



Department for Transport

Vehicle Speed Compliance Statistics, Great Britain: July - September 2020

About this release

This statistical release is a quarterly release and is in addition to the annual Vehicle Speeds Compliance release.

It presents estimates of compliance with speed limits in free-flowing conditions on roads in Great Britain.

These are based on speed data from a sample of DfT's Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs), chosen to exclude locations where external factors might restrict driver behaviour (e.g. junctions, hills, sharp bends and speed cameras).

The statistics provide insights into speeds at which drivers choose to travel when free to do so, but are not estimates of average speeds across the whole network, which are available separately (see page 7).

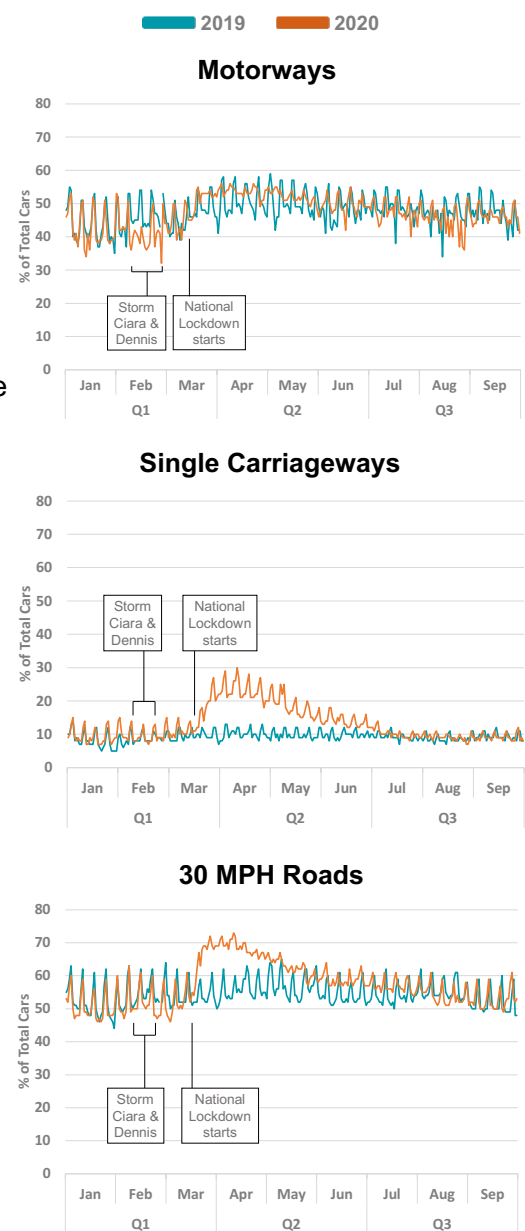
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The proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit during July to September 2020 was similar to the equivalent period of 2019, unlike the previous quarter when comparative levels of speeding had been higher during the first national lockdown.

- ▶ In quarter 3 2020, (49%) of cars in free flowing conditions **exceeded** the speed limit on motorways. On National Speed Limit (NSL) single carriageways with a car speed limit of 60mph, (9%) of cars **exceeded** the speed limit in Q3 2020, while on 30mph roads (55%) of cars **exceeded** the speed limit. These figures were almost identical to what was reported in Q3 2019.
- ▶ In Q2 2020 the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit increased sharply compared to Q1 2020, this trend began soon after the initial coronavirus national lockdown which started at the end of Q1 2020.
- ▶ In Q3 2020 coronavirus restrictions changed from national to more localized forms. As a result, road traffic and speed limit exceedance has returned to normal levels, more similar to that of Q3 2019.

Figure 1 Proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit

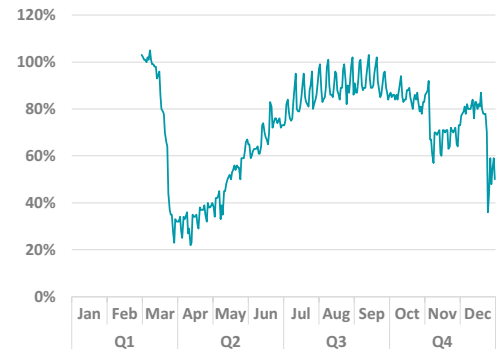


Important information about this release

Context

- ▶ The annual speed compliance statistics normally show very little variation in compliance with the speed limit from year to year, so without the coronavirus pandemic, we would expect speed limit compliance to have remained in line with previous years.
- ▶ However, during the first national lockdown, which started in March 2020, road traffic decreased significantly as people were encouraged to stay at home (see Figure 2). Throughout Q2 2020, road traffic levels began to rise back to normal levels. In Q3 2020, road traffic levels were broadly constant as traffic remained at near normal levels.
- ▶ This trend in road traffic coincides with reduced speed limit exceedance, when compared to Q2 2020.

