



Department  
for Transport

# Provisional Road Traffic Estimates

## Great Britain: April 2020 to March 2021

Road traffic trends since March 2020 have been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK.

**Provisional estimates show motor vehicles travelled 257.2 billion vehicle miles in Great Britain for the year ending March 2021.**

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### About provisional traffic estimates

This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for April 2020 to March 2021. 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.

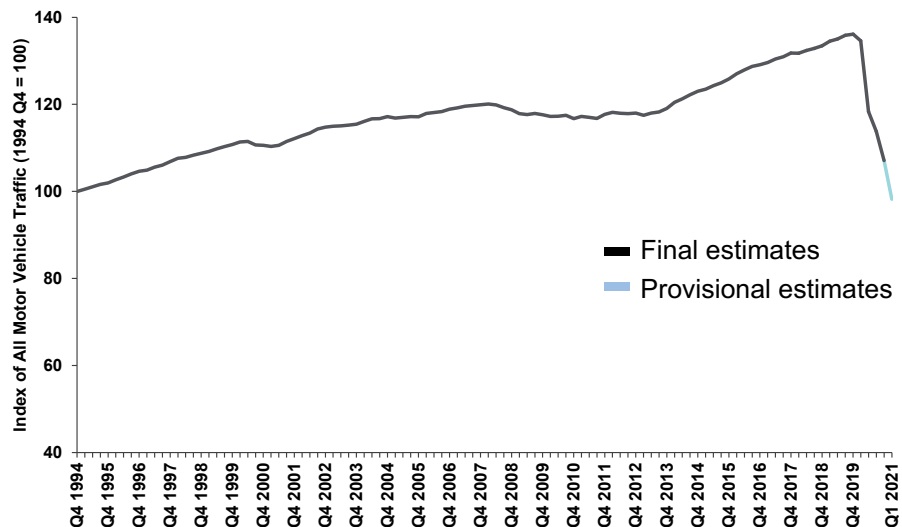
Traffic shows a seasonal pattern at the national level, being highest in summer and lowest in winter. This publication focuses on rolling annual traffic totals, which better illustrate medium and long term trends in traffic.

### Key Findings

Compared to the year ending March 2020, in the year ending March 2021:

- ▶ **All motor vehicle traffic decreased** by 27.0%. This is the largest fall since quarterly records started in 1994.
- ▶ **Car traffic decreased** by 31.0% to 189.1 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Van and lorry traffic decreased** by 14.2% and 6.8%, respectively.
- ▶ **Traffic decreased across all main road types.** Motorways, 'A' roads and minor roads decreased by 32.8%, 28.3% and 22.7%, 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. 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.

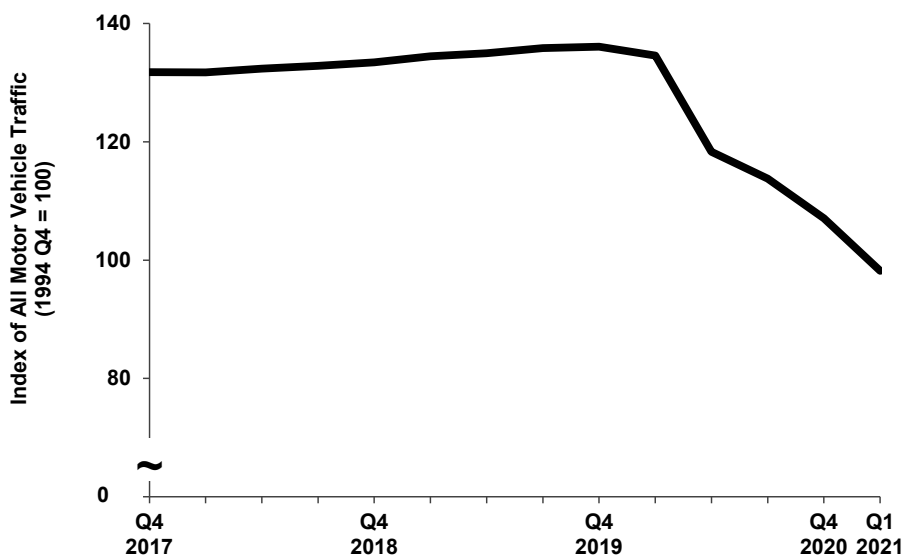
## Factors Affecting Traffic - Coronavirus (COVID-19)

These statistics include the twelve 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.

