



Department for Transport

Provisional Road Traffic Estimates

Great Britain: April 2019 - March 2020

Minor Road Traffic Estimates Revisions

Minor road traffic estimates from 2010 to 2019 have been revised as a result of a planned benchmarking exercise. Further information on this exercise can be found on www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics.

Provisional estimates show motor vehicles travelled 349.4 billion vehicle miles in Great Britain for the year ending March 2020.

Compared to the year ending March 2019, in the year ending March 2020:

- ▶ **All motor vehicle traffic decreased** by 0.8%.
- ▶ **Car traffic decreased** by 0.9% to 272.1 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Van traffic was broadly stable and lorry traffic decreased** by 1.0%.
- ▶ **Traffic decreased across** both Motorways and 'A' roads by 1.5%. Minor road traffic was broadly stable.
- ▶ Exploratory analysis suggests that the majority of the observed decrease in road traffic levels is linked to the measures implemented towards the end of March 2020 to limit the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. See [page 2](#) for more information.

In this publication

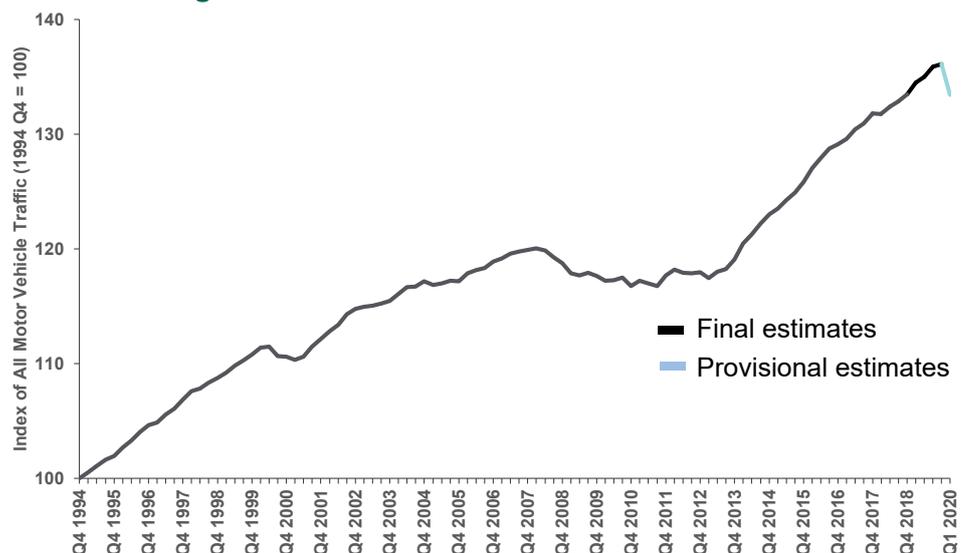
- Summary Figures[p2](#)
- Factors affecting traffic.....[p2](#)
- by Vehicle Type.....[p3](#)
- by Road Type.....[p4](#)
- Background.....[p5](#)

About provisional traffic estimates

This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for April 2019 to March 2020. 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.

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 December 2019), in the year ending March 2020 overall traffic levels decreased by 2.0%.

Factors Affecting Traffic - Coronavirus (COVID-19)

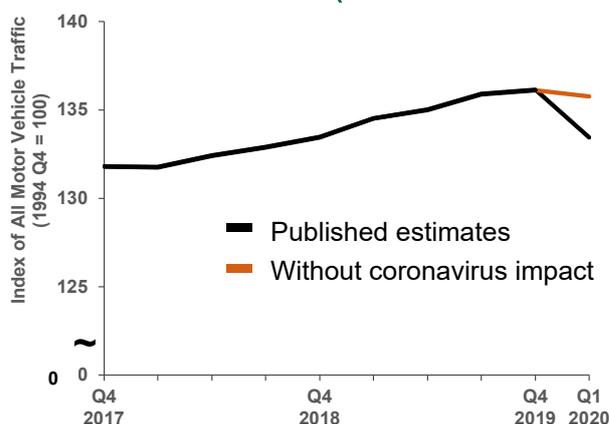
The statistics for this quarter cover the period before and immediately following the government's announcement of measures to limit the impact and transmission of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In early March 2020 the UK government set out four phases in its response to the coronavirus pandemic. The delay phase started on 12 March 2020 when the first self-isolation guidance was announced. The measures also included advice against all non-essential travel on 17th March; guidance to close schools to most children across Great Britain by 20th March; further guidance on staying at home on 23rd March.

