



Department for Transport

# Road Lengths in Great Britain 2020

**In 2020, the total road length in Great Britain was estimated to be 247,500 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 2020. Detailed statistical tables can be accessed online via the [road length statistical series](#).

To note, some of the figures in this release may not sum due to rounding.

## In this publication

- Trends Over Time...[p2](#)
- Road Length by Country...[p3](#)
- Rural / Urban Breakdowns...[p4](#)
- Background...[p4](#)

There were 31,800 miles of **major road** in Great Britain in 2020, consisting of:

- 2,300 miles of motorway (99% trunk, 1% principal)
- 29,500 miles of 'A' road (18% trunk, 82% principal)

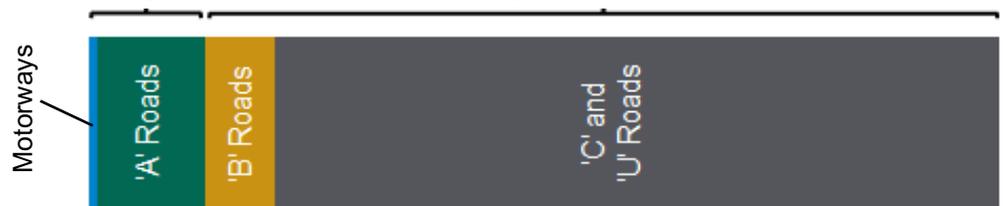
There were 215,700 miles of **minor road** in Great Britain in 2020, consisting of:

- 18,900 miles of 'B' road
- 196,800 miles of 'C' and 'U' roads

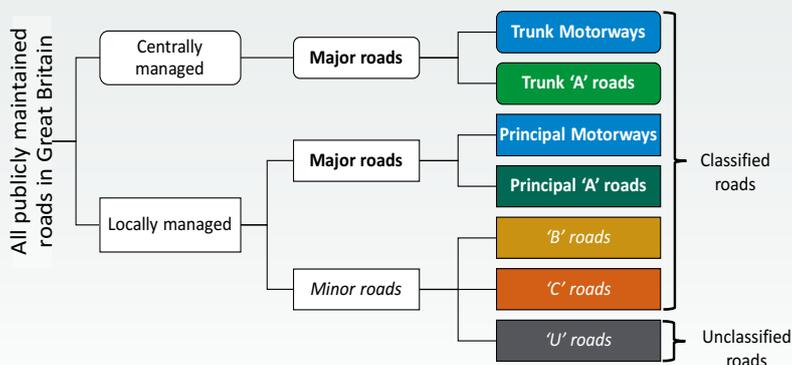
## Road length in Great Britain in 2020, by road type

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

Minor Roads - 87% of total road length (215,700 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).

