



Department for Transport

Provisional Road Traffic Estimates

Great Britain:

October 2019 - September 2020

Provisional estimates show motor vehicles travelled 288.7 billion vehicle miles in Great Britain for the year ending September 2020.

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About provisional traffic estimates

This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for October 2019 to September 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.

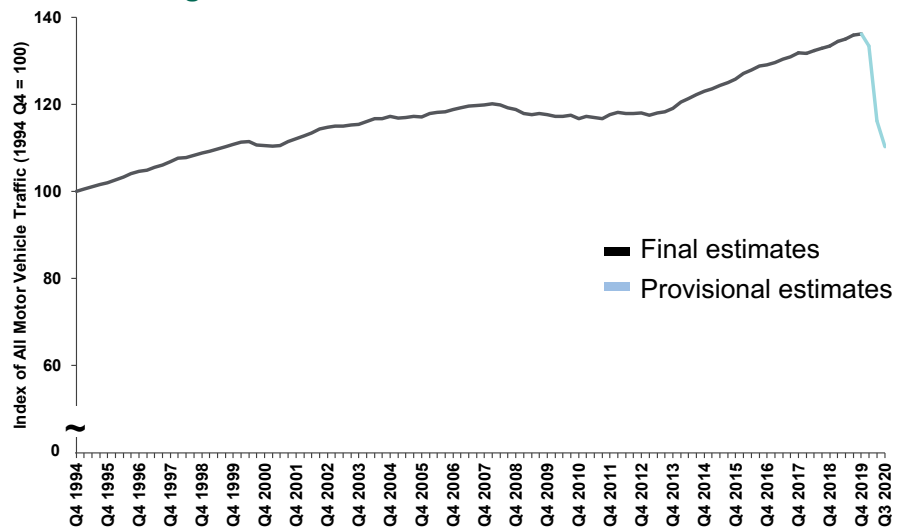
Traffic shows a seasonal pattern at the national level, being highest in summer and lowest in winter. This publication focuses on rolling annual traffic totals, which better illustrate medium and long term trends in traffic.

Key Findings

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

- ▶ **All motor vehicle traffic decreased** by 18.9%. This is the largest fall since quarterly records started in 1994.
- ▶ **Car traffic decreased** by 20.9% to 219.9 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Van and lorry traffic decreased** by 11.4% and 10.0%, respectively.
- ▶ **Traffic decreased across all main road types.** Motorways, 'A' roads and minor roads decreased by 24.9%, 18.7% and 15.9% respectively.

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



Coronavirus has had a wide impact on UK society and economic activity since March 2020. Exploratory analysis suggests that the observed decrease in road traffic levels may be linked to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the associated impacts on travel.

See [page 2](#) for more information.

Coronavirus statistics

Statistics on [Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#) are published weekly by the Department for Transport.

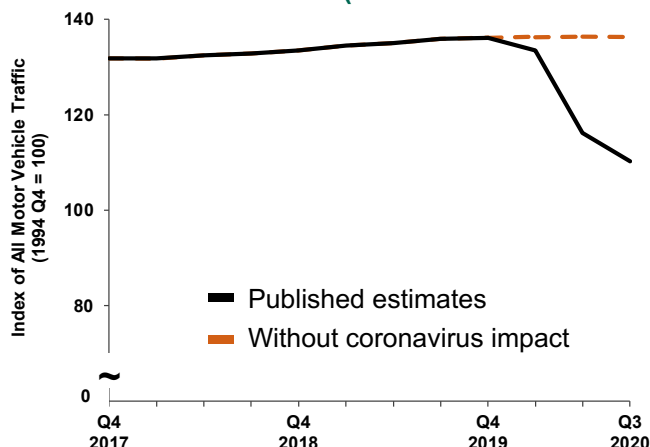
Factors Affecting Traffic - Coronavirus (COVID-19)

These statistics include the six months 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. Coronavirus has had a wide impact on UK society and economic activity since March 2020.

As these data are affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK, this should be taken into account when comparing them with previous time periods.

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 September 2020 would have remained broadly stable at 357.0 billion vehicle miles. Therefore, the provisionally estimated impact of the coronavirus pandemic is to have decreased road traffic for the year ending September 2020 by 68.2 billion vehicle miles, or 19.2% of rolling annual traffic levels.

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



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 September 2020 was more pronounced for car traffic than for van and lorry levels. There were also slightly larger falls on motorways than other road types.

Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending September 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 Jun 2020 | Year ending Sep 2019 | Year ending Sep 2015 | Year ending Sep 2010 | Year ending Sep 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 Sep 2020 | | | | | |
| All Motor Vehicle Traffic | 288.7 billion | ↓ -5.1% | ↓ -18.9% | ↓ -11.8% | ↓ -6.2% | ↔ -0.4% |
| Cars and Taxis | 219.9 billion | ↓ -6.0% | ↓ -20.9% | ↓ -14.3% | ↓ -9.8% | ↓ -6.0% |
| Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV) | 49.0 billion | ↓ -1.8% | ↓ -11.4% | ↑ 1.6% | ↑ 18.5% | ↑ 51.6% |
| Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV) | 15.6 billion | ↓ -1.7% | ↓ -10.0% | ↓ -6.2% | ↔ -4.6% | ↓ -11.0% |
| Motorways | 52.9 billion | ↓ -8.1% | ↓ -24.9% | ↓ -19.8% | ↓ -13.6% | ↔ -2.9% |
| 'A' Roads | 122.2 billion | ↓ -4.8% | ↓ -18.7% | ↓ -12.7% | ↓ -11.0% | ↓ -7.2% |
| Minor Roads | 113.6 billion | ↓ -4.1% | ↓ -15.9% | ↓ -6.2% | ↔ 4.1% | ↑ 9.6% |

Vehicle Type

Provisional estimates indicate that car, van and lorry traffic decreased over the last year.

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



Car and taxi traffic decreased by 20.9% to 219.9 billion vehicle miles (bvm) compared to the year ending September 2020. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, car traffic would have remained at the same level as the year ending September 2019.



Van traffic decreased by 11.4% to 49.0 bvm compared to the year ending September 2019. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, van traffic would have increased by 2.6%.



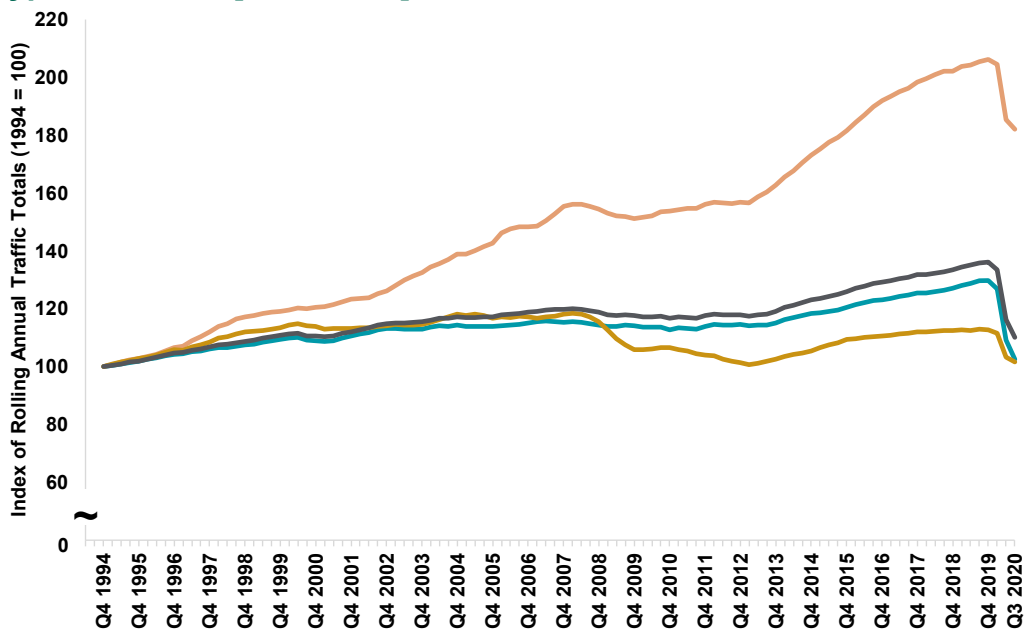
Lorry traffic decreased by 10.0% to 15.6 bvm compared to the year ending September 2019. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, lorry traffic would have remained broadly stable with the year ending September 2019.

Comparison with 20 years ago

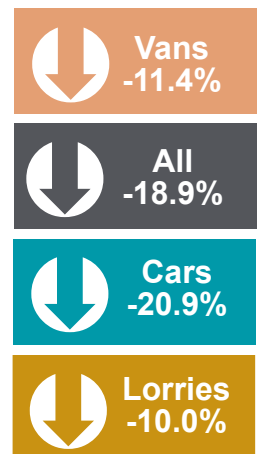
Over the last 20 years, traffic has changed at varying rates across vehicle types:



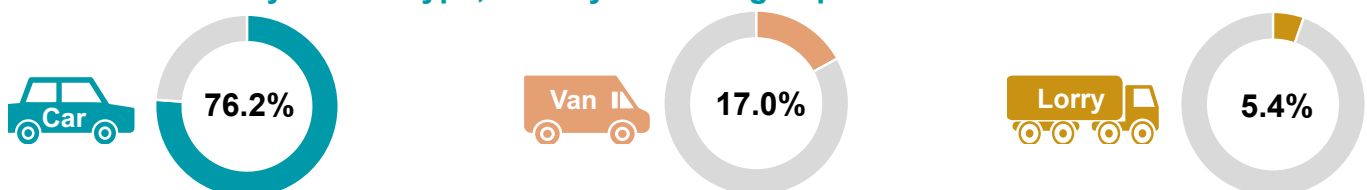
Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1994 [TRA2501b]



% Change from year ending September 2019...