Exploratory analysis, based on provisional road traffic statistics (see [page 5](#) for more information), suggests that without the impact of coronavirus on travel, the figure for the year ending March 2020 would have increased by 0.9% to 355.6 billion vehicle miles. Therefore, the provisionally estimated impact of the coronavirus pandemic is to have decreased road traffic for the year ending March 2020 by 6.2 billion vehicle miles, or 1.8% of rolling annual traffic levels.

The exploratory analysis suggest that the impact of the coronavirus pandemic affected road traffic differently by vehicle type and road type. The decline seen in road traffic levels at the end of March 2020 was more pronounced for car traffic than for van and lorry levels. There were also slightly larger falls on motorways and rural 'A' roads than other road types.

There is likely to be an impact on UK society and economic activity beyond March 2020. Provisional data covering April-June 2020 (due to be released in October 2020) will show the fuller impact of the coronavirus pandemic on road traffic.

Chart 2: Rolling Annual Indices of Road Traffic in Great Britain from 1994 (2017 onwards shown)



Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending March 2020 compares to 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 Dec 2019	Year ending Mar 2019	Year ending Mar 2015	Year ending Mar 2010	Year ending Mar 2000
↔ 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 Mar 2020					
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	349.4 billion	↓ -2.0%	↓ -0.8%	↑ 8.0%	↑ 13.8%	↑ 19.8%
Cars and Taxis	272.1 billion	↓ -2.2%	↓ -0.9%	↑ 7.1%	↑ 11.7%	↑ 15.4%
Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV)	54.9 billion	↓ -1.1%	↔ 0.2%	↑ 16.3%	↑ 34.5%	↑ 70.5%
Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV)	17.2 billion	↓ -1.1%	↓ -1.0%	↑ 4.8%	↑ 5.4%	↔ -2.3%
Motorways	68.5 billion	↓ -2.8%	↓ -1.5%	↑ 5.3%	↑ 11.5%	↑ 25.0%
'A' Roads	147.3 billion	↓ -1.9%	↓ -1.5%	↑ 6.2%	↑ 7.0%	↑ 11.0%
Minor Roads	133.6 billion	↓ -1.6%	↔ 0.3%	↑ 11.7%	↑ 23.8%	↑ 28.2%

Vehicle Type

Provisional estimates indicate that car, van and lorry traffic decreased over the last year. In the year ending March 2020:



Car and taxi traffic decreased by 0.9% to 272.1 billion vehicle miles (bvm) compared to the year ending March 2019. The fall in car and taxi traffic linked to the impact on travel of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020 is estimated to have been 5.2 bvm (1.9% of annual car traffic).



Van traffic was broadly stable at 54.9 bvm compared to the year ending March 2019. Van traffic has shown the largest growth over the last 20 years but has stabilised in recent quarters. Van traffic is estimated to have fallen by 0.8 bvm (1.4% of annual van traffic) from the impact on travel of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020.



Lorry traffic decreased by 1.0% to 17.2 bvm compared to the year ending March 2019. The fall in lorry traffic linked to the impact on travel of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 is estimated to have been 0.1 bvm (0.8% of annual lorry traffic).