The decline seen in road traffic levels at the end of March 2021 was more pronounced for car traffic than for van and lorry levels. There were also slightly larger falls on motorways than other road types.

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



The trends have also varied across the year, as shown in the road traffic daily trends published on a weekly basis at:

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic).

## Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending March 2021 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 2020	Year ending Mar 2020	Year ending Mar 2016	Year ending Mar 2011	Year ending Mar 2001
<b>All Motor Vehicle Traffic</b>	257.2 billion	↓ -8.3%	↓ -27.0%	↓ -22.7%	↓ -16.2%	↓ -11.0%
<b>Cars and Taxis</b>	189.1 billion	↓ -9.8%	↓ -31.0%	↓ -27.4%	↓ -22.2%	↓ -18.9%
<b>Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV)</b>	47.9 billion	↓ -5.0%	↓ -14.2%	↓ -3.4%	↑ 15.4%	↑ 47.5%
<b>Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV)</b>	16.2 billion	↓ -0.8%	↓ -6.8%	↓ -3.8%	↔ -0.4%	↓ -6.7%
<b>Motorways</b>	46.8 billion	↓ -11.1%	↓ -32.8%	↓ -30.1%	↓ -23.8%	↓ -14.9%
<b>'A' Roads</b>	106.0 billion	↓ -8.1%	↓ -28.3%	↓ -25.5%	↓ -22.6%	↓ -19.2%
<b>Minor Roads</b>	104.3 billion	↓ -7.2%	↓ -22.7%	↓ -15.4%	↔ -4.0%	↔ 1.6%

# Vehicle Type

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

In the year ending March 2021:



**Car and taxi traffic** decreased by 31.0% to 189.1 billion vehicle miles (bvm) compared to the year ending end March 2020.



**Van traffic** decreased by 14.2% to 47.9 bvm compared to the year ending March 2020.



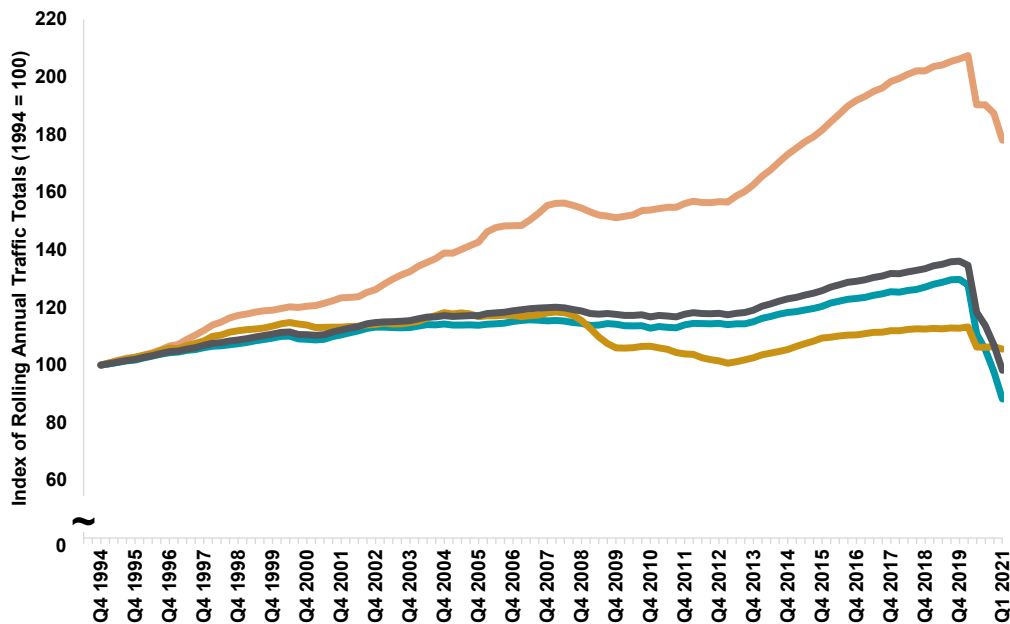
**Lorry traffic** decreased by 6.8% to 16.2 bvm compared to the year ending March 2020.

