Road Traffic Statistics

Statistical Release

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Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates: Great Britain, Quarter 1 2013

This statistical release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain between January and March (Quarter 1) 2013.

The provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a national network of around 180 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs). In addition to counting traffic, the ATCs record some of the physical properties of passing vehicles which are used to classify traffic by vehicle type.

Quarterly estimates are provisional until they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year. Therefore, figures for 2012 and 2013 are provisional in this release. Annual estimates for 2012 are due to be published in June.

The traffic estimates in this release are seasonally adjusted unless otherwise stated.

Comparing Q1 (January to March) 2013 with the same quarter in the previous year:

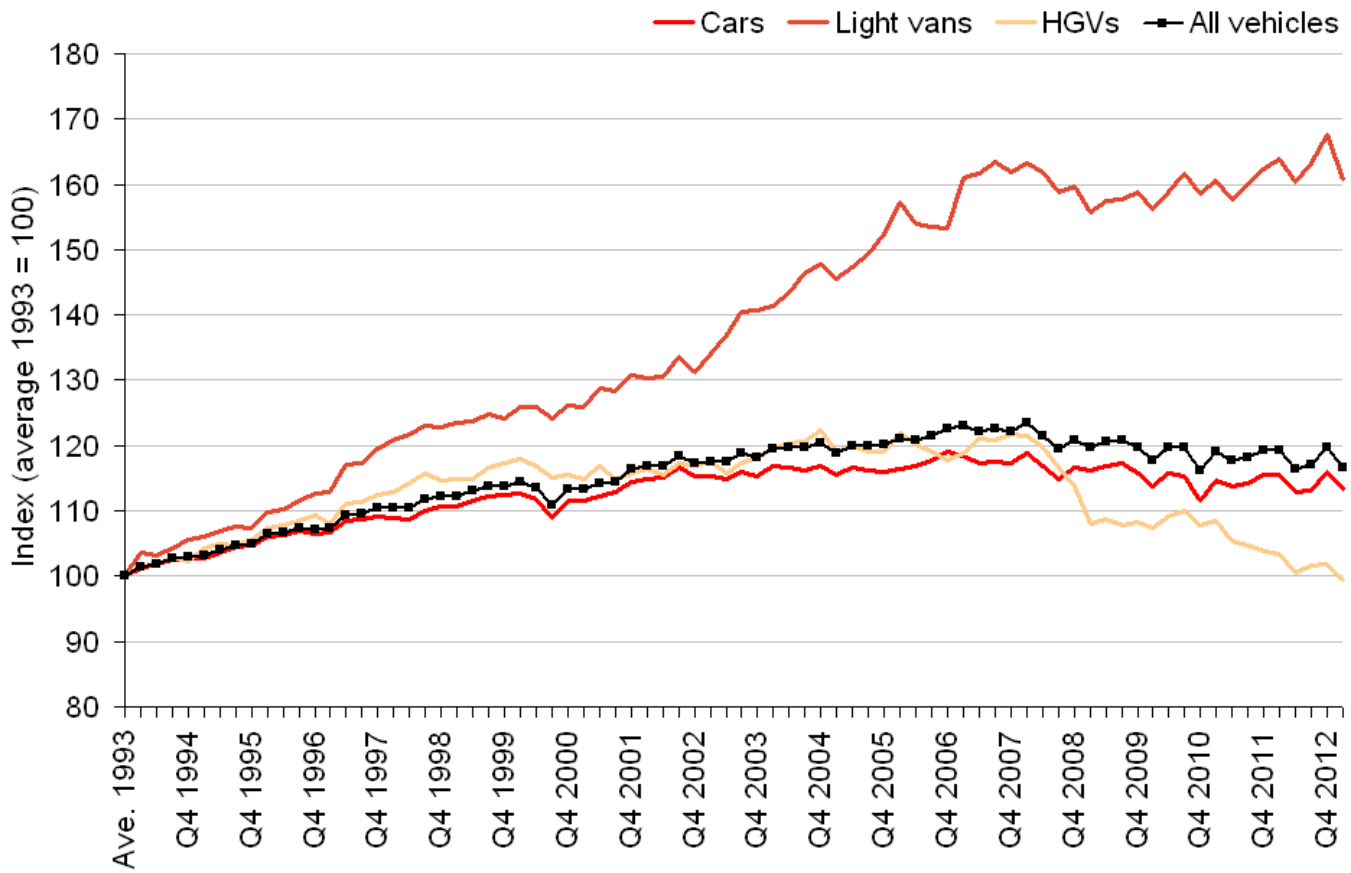
- All motor vehicle traffic decreased, by 2.3 per cent, to 74.7 billion vehicle miles.
- All vehicle types have shown a decrease, including:
  - Car traffic decreased by 1.9 per cent to 59.6 billion vehicle miles.
  - Light goods vehicle traffic decreased by 1.9 per cent to 10.4 billion vehicle miles.
  - Heavy goods vehicle traffic decreased by 3.8 per cent, to 3.7 billion vehicle miles.
- Traffic volumes decreased on all roads types, with larger decreases on rural and urban roads (2.5 and 2.9 per cent respectively) than on motorways (0.7 per cent).

1. Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- The provisional quarterly estimates show that all motor vehicle traffic was 2.3 per cent lower in the first quarter of 2013 than in the first quarter of 2012 at 74.7 billion vehicle miles. This is the lowest quarter one estimate since 2001.
- Car traffic decreased by 1.9 per cent, to 59.6 billion vehicle miles, between quarters one of 2012 and 2013.
- Light goods vehicle traffic totalled 10.4 billion vehicle miles in quarter one of 2013, 1.9 per cent lower than the same quarter of the previous year. This is the first decrease in light goods vehicle traffic in the first quarter since 2009.
- Heavy goods vehicle traffic decreased by 3.8 per cent to 3.7 billion vehicle miles between the first quarters of 2013 and 2012. Heavy goods vehicle traffic has decreased by 18.2 per cent since its quarter one peak of 4.6 billon vehicle miles in 2008. Heavy goods vehicle traffic has returned to 1993 levels, steadily decreasing since 2008.
- Other motor vehicle traffic, which includes motorcycles, buses and coaches, fell 19.2 per cent, from 1.3 billion vehicle miles in the first quarter of 2012 to 1.1 billion vehicle miles in the first quarter of 2013. Caution, however, should be taken when interpreting figures for other motor vehicle traffic as they are based on small numbers.

Road traffic by vehicle type: Great Britain, quarterly from 1993

[table TRA2501c, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)]