Long term trends

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

All Motor Vehicles 19.8%



15.4%

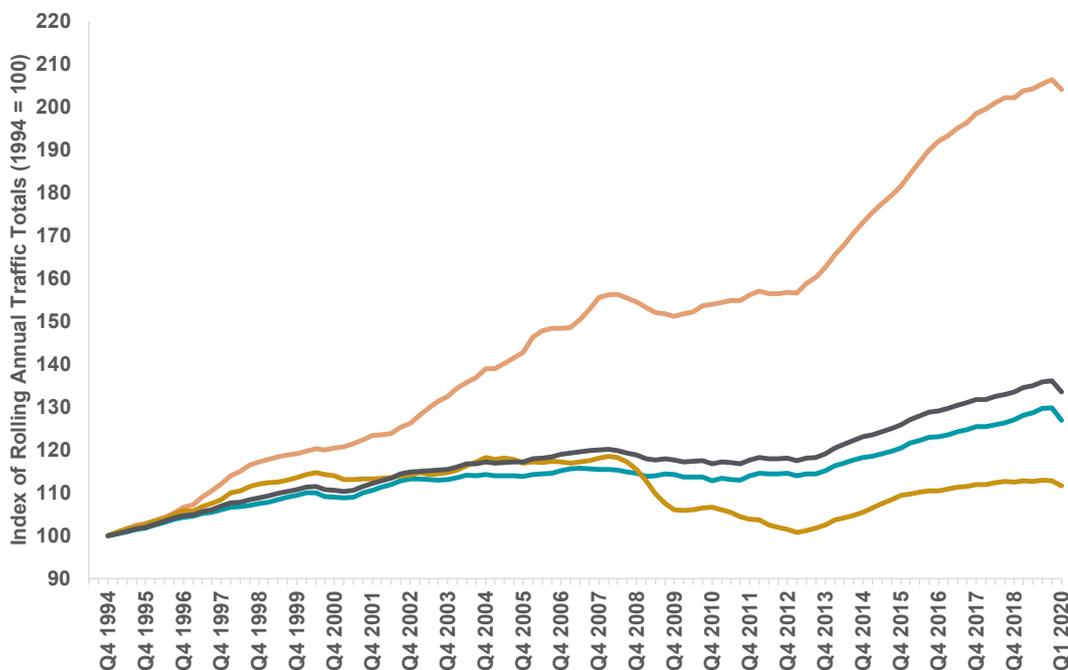


70.5%

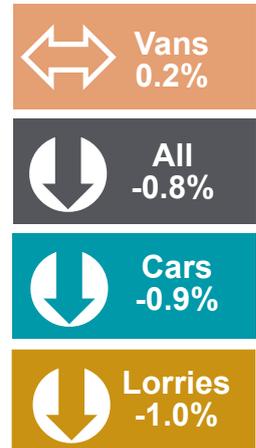


-2.3%

Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1994 [\[TRA2501b\]](#)



% Change from year ending March 2019...



Share of traffic by vehicle type, in the year ending March 2020



Road Type

Provisional estimates indicate that traffic decreased across all road types.

Compared to the year ending March 2019, in the year ending March 2020:

- **Motorway traffic** decreased by 1.5% to 68.5 bvm. The fall in motorway traffic linked to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on travel in March 2020 is estimated to have been 1.3 bvm (2.0% of annual motorway traffic). Motorway traffic has shown the largest growth over the last 20 years.
- **'A' road traffic** decreased by 1.5% to 147.3 bvm. The fall in 'A' road traffic linked to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel in March 2020 is estimated to have been 2.6 bvm (1.8% of annual 'A' road traffic).
- **Minor road traffic** was broadly stable at 133.6 bvm. The fall in minor road traffic linked to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel in March 2020 is estimated to have been 2.2 bvm (1.7% of annual minor road traffic).

Long term trends over the last 20 years

Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.