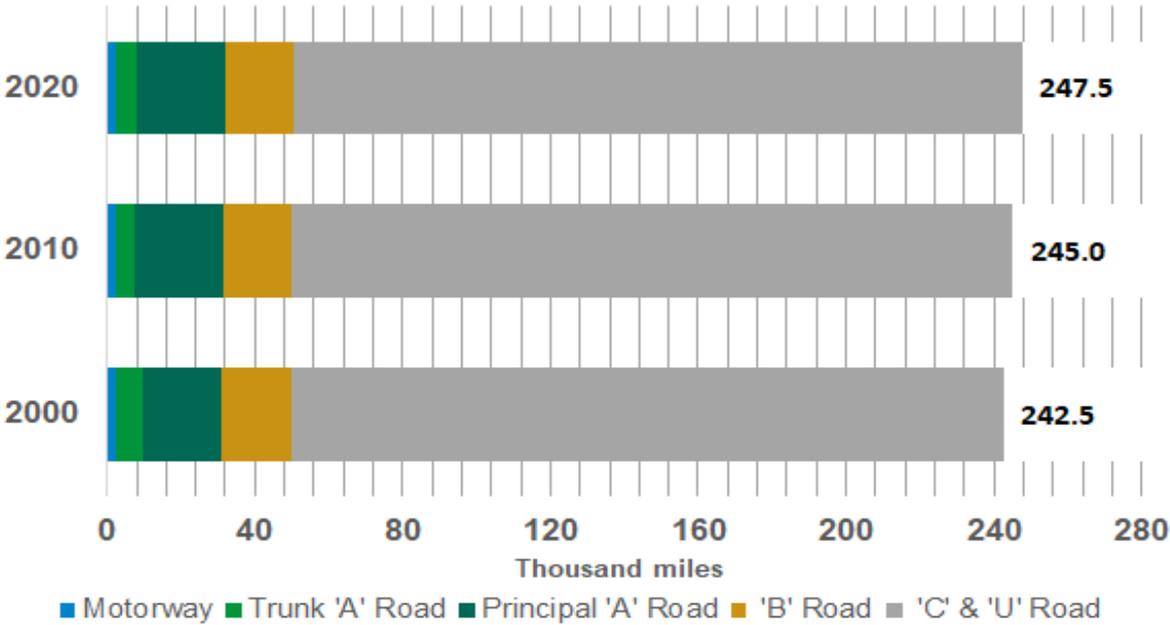
The rest of the **major roads** (trunk motorways and 'A' roads) are **managed centrally** by Highways England (formerly the Highways Agency), Transport Scotland, and the Welsh Government.

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 2020, there were 247,500 miles of road in Great Britain. This was 2,600 more miles than a decade earlier in 2010 (a 1.1% increase) and 5,000 more miles than in 2000 (a 2.1% increase).

**Chart 1: Road length by road type in Great Britain, 2000 to 2020 in miles** [\[RDL0103\]](#)



There were 700 more miles of major road in Great Britain in 2020 than in 2000, a 2.3% increase, with **motorways** contributing 100 miles and **'A' roads** contributing 600 miles of that increase. Whilst the overall length of 'A' roads increased by 600 miles between 2000 and 2020, the length of **trunk 'A' roads** decreased by 1,800 miles and the length of **principal 'A' roads** increased by 2,400 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.

There were 4,300 more miles of **minor road** in Great Britain in 2020 than in 2000, almost entirely driven by an increase in **'C' and 'U' roads**.

Interpreting these statistics		
<b>Which roads are included?</b>	✓	✗
<b>What does 'length' mean?</b>		
<b>Do we know why road length has changed?</b>		

<sup>1</sup> An adopted highway is a highway road that was previously privately-owned road or centrally managed by government, but has now become a public road which is managed and maintained by the highway authority (typically a Local Authority), pursuant to the 1980 Highways Act.

# Road Length by Country

Of the 247,500 miles of road in Great Britain in 2020, 189,700 miles (77%) of road were in England, 36,800 miles (15%) were in Scotland, and 21,000 miles (9%) were in Wales. Table 1 and Chart 2 show the varying composition of each country's road network by road type.