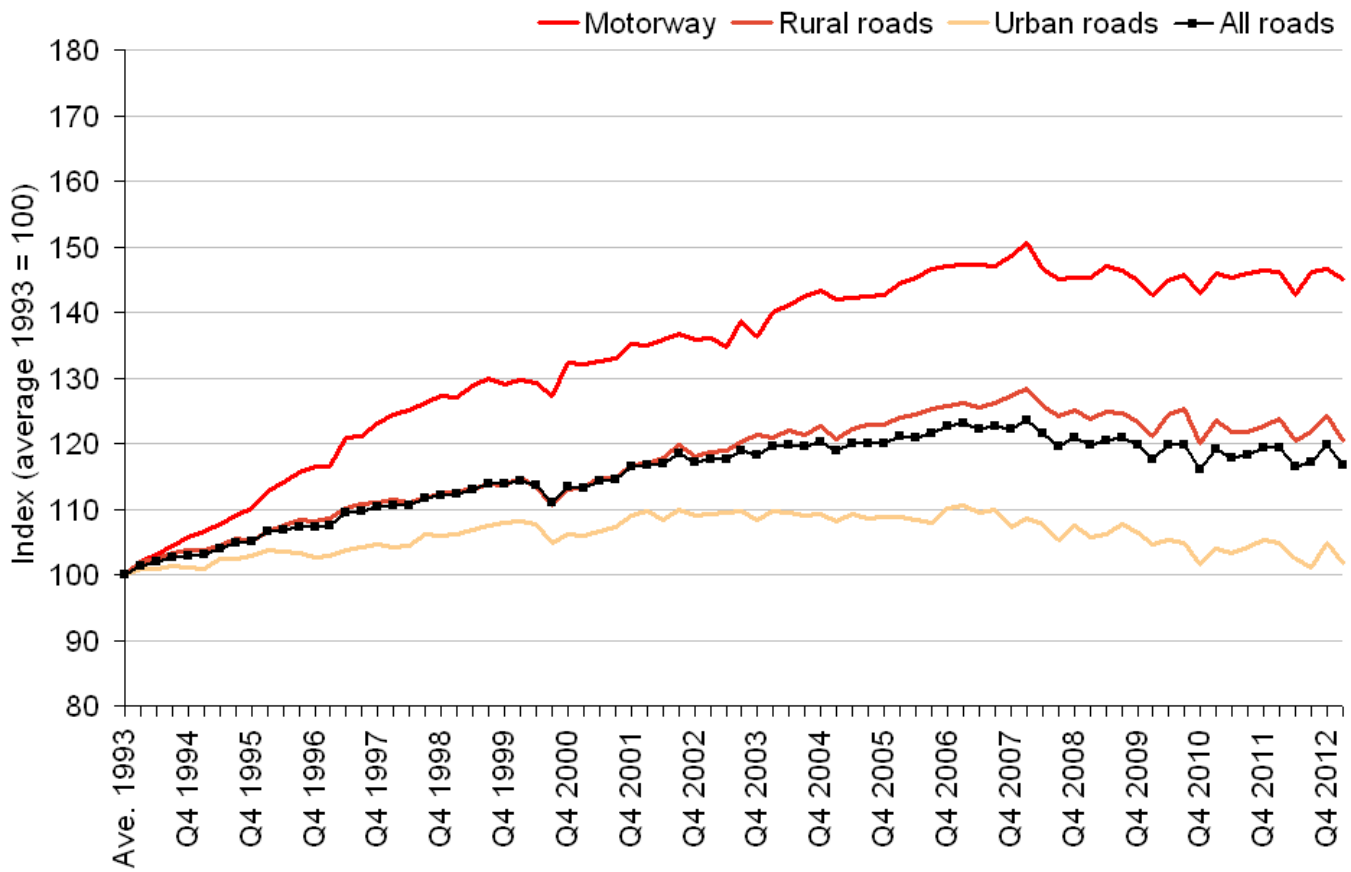
Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on “Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type” can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables, TRA2501, TRA2504

2. Quarterly road traffic by road class

- Provisional estimates for the first quarter of 2013 show that traffic volumes decreased on all road types when compared to the same quarter in 2012. However, the decreases on rural and urban roads were larger (2.5% and 2.9% respectively) than on motorways (0.7%).
- Between the same periods, the decreases shown in the level of traffic were similar across 'A' roads and minor roads (2.9% and 2.4% respectively).
- Estimates for urban 'A' roads show the largest drop for any road type when comparing first quarters of 2013 and 2012. Traffic volumes fell 3.1 per cent to 11.9 billion vehicle miles. This is the lowest quarter one estimate for this road type since quarterly estimates began in 1993 and is 8.3 per cent lower than its quarter one peak in 2004.
- The traffic volume on motorways has increased the most of any road type, 48 per cent, since quarterly estimates began in quarter one 1993. Traffic volume has increased by 21.7 per cent and 2.2 per cent on rural and urban roads respectively, over the same period.
- In quarter one 1993, around a sixth (16.3%) of all traffic were on motorways compared to just around a fifth (20.6%) in quarter one 2013. Over the same period, the proportion of traffic on urban roads has fallen from 42.6 per cent to 37 per cent.