## Comparison with 20 years ago

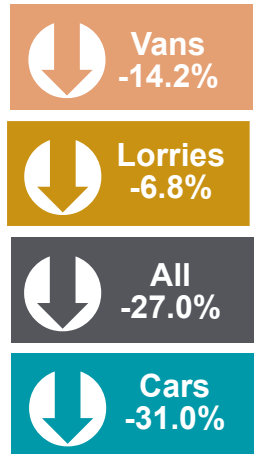
Over the last 20 years, traffic has changed at varying rates across vehicle types:



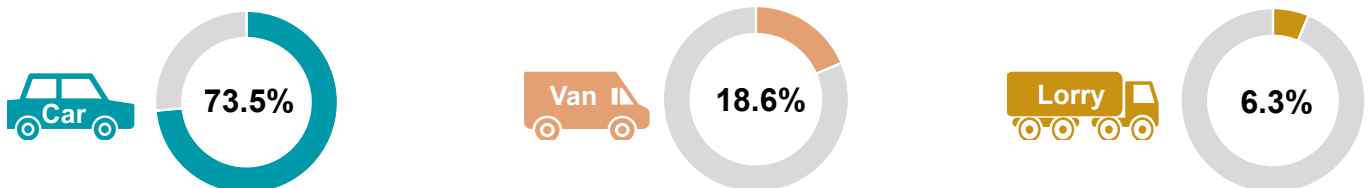
Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1994 [TRA2501b]



% Change from year ending March 2020...



## Share of traffic by vehicle type, in the year ending March 2021



# Road Type

Provisional estimates indicate that traffic decreased across all road types over the last year.

Compared to the year ending March 2020, in the year ending March 2021:

- **Motorway traffic** decreased by 32.8% to 46.8 bvm.
- **'A' road traffic** decreased by 28.3% to 106.0 bvm.
- **Minor road traffic** decreased by 22.7% to 104.3 bvm.

## Comparison with 20 years ago

Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.

