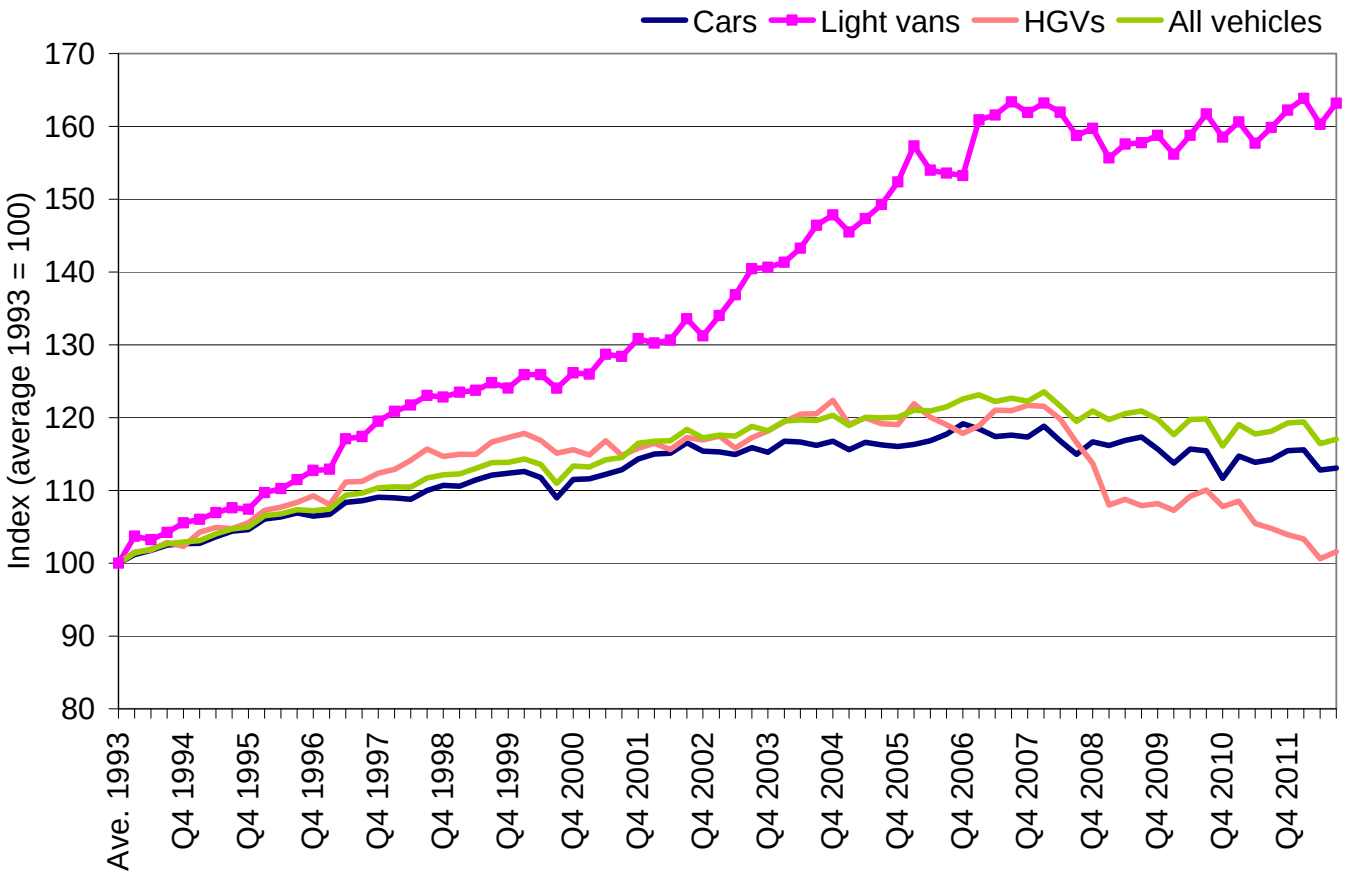
- The latest provisional annual estimates show that in 2012, the overall motor vehicle traffic volume in Great Britain fell slightly by 0.4 per cent to 302.6 billion vehicles miles compared to 303.8 billion vehicles miles in 2011.
- Provisional annual traffic estimates for 2012 show traffic volumes to be 0.7 per cent higher than 10 years ago in 2002, but 3.7 per cent lower than the peak of 314.1 billion vehicles miles in 2007.
- An increase in light goods vehicle traffic of 2.2 per cent to 42.3 billion vehicle miles was observed between 2011 and 2012. In comparison heavy goods vehicle traffic fell by 3.7 per cent.
- In 2012, cars accounted for 79.4 per cent of all motor vehicle traffic. This is broadly similar to the proportions in recent years.

2. Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- The provisional quarterly estimates show that all motor vehicle traffic was 0.4 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2012 than in the fourth quarter of 2011 at 76.7 billion vehicle miles. This is the second year that traffic has increased in the fourth quarter.
- Car traffic increased slightly by 0.4 per cent, to 60.9 billion vehicle miles, between quarters four of 2011 and 2012.
- Light goods vehicle traffic totalled 10.8 billion vehicle miles in quarter four of 2012, 3.2 per cent higher than the same quarter of the previous year. Light goods vehicle traffic has grown by 67.5 per cent since quarterly estimates began in 1993 – much more than any other vehicle type.
- Heavy goods vehicle traffic decreased by 1.9 per cent to 3.8 billion vehicle miles between the fourth quarters of 2012 and 2011. This is the fifth consecutive year of decreases between fourth quarters, heavy goods vehicle traffic is now 16.2 per cent lower than in the fourth quarter of 2007.
- Other motor vehicle traffic, which includes motorcycles, buses and coaches, fell 15.6 per cent, from 1.3 billion vehicle miles in the fourth quarter of 2011 to 1.1 billion vehicle miles in the fourth quarter of 2012. Caution, however, should be taken when interpreting figures for other motor vehicle traffic as they are based on small numbers.

Road traffic by vehicle type: Great Britain, quarterly from 1993

[table TRA2501c, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)]



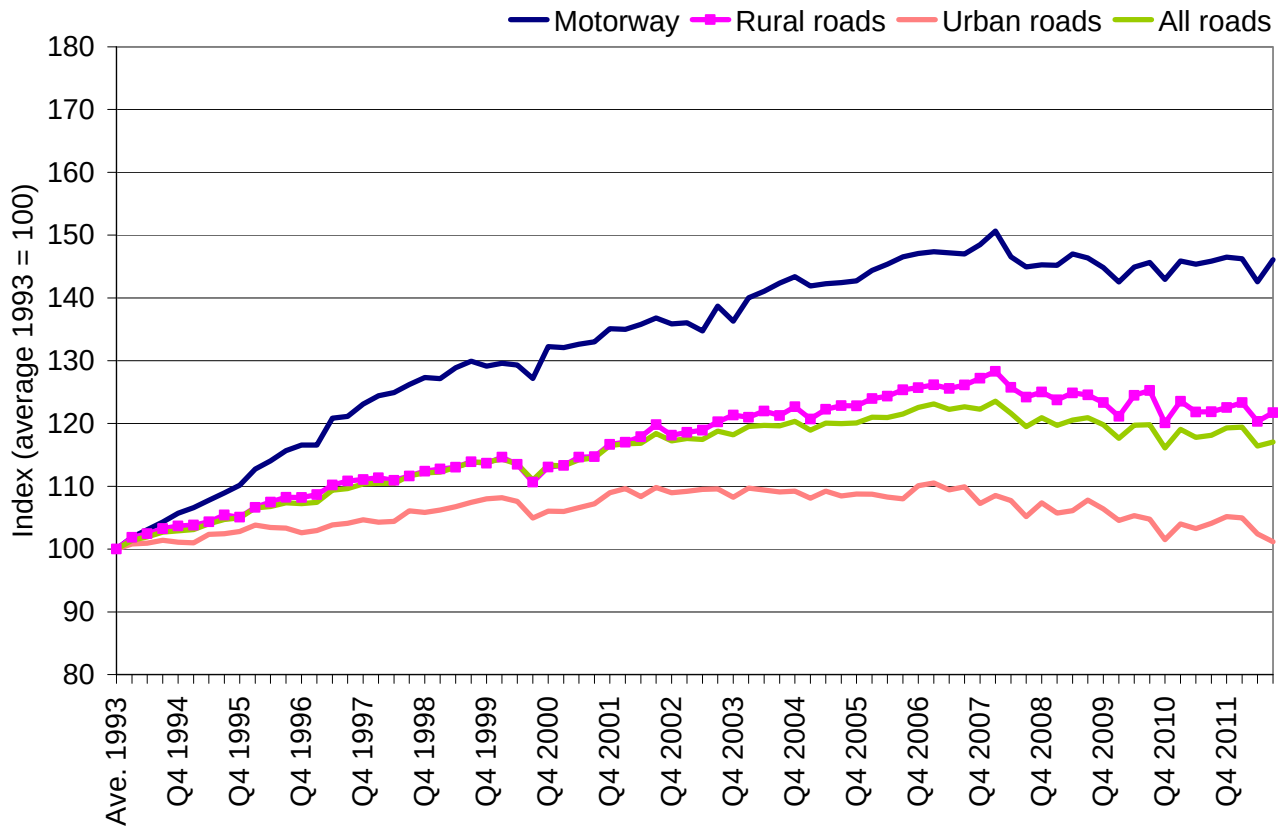
Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on "Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type" can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables, TRA2501, TRA2504