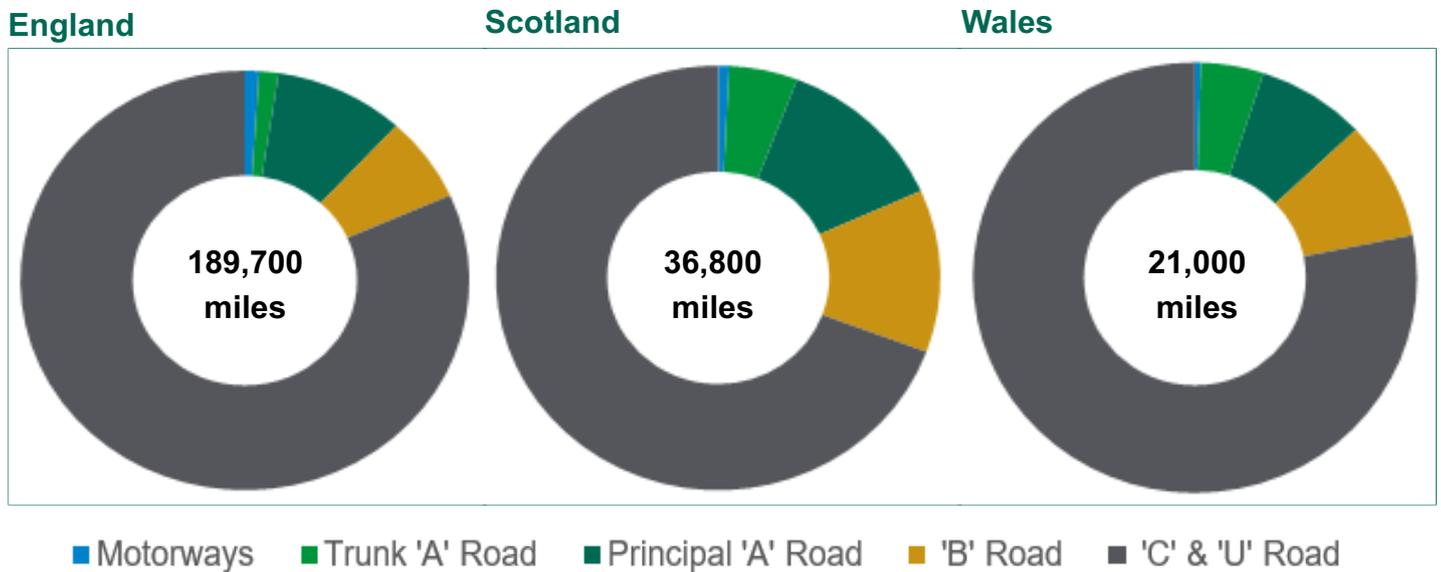
**Table 1: Breakdown of road length by country and road type in 2020** [\[RDL0101\]](#)

Thousand Miles (000s)

% of Road Length

	Major Roads			Minor Roads			Total		Major Roads			Minor Roads			Total
	Trunk	Principal	All	'B' Roads	'C' & 'U' Roads	All			Trunk	Principal	All	'B' Roads	'C' & 'U' Roads	All	
England	4.5	17.8	22.4	12.4	154.9	167.3	189.7	England	2	9	12	7	82	88	100
Scotland	2.1	4.6	6.7	4.6	25.5	30.1	36.8	Scotland	6	13	18	12	69	82	100
Wales	1.1	1.7	2.7	1.9	16.4	18.3	21.0	Wales	5	8	13	9	78	87	100
Great Britain	7.7	24.1	31.8	18.9	196.8	215.7	247.5	Great Britain	3	10	13	8	80	87	100

**Chart 2: Road length by country and road type in Great Britain in 2020** [\[RDL0101\]](#)



The Strategic Road Network (SRN) consists of all trunk motorways and trunk 'A' roads in England. In 2020, the SRN was 4,500 miles long and made up 2% of the total length of road in England. By comparison, **trunk roads** made up a higher proportion of roads in Scotland (6% of total road length) and Wales (5%). The composition of these trunk roads differed in each country, with 42% of trunk roads classified as motorways in England, compared to only 8% in Wales and 14% in Scotland.

In 2020, a higher proportion of the road network in Scotland consisted of **major roads** (18%) compared with England (12%) and Wales (13%). A greater proportion of **'A' roads** were classified as **principal** in England (87%) compared to Scotland (72%) and Wales (63%).