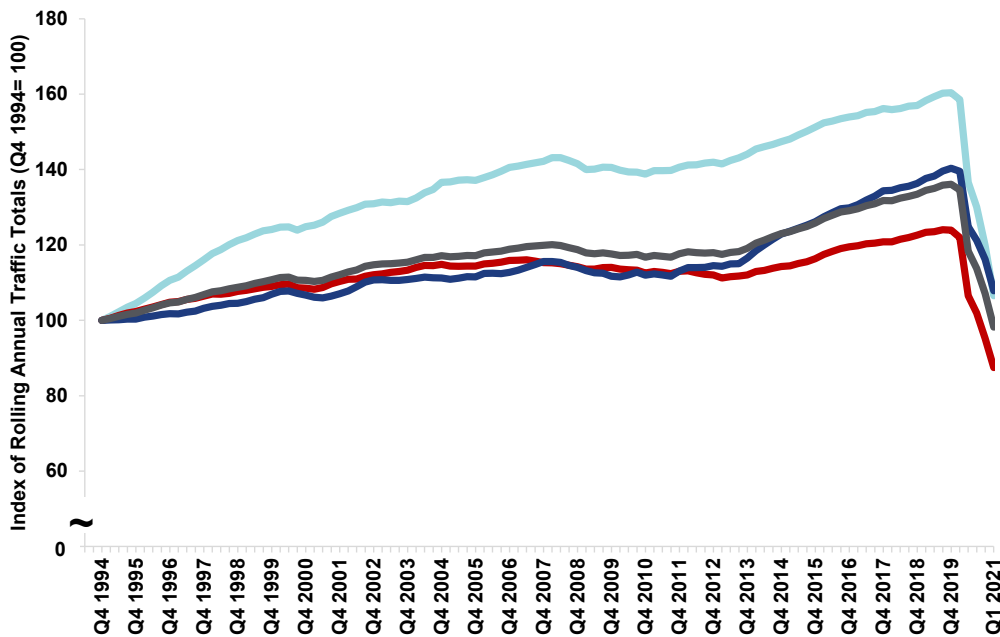
All Road Types -11.0%

Motorways -14.9%

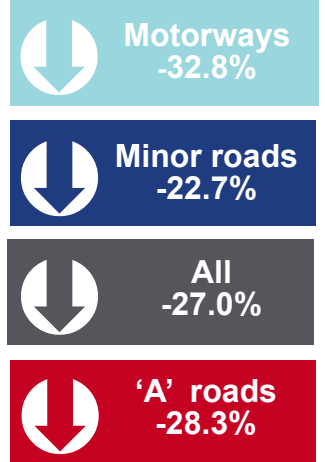
Rural 'A' -13.8%  
Rural minor 6.6%

Urban 'A' -27.9%  
Urban minor -1.3%

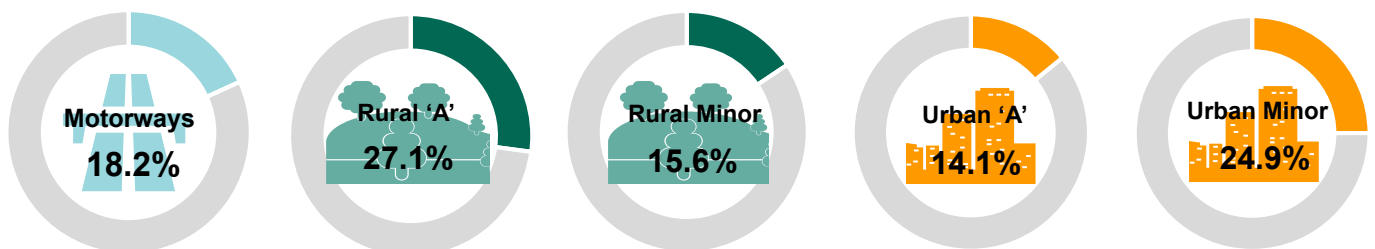
Chart 4: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1994 [\[TRA2502b\]](#)



% Change from year ending March 2020...



## Share of traffic by road type, in the year ending March 2021



## 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](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-transport-data-methodology-note).

### 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
<b>Vehicle Types</b>	<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
<b>Road Types</b>	<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 Dec 2020

(3) Year ending March 2020

(1) Year ending March 2021

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
2019												2020												2021		

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](mailto: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.

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

In 2020 the Department revised its minor road traffic estimates for 2010 to 2019 as a result of the latest minor roads benchmarking exercise, which is conducted every decade. As part of our continuous review of road traffic methodology, the Department for Transport's Road Traffic Statistics Team are undertaking a deep dive into the current minor road methodology with the aim of identifying areas that would continue to improve the robustness and granularity of annual estimates of traffic on minor roads and the consistency of the historic time series. A document setting out the scope of the review is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-traffic-statistics-guidance>

### Next Release

Final 2021 annual traffic estimates are expected to be published in May 2022.

Provisional figures for 2021 will be published on quarterly basis during 2021. The next provisional figures, for the year to end June 2021, are due to be released in September 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](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-series)

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