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Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates for Great Britain: Quarter 3 2012

This statistical release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain between July and September (Quarter 3) 2012.

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.

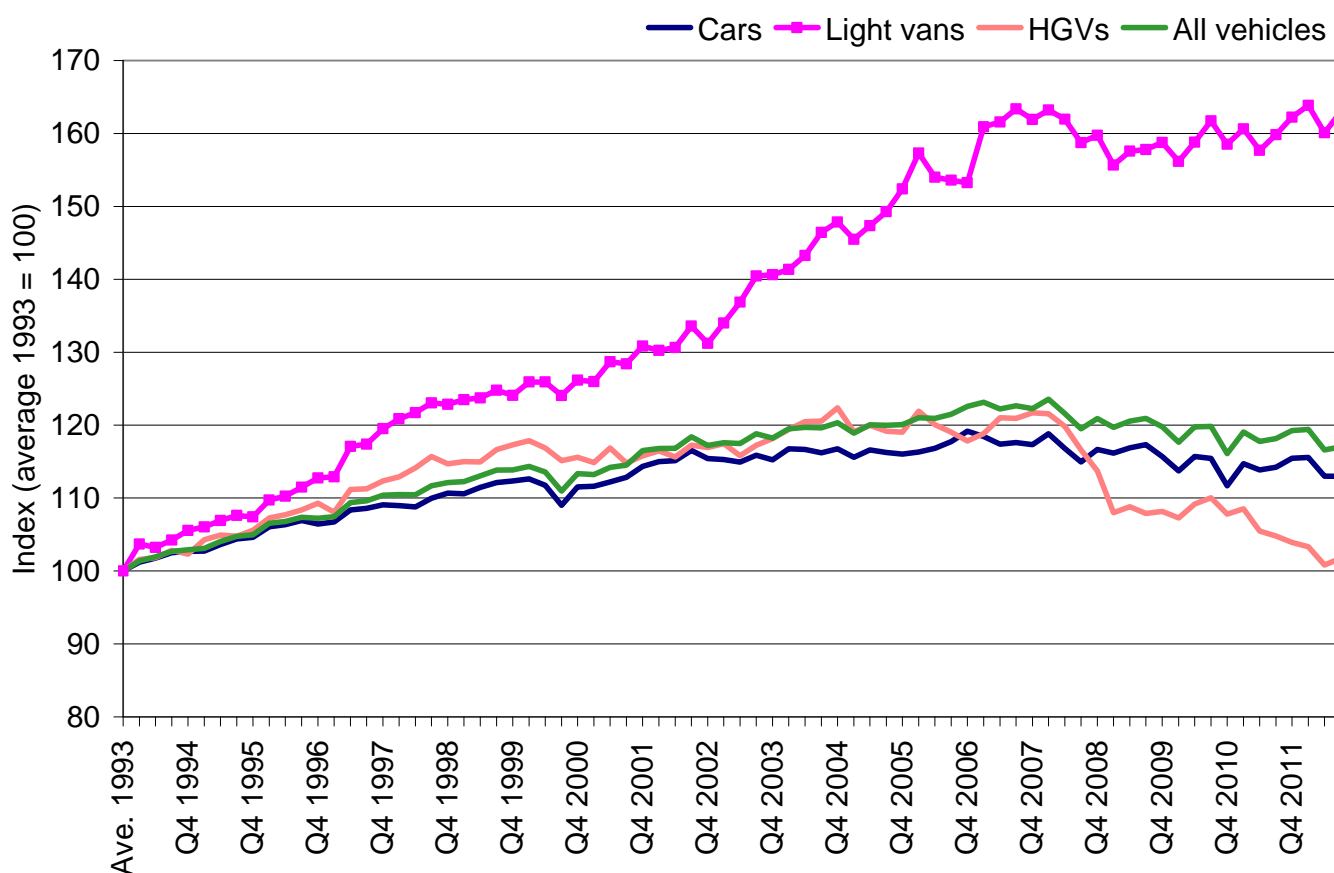
Key results from Quarter 3 2012 include:

- All motor vehicle traffic was 1.0 per cent lower in the third quarter of 2012 than in the third quarter of 2011 at 75.0 billion vehicle miles.
- The volume of total vehicle traffic observed in quarter three of 2012 was the lowest of any third quarter since 2001.
- Light goods vehicle traffic continued to increase with growth of 2.0 per cent in the third quarter of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011, while traffic for all other vehicle types fell.
- HGV traffic in quarter three was 15.8 per cent lower than at its peak of 4.6 billion vehicle miles in quarter three of 2007.
- Traffic grew on motorways and rural 'A' roads in the third quarter of 2012 compared with the third quarter of 2011 but fell on all other road types.
- Traffic on urban roads has fallen by 7.9 per cent since its peak in quarter three of 2007. This is the largest decrease for any of the road types. In particular the recent fall in traffic was driven by a decrease of 3.3 per cent on urban 'A' roads between quarter three in 2011 and 2012.

1. Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- The provisional quarterly estimates show that all motor vehicle traffic was 1.0 per cent lower in the third quarter of 2012 than in the third quarter of 2011 at 75.0 billion vehicle miles. This is the third year that has shown a small decrease (around 1%) in the third quarter with the 2012 estimate being the lowest of any third quarter since 2001.
- Car traffic decreased by 1.1 per cent, to 59.3 billion vehicle miles, over the same period.
- Light goods vehicle traffic totalled 10.5 billion vehicle miles in quarter three of 2012, 2.0 per cent higher than the same quarter of the previous year. Light goods vehicle traffic has grown by 22.0 per cent in the last 10 years - much more than other vehicle types.

Road traffic in Great Britain by vehicle type, 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 tables¹, [TRA2501](#), [TRA2502](#)