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



Road Type

Provisional estimates indicate that traffic decreased across all road types.

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

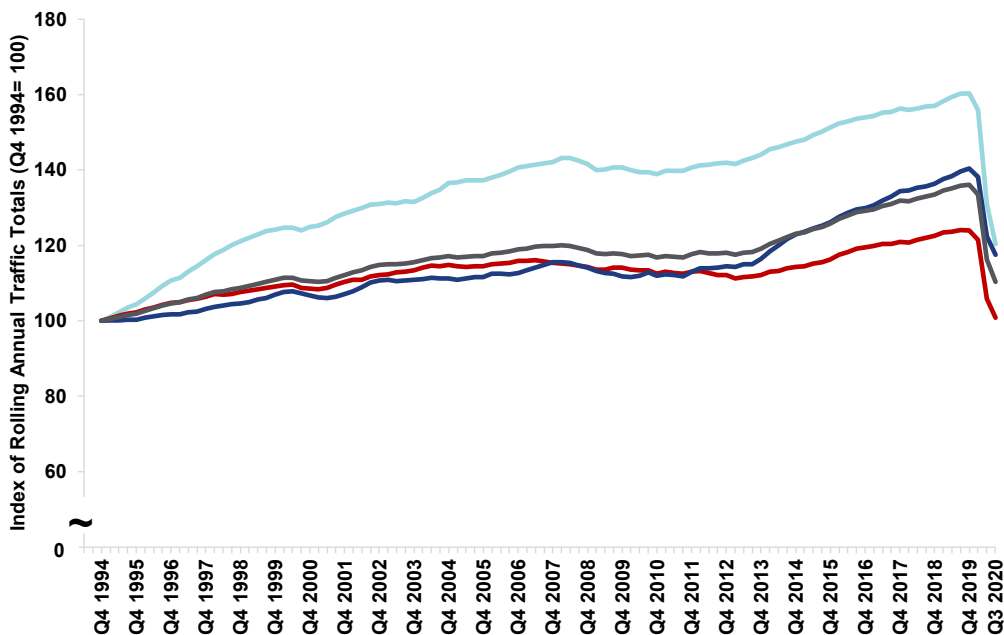
- **Motorway traffic** decreased by 24.9% to 52.9 bvm. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, motorway traffic would have decreased by 1.1%.
- **'A' road traffic** decreased by 18.7% to 122.2 bvm. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, 'A' road traffic would have remained at the same level as the year ending September 2019.
- **Minor road traffic** decreased by 15.9% to 113.6 bvm. Exploratory analysis suggests that without the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on travel, minor road traffic would have increased by 1.1%.

Comparison with 20 years ago

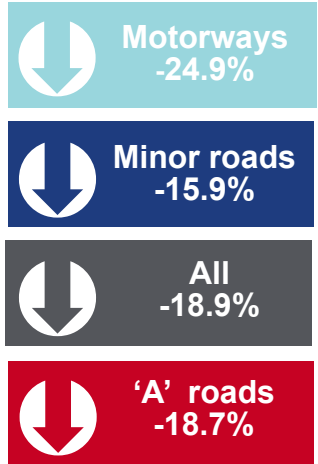
Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.



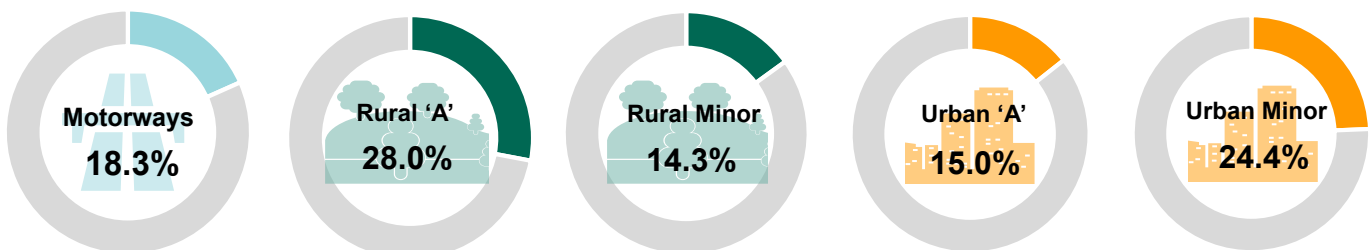
Chart 4: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1994 [TRA2502b]



% Change from year ending September 2019...



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



Background Information

Publication of daily road traffic data during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

The weekly publication of the statistics "[Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)" includes estimates of road traffic change on Great Britain's roads for each day since 1 March 2020.

The road traffic figures in the weekly publication 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. Further information is available 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.

This analyses compared the published rolling annual figures for October 2019 to September 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 March - 30 September 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 June 2019

(3) Year ending September 2019

(1) Year ending September 2020

| 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 |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 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.

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.

Next Release

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

Provisional figures for 2021 will be published on quarterly basis during 2021. The next provisional figures, for the year to end March 2021, are due to be released 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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