Figure 2: Car use on roads, since March 2020



For more information on transport use during the coronavirus pandemic, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

Understanding and Interpreting these statistics



What do free flow speeds tell us ?	Free flow speeds reflect the speeds drivers may travel at when free to do so.	They are not representative of the level of speeding across the whole road network – which we would expect to be lower.
What roads are covered?	Only sites where the road conditions are free flowing and there are no junctions, hills, sharp bends, speed enforcement cameras or other traffic calming measures.	The statistics do not cover roads where the road layout or traffic calming measures are likely to constrain vehicle speeds. This includes smart motorways.
Comparing Data Between Years?	Only broad-scale comparisons of patterns in compliance and speeds over time periods of 5 or more years can be made confidently, unless the changes are large and the context is clear.	This release covers July to September 2020 and therefore cannot be directly compared to annual publications. 2019 quarterly statistics are provided throughout the release for comparative purposes.

Key terms

Exceeding the speed limit

Vehicles travelling at a speed higher than their applicable speed limit are defined as “exceeding the speed limit”.

Free flow speed

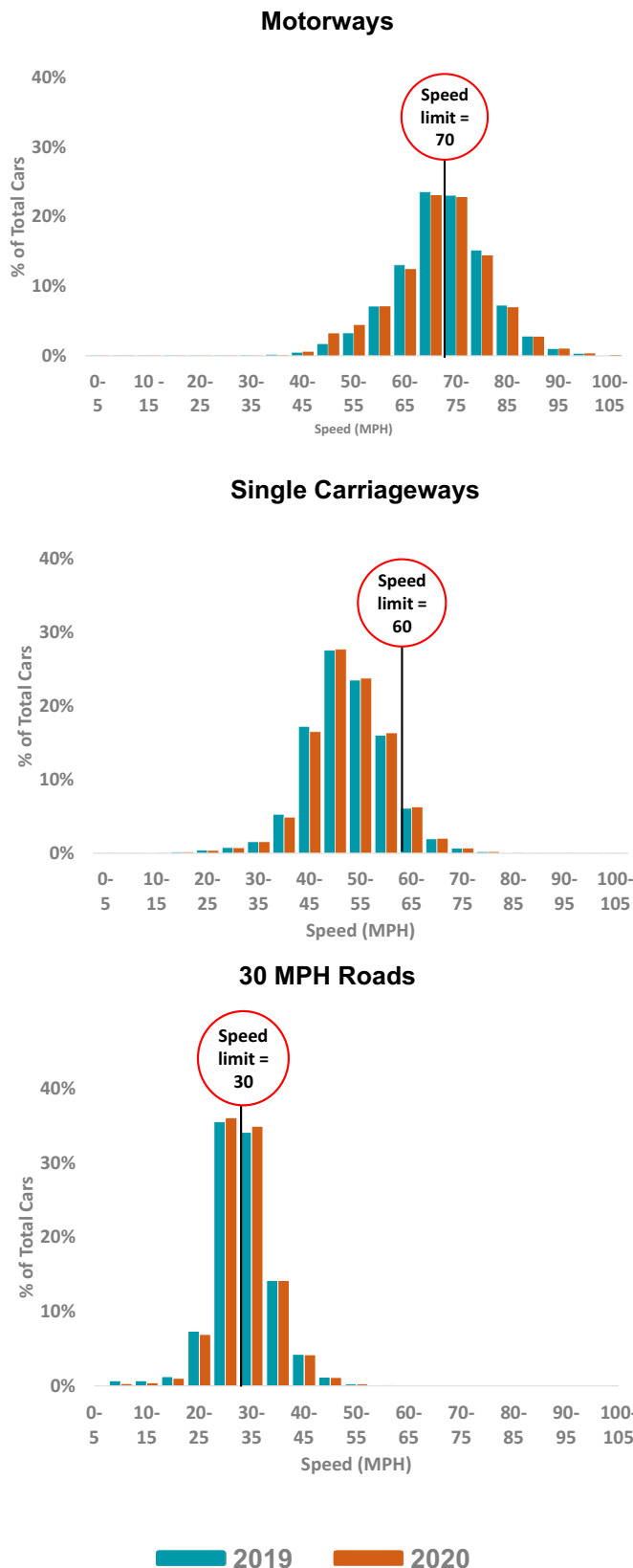
Free flow speeds are observed in locations where external factors which might restrict driver behaviour (e.g. junctions, hills, sharp bends and speed enforcement cameras) are not present.

Speed Limits

As of 2015, speed limits for cars are 70mph on Motorways and 60mph on National Speed Limit Single Carriageways. A complete breakdown of national speed limits can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk/speed-limits>.



Figure 3: Distribution of car speeds by road type in Great Britain, July to September 2020



Summary

- ▶ In Q3 2020, the distribution of car speeds across different road types was broadly similar to Q3 2019.

Figure 4: Percentage of Cars exceeding the speed limit by road type (Table SPE2501)

	2019			2020		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3
Motorways	Exceeding speed limit					
	48	52	50	46	53	49
Single Carriageway	Exceeding speed limit by 10mph+					
	11	13	12	10	15	11
30 mph roads	Exceeding speed limit					
	9	10	9	10	17	9
	Exceeding speed limit by 10mph+					
	1	1	1	1	3	1
	Exceeding speed limit					
	54	56	54	53	63	55
	Exceeding speed limit by 10mph+					
	6	6	6	6	8	6

- ▶ Whilst overall speed limit exceedance was higher during Q2 2020 compared to Q2 2019, speed limit exceedance during Q3 2020 was more similar to levels seen during Q3 2019, across all road types.
- ▶ On motorways, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit in Q3 2020 was slightly lower (49%), compared to Q2 2020 (53%).
- ▶ On NSL single carriageways (60mph limit), the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit in Q3 2020 was lower (9%), when compared to Q2 2020 (17%).
- ▶ On 30 mph roads, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit in Q3 2020 was (55%), this proportion was higher in Q2 2020 to (63%).



Figure 5: Cars exceeding the speed limit by time of day in Great Britain, 2019

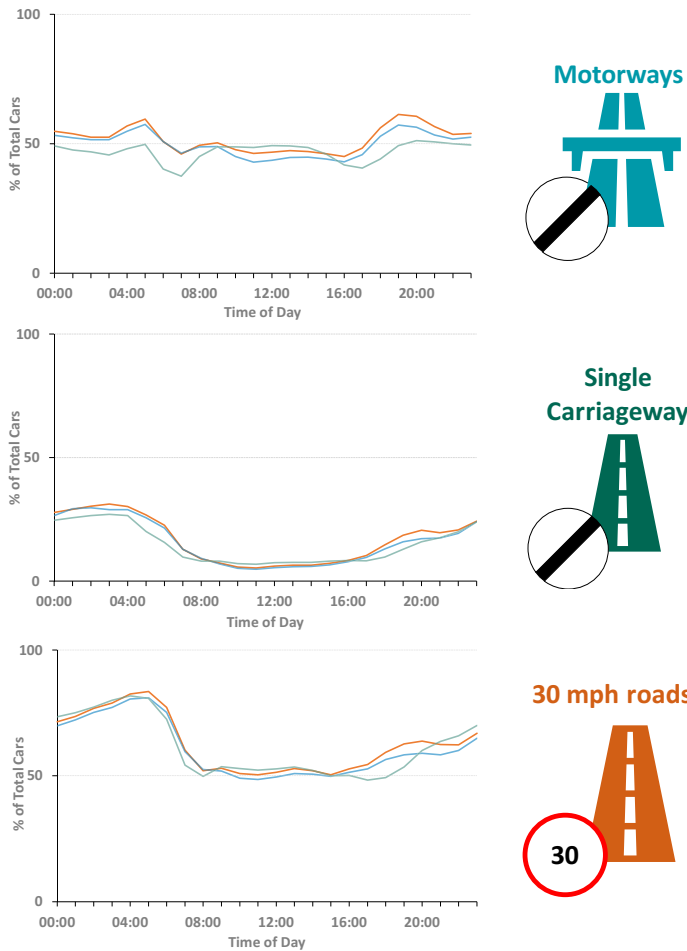
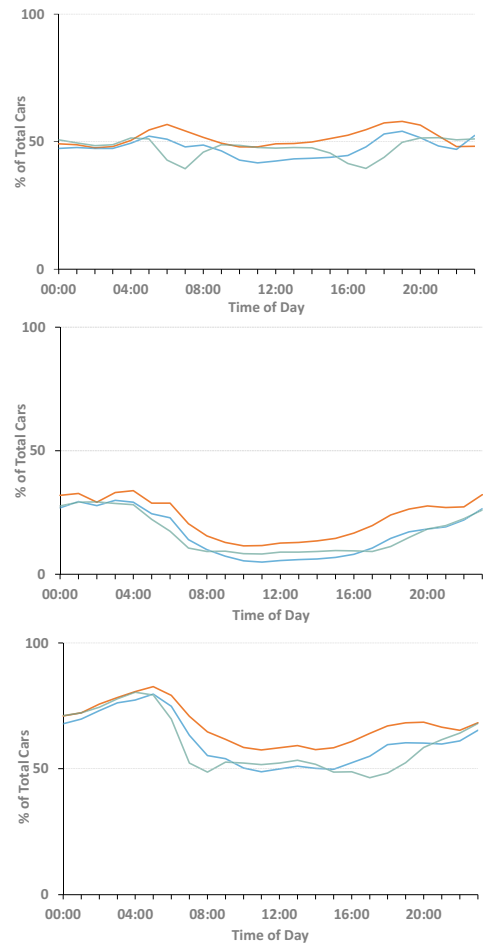


Figure 6: Cars exceeding the speed limit by time of day in Great Britain, 2020



Quarter 1 (January to March) Quarter 2 (April to June) Quarter 3 (July to September)

Summary

These charts show how the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit varied by time of day for the first three quarters in 2019 and 2020.

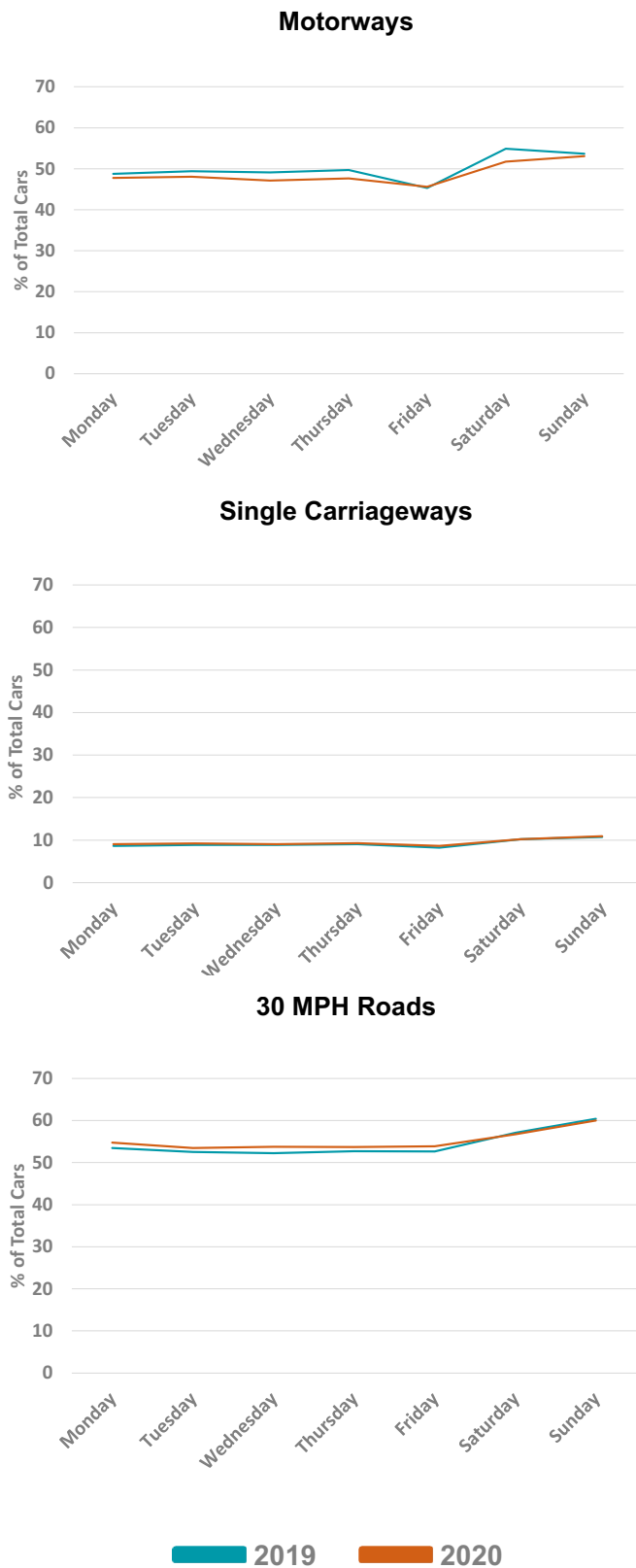
In Q2 2020, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit was higher across all road types for most hours of the day compared to other quarters. In Q3 2020:

- ▶ For all road types, the overall hourly patterns returned to levels similar to Q3 2019, as traffic levels returned to more normal levels.
- ▶ On motorways, a lower proportion of cars exceeded the speed limit at night (50%), compared to the corresponding figure in Q3 2019 (54%).
- ▶ As people were encouraged to travel to work if safe to do so during Q3 2020, which saw levels of traffic during peak rush hour times increase towards normal. In conjunction with this, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit at peak rush hour times returned to normal levels across all road types, similar to what was seen in Q3 2019.

Compliance with the speed limit by day of week



Figure 7: Cars exceeding the speed limit by day of week in Great Britain, July to September



Summary

These charts show how the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit varied by day of week. In Q3 2020, overall daily patterns were broadly similar to Q3 2019.

Figure 8: Percentage of Cars exceeding the speed limit on weekdays and weekends (Table SPE2503)

	2019			2020		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3
Motorways						
Weekday	46	50	49	44	53	47
Weekend	54	58	54	52	55	52
Single Carriageway						
Weekday	8	9	9	9	17	9
Weekend	11	12	10	14	19	11
30 mph roads						
Weekday	52	55	53	51	62	54
Weekend	60	61	59	59	64	58

In Q3 2020:

- ▶ On all road types, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit reflected levels seen in Q3 2019, as traffic levels returned to normal. This is a decrease from Q2 2020, where speed limit exceedance was higher.
- ▶ On all road types, the proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit remained higher on weekends than on weekdays, when compared to previous years.
- ▶ Across all road types, Sundays saw the highest proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit.

Background information

What's included in this release

This release has been produced in addition to the annual publication, which is due to be released in June 2021. This release provides a quarterly breakdown of car speed compliance statistics during periods covering the coronavirus pandemic, to investigate car speed compliance trends during the pandemic period.

This second quarterly release covers the period July to September 2020. It looks at car speed limit compliance on motorways, National Speed Limit single carriageways and 30mph roads.

A daily time series analysis of car speed limit exceedance between July to September 2020 is provided. Also, a daily time series of car usage on roads has been included to provide additional context.

Vehicle definitions

Car: Includes cars, car-derived vans and dual-purpose vehicles (definition of these vehicles can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/car-derived-vans-and-dual-purpose-vehicles>).

More information is available in the [notes & definitions](#) document.

Sources, strengths and weaknesses of the data

- ▶ These estimates are based on traffic speed data collected from a current sample of 77 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs) operated by DfT. In some cases (e.g. motorways), two ATCs may be covering different directions of traffic flow at the same location. The number of individual cars observed in the production of the July to September 2020 statistics was 66 million. The breakdown for each year is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Number of Automatic Traffic Counters and Vehicles used to produce Free Flow Vehicle Speed Statistics for Great Britain, 2011 to 2020

Year	Automatic Traffic Counters Used	Vehicles used (millions)	Significant proportion of data removed from (sites)	Number
2011	99	685	3 motorways	
2012	99	702	3 motorways	
2013	98	605	3 motorways	
2014	105	567	3 motorways	
2015	107	743	3 motorways	
2016	107	725		0
2017	92	637		0
2018	102	655		0
2019	79	510		0
2020 Jan-Jun	78	91 (cars only)	1 motorway	
2020 Jul-Sep	77	66 (cars only)	1 30mph road	

Sources, strengths and weaknesses of the data (cont.)

- ▶ The ATC technology used to collect this data can experience technical failures and produce output data which is incorrect and not representative of the traffic passing the counter. The methodology accounts for these occasions and removes any data which is not accurate. The ATCs classify vehicles using the number of axles, the axle spacing and the length of the vehicle.
- ▶ Full guidance on the sources and methods used to compile these statistics, plus information on speed limits, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/speeds-statistics>.
- ▶ Average speed statistics for both local authority managed 'A' roads and the Strategic Road Network are available online as part of a suite of travel time measures from the Road Congestion and Reliability Statistics series at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-congestion-and-reliability-statistics>. Note that this series also uses the term "free flow speed" but this is calculated in a different way (e.g. 'capped' at national speed limits) and using a different data source to the statistics presented in this release. The data for this release has been recorded consistently well during times when traffic volumes are abnormally low or high.

Next update

The October to December 2020 release is due to be published in March 2021. We are continuing to review methodologies and the coverage of these statistics and further changes may be reflected in the next publication. We welcome feedback on this publication including content, timing, and format via email to roadtraff.stats@dft.gov.uk.

National Statistics

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

Free Flow Vehicle Speed Statistics were assessed by the UK Statistics Authority against the Code of Practice and 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: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-series>.

Department for Transport (DfT) statistics Twitter feed



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