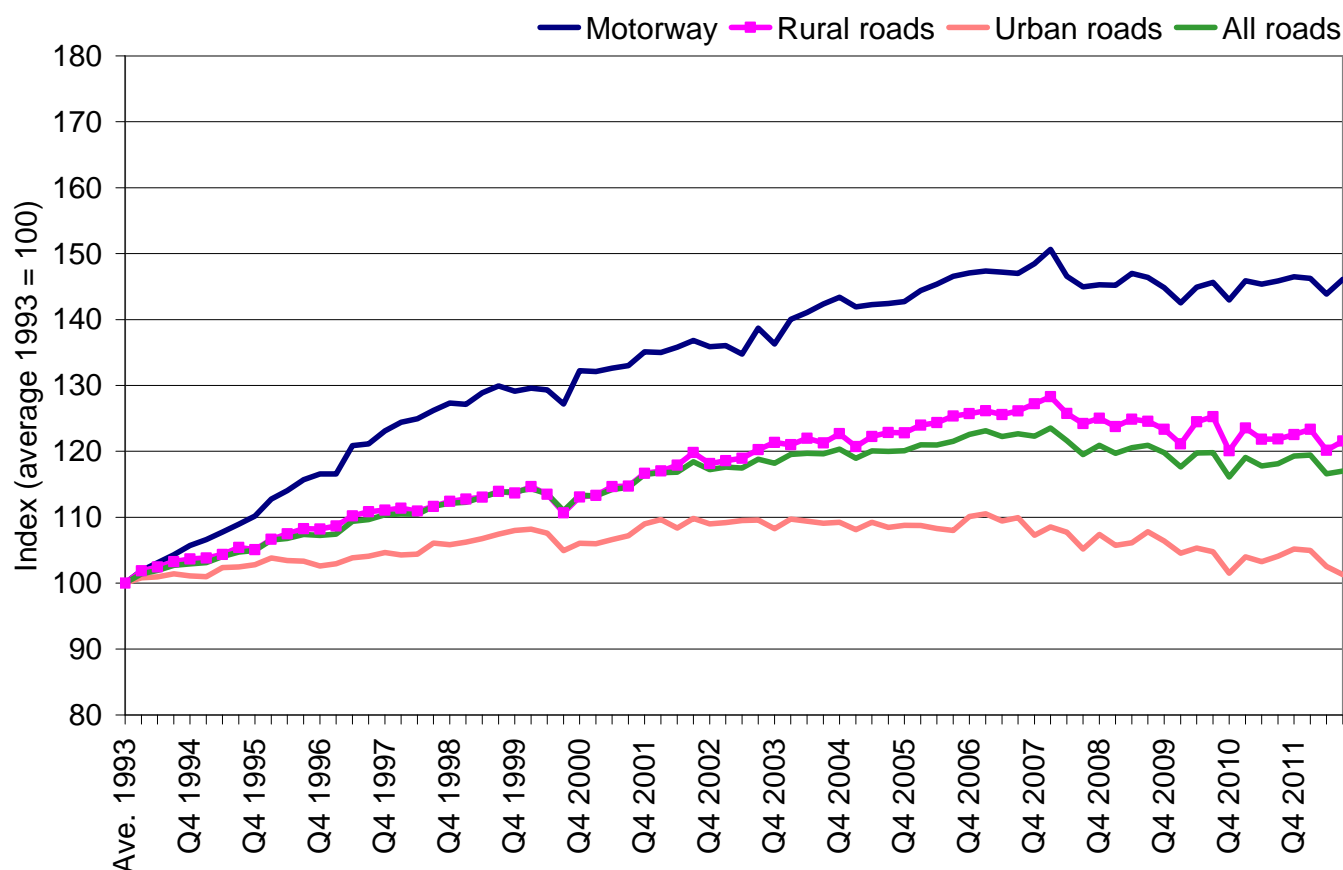
- Heavy goods vehicle traffic decreased by 2.9 per cent, to 3.8 billion vehicle miles, in July to September 2012 compared with the same period in 2011. This is the lowest level since 1993 and 15.8 per cent lower than its peak of 4.6 billion vehicle miles in quarter three of 2007.
- Other motor vehicle traffic, which includes motorcycles, buses and coaches, fell 10.8 per cent, from 1.4 billion vehicle miles in the third quarter of 2011 to 1.2 billion vehicle miles in the third quarter of 2012. This was primarily driven by a fall in motorcycle traffic (figures not shown).

Caution, however, should be taken when interpreting figures for other motor vehicle traffic as they are based on small numbers.

2. Quarterly road traffic by road class

- Provisional estimates for the third quarter of 2012 show that traffic volumes increased on rural 'A' roads, remained broadly stable on Motorways but fell on all other road types and overall since the same quarter in 2011.
- Between quarter three 2011 and 2012, the largest fall in traffic on any road type was seen on urban 'A' roads where total traffic fell 3.3 per cent resulting in the lowest quarter three traffic levels seen on this road type since quarterly records began in 1993.
- Traffic on urban roads has fallen by 7.9 per cent since its peak in quarter three of 2007. This is the largest decrease for any of the road types.
- Falls in traffic on rural and urban minor roads were similar, unlike previous quarters when traffic on minor rural roads fell more than on minor urban roads.

Road traffic in Great Britain by road class, 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 tables¹, [TRA2503](#)

3. Recent trends in traffic estimates

- The final 2011 traffic estimates were broadly stable in comparison with 2010 as a result of increases in quarters one and four being balanced out by decreases in quarters two and three. So far in 2012, quarter one traffic levels were broadly stable while quarters two and three have shown a small decrease.

There are a number of possible causes of the decrease in road traffic levels in the third quarter of 2012:

- Whilst GDP in volume terms between quarter three of 2011 and quarter three of 2012 was flat, traffic levels decreased by 1.0 per cent. Traffic volume would