Road traffic by road class: Great Britain, quarterly from 1993

[table TRA2502c, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)]



Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on "Quarterly road traffic by road class" can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables, TRA2502, TRA2505

3. Recent trends in traffic estimates

A number of factors may affect traffic volumes. For example, traffic levels would normally be expected to change in line with economic growth, as well as widespread weather events. When comparing changes between quarter one of 2012 and quarter one of 2013:

- An important factor affecting traffic appears to have been the heavy snowfall and icy conditions in many areas of Great Britain in the first quarter of 2013, dampening the traffic volumes. Initial analyses suggest that that this has not been to the extent of that seen in quarter four (October to December) of 2010.
- Preliminary estimates show GDP to have increased slightly overall between quarter one 2012 and quarter one 2013, by 0.6 per cent, with increases in the sectors we would expect to have the greatest influence on traffic volume. For example, the index for transport, storage and communication increased by 2.5 per cent between the first quarters of 2012 and 2013 and index for distribution, hotels and restaurants increased by 0.7 per cent during the same period.

4. Users and uses of Road Traffic Estimates

We continuously review the content of these statistics to ensure they are meeting users' needs. A summary of the feedback we have received from users can be found in 'Meeting customers' needs: Users and uses of road traffic statistics and data'.

Road traffic data are a key source of management information on the country's infrastructure. Main uses of road traffic statistics include:

- The Highways Agency, Local Authorities (including Transport for London) and devolved governments use the data for transport planning, road engineering and policy monitoring at a regional or local level.
- Road accident and safety statistics use annual and quarterly traffic estimates to produce road safety and accident rates, as required for the Strategic Framework on Road Safety.

We welcome feedback on any aspects of the Department's road traffic statistics including content, timing, and format via email to roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

5. Strengths and weaknesses of the data

- Quarterly estimates are based on data from 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.
- Annual estimates make use of data from around eight thousand manual traffic counts in addition to the data from the automatic traffic counters and can estimate traffic levels in local areas and on specific road links which cannot be produced from the quarterly data.
- Automatic traffic counters 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 counts data. The classification algorithms are continually developed to ensure that vehicle classification is as accurate as possible.

- Provisional quarterly traffic estimates for all motor vehicles have historically been accurate (typically within 1 per cent) when compared with the final quarterly estimates.

billion vehicle miles/*percentage*

All motor vehicles traffic	2009					2010					2011				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann
Provisional estimates at time of publication	73.3	79.9	82.0	76.9	312.1	71.8	79.5	81.1	74.1	306.6	76.7	75.8	76.2	77.3	305.8
Final estimates	73.8	80.4	82.2	76.8	313.2	72.2	79.9	81.5	74.6	308.1	76.3	75.4	75.7	76.4	303.8
Difference (%)	*-0.7*	*-0.6*	*-0.2*	*0.1*	*-0.3*	*-0.6*	*-0.5*	*-0.5*	*-0.6*	*-0.5*	*0.6*	*0.4*	*0.6*	*1.2*	*0.7*

6. Background notes

1. The web tables give further detail of the results presented in this release and statistics on other related topics.

   The quarterly traffic estimates are presented in tables **TRA2501** to **TRA2506**. They are available at: www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/tra25-quarterly-estimates

   Also available annual traffic estimates, which are presented in table series **TRA01**, **TRA02**, **TRA03**, **TRA31**, **TRA32** and **TRA89**. They are available at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-traffic-statistics#statistical-data-sets

2. Full guidance on the methods used to compile traffic statistics can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49975/quarterly-methodology-note.pdf or more general information at: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-traffic

3. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Road Traffic Statistics were recently assessed against the Code of Practice by the UK Statistics Authority. The assessment report can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-traffic#national-statistics

4. 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/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-traffic#pre-release-access-list

5. Final annual estimates for 2013 are due to be published in June 2013. The next Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates release, providing estimates up to Quarter 2 (April to June) 2013, is due to be published in August 2013.