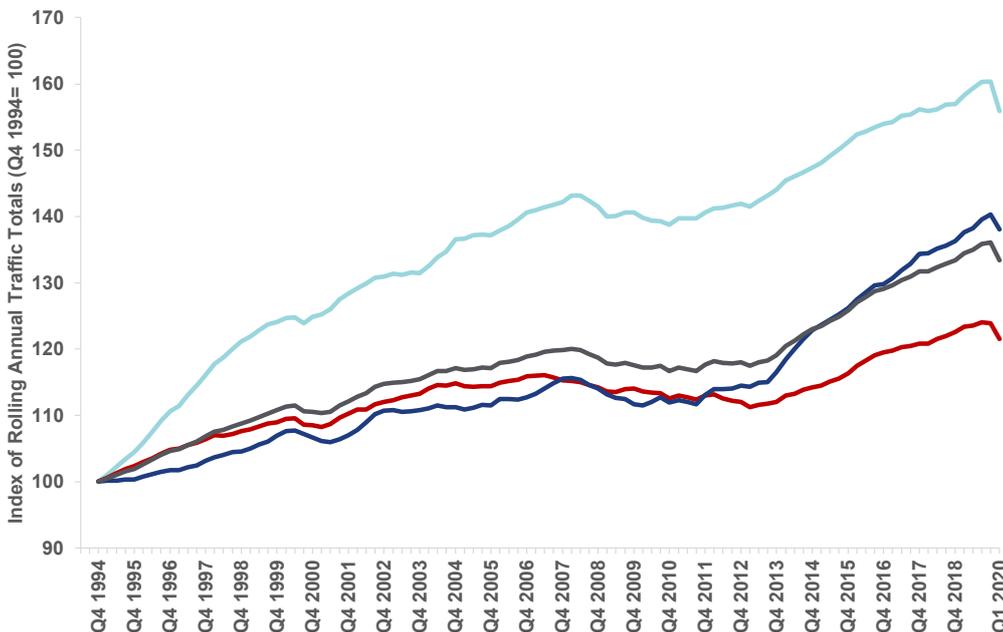
All Road Types 19.8%

Motorways 25.0%

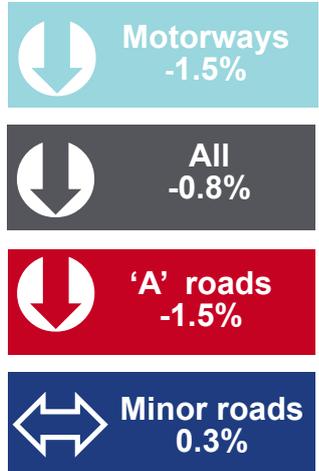
Rural 'A' 21.2%
Rural minor 34.5%

Urban 'A' -5.3%
Urban minor 24.6%

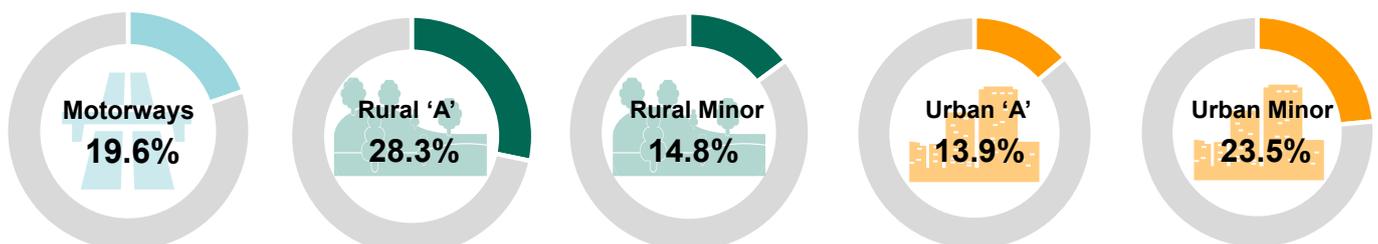
Chart 4: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1994 [\[TRA2502b\]](#)



% Change from year ending March 2019...



Share of traffic by road type, in the year ending March 2020



Background Information

Road traffic data in the daily coronavirus press conferences

The road traffic figures in the daily coronavirus press conferences use the same data source as the statistics presented in this release. However, in order to achieve a daily estimate of traffic change, lower levels of validation have been applied compared to the statistical outputs presented here.

The latest daily road traffic data is available at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/slides-and-datasets-to-accompany-coronavirus-press-conferences, and further background information at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-transport-data-methodology-note.

Exploratory analyses on the impact of coronavirus

This release includes the results of exploratory analyses that were conducted to estimate the effect on road traffic levels of the measures implemented towards the end of March 2020 to limit the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

These analyses compared the published rolling annual figures for April 2019 to March 2020 against a counterfactual rolling annual total for the same period. The counterfactual was produced using the same methodology, but replaced the road traffic data for 11-31 March 2020 with the equivalent day's data from 2019. The results of these exploratory analyses are set out on [page 2](#).

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 / LCV</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 in England and Wales, or over 3,000 in Scotland

About Rolling Annual Figures

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

(2) Year ending December 2019

(3) Year ending March 2019

(1) Year ending March 2020

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2018												2019												2020		

Comparison with the previous quarter: (1) against (2) Final estimates Provisional estimates

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

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](#)".

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. In addition to this data, final annual estimates make use of data from around 8,000 manual traffic counts and from automatic traffic counters operated by Highways England, Transport Scotland and Transport for London. Final annual statistics can estimate traffic levels in local areas and on specific road links, which cannot be produced from the provisional data. Further statistical guidance can be found online here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-traffic-statistics-guidance>.

The automatic traffic counters used as the data source in this publication 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. Between September 2018 and June 2019 a major upgrade of the DfT ATC network was carried out which involved installing a newer model of counter at about 60 per cent of sites. It is possible that this may have had a slight impact on the vehicle classification results, and therefore on the reported trend in vehicle types over this period. It is expected that planned development work on the classification algorithms will provide an opportunity to quantify and adjust for any such effects.

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	2017				2018			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Provisional estimates at time of publication	324.3	325.1	325.5	-	326.2	327.0	327.1	-
Final estimates	323.5	324.9	325.7	327.1	326.3	327.2	327.6	328.1
<i>Difference (%)</i>	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>-0.1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-0.03</i>	<i>-0.1</i>	<i>-0.2</i>	<i>-</i>

Next Release

Provisional figures for 2020 will be published on quarterly basis during 2020. The next provisional figures, for the year to end June 2020, are due to be released in October 2020.

Final 2020 annual traffic estimates are expected to be published in June 2021.

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. These statistics were designated as [National Statistics in February 2013](#).

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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