3. Quarterly road traffic by road class

- Provisional estimates for the fourth quarter of 2012 show that traffic volumes increased overall on rural roads, decreased on urban roads and were broadly stable on motorways when compared to the same quarter in 2011.
- Despite being stable between quarters four of 2011 and 2012, traffic volume on motorways has increased the most of any road type, 46.6 per cent, since quarterly estimates began in 1993.
- The largest changes in traffic volume between quarters four of 2011 and 2012 occurred on 'A' roads; traffic volumes increased by 2.3 per cent on rural 'A' roads but decreased by 2.3 per cent on urban 'A' roads.
- Provisional estimates for the fourth quarter of 2012 show traffic volumes increased on urban minor roads but decreased on rural minor roads when compared to quarter four of 2011.

Road traffic by road class: Great Britain, quarterly from 1993

[table TRA2502c, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)]



Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on "Quarterly road traffic by road class" can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables, TRA2502, TRA2505

4. Recent trends in traffic estimates

- Provisional traffic estimates for 2012 show a small decrease in traffic of 0.4 per cent between 2011 and 2012. Unlike in 2011 where decreases in traffic volume in quarters two and three were balanced out by increases in quarters one and four, the increases in traffic volume in quarters one and four of 2012 were not great enough to prevent an overall annual decrease in traffic.

A number of factors may affect traffic volumes. For example, traffic levels would normally be expected to change in line with economic growth. When comparing changes between quarter four of 2011 and quarter four of 2012:

- GDP was broadly flat whilst there was a small increase in traffic volume. Traffic levels are influenced by some sectors more than others and whilst there was a decrease in production (-2.4%), there were increases in distribution (1.7%) and transport (0.4%) which could have contributed towards the small increase in traffic.

In the past extreme weather conditions, such as heavy snowfall in quarter four of 2010 have dampened traffic volumes. Flooding and heavy rainfall in some areas of Great Britain in quarter four of 2012 does not appear to have had an affect on traffic volume at a national level.

5. Users and uses of Road Traffic Estimates

We continuously review the content of these statistics to ensure they are meeting users' needs. A summary of the feedback we have received from users can be found in 'Meeting customers' needs: Users and uses of road traffic statistics and data'.

Road traffic data are a key source of management information on the country's infrastructure. Main uses of road traffic statistics include:

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

We welcome feedback on any aspects of the Department's road traffic statistics including content, timing, and format via email to roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

6. Strengths and weaknesses of the data

- Quarterly estimates are based on data from 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.
- Annual estimates make use of data from around ten thousand 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 quarterly 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 counts data. The classification algorithms are continually developed to ensure that vehicle classification is as accurate as possible.
- Provisional quarterly traffic estimates for all motor vehicles have historically been accurate (typically within 1 per cent) when compared with the final quarterly estimates.

billion vehicle miles/*percentage*

All motor vehicles traffic	**2009**					**2010**					**2011**				
	Q1	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Ann**	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Ann**	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Ann**
Provisional estimates at time of publication	73.3	79.9	82.0	76.9	312.1	71.8	79.5	81.1	74.1	306.6	76.7	75.8	76.2	77.3	305.8
Final estimates	73.8	80.4	82.2	76.8	313.2	72.2	79.9	81.5	74.6	308.1	76.3	75.4	75.7	76.4	303.8
Difference (%)	*-0.7*	*-0.6*	*-0.2*	*0.1*	*-0.3*	*-0.6*	*-0.5*	*-0.5*	*-0.6*	*-0.5*	*0.6*	*0.4*	*0.6*	*1.2*	*0.7*

7. Background notes

1. The web tables give further detail of the results presented in this release and statistics on other related topics.

   The quarterly traffic estimates are presented in tables **TRA2501** to **TRA2506**. They are available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-traffic-statistics

   Also available here are the provisional annual traffic estimates, which are presented in tables **TRA0101**, **TRA0102**, **TRA0201**, and **TRA0202**.

2. Full guidance on the methods used to compile traffic statistics can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49975/quarterly-methodology-note.pdf or, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49976/annual-methodology-note.pdf

3. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Road Traffic Statistics were recently assessed against the Code of Practice by the UK Statistics Authority. The assessment report can be found here: http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-221---maritime--road-traffic--bus--taxi--light-rail-and-disabled-parking-badge-statistics.pdf

4. Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49982/quarterly-traffic-pre-release.pdf

5. Final annual estimates for 2012 are due to be published in June 2013. The next Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates release, providing estimates up to Quarter 1 (January to March) 2013, is due to be published in May 2013.