## Scotland and Wales estimates

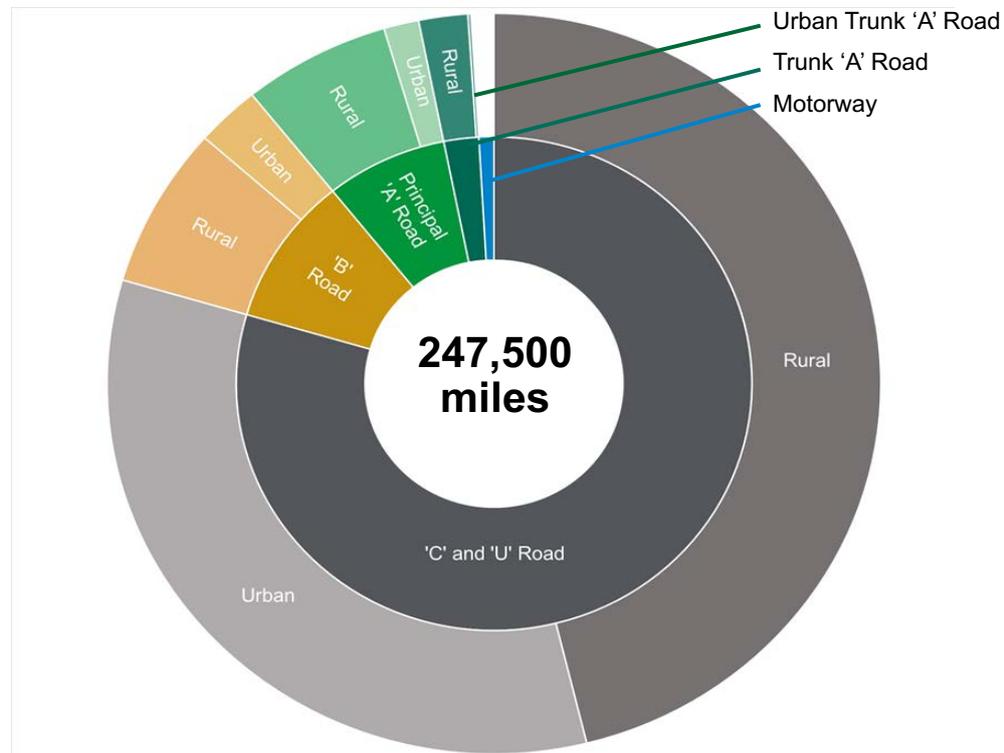
Scotland and Wales produce their own estimates of length. Scotland - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-no-38-2019-edition/> Wales - <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Transport/Roads/Lengths-and-Conditions>

## Rural / Urban Breakdowns

In 2020, the majority of road length in Great Britain was rural, with 76% of 'A' roads, 81% of 'B' roads, and 58% of the combined 'C' and '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 three countries.

**Chart 3: Urban/Rural road length by road type in Great Britain, in 2020**



### 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.

## Background Information

### Rounding

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

### Methodology changes

Ongoing improvements to the accuracy of data sources and methodology may account for some of the slight changes between years.

Further technical and methodological information can be found: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-network-size-and-condition-statistics-guidance>.

## Traffic and Road Length in England

Vehicle activity is unevenly distributed across Great Britain's road network. Road traffic estimates for 2020 are provisionally due to be published in June 2021, and so were unavailable at the time of publication.

**In 2019**, 62% of the motor vehicle miles travelled were on motorways and 'A' roads, despite comprising only 13% of the road network by length.

On an average day in 2019, 75 times more vehicles travelled along a typical stretch of motorway than a typical stretch of rural minor road ('B' roads, 'C' roads and unclassified roads).

## Urban / Rural Methodology

There have been no significant methodology changes for the publication this year.

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). Scotland have recently updated their Urban/Rural Classifications. We will be making use of this newer classification for Scotland in the 2021 series for Road Length Statistics, following a review of the data. More information on the Urban/Rural classifications used in the 2020 Road Length Statistics can be found at the following links:

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

## Further Information about this Release

- Data tables and guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-network-size-and-condition>.
- For anything else, please email [road.length@dft.gov.uk](mailto:road.length@dft.gov.uk)

## 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. The product is continuously being developed with Ordnance Survey (OS), GeoPlace and other stakeholders. If you have any questions, please email [road.length@dft.gov.uk](mailto:road.length@dft.gov.uk).



To hear more about DfT statistics publications as they are released please follow us on Twitter via our @DfTstats account: <https://twitter.com/dftstats>. TWITTER, TWEET, RETWEET and the Twitter logo are trademarks of Twitter, Inc. or its affiliates

## 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 Length in Great Britain 2021, is due to be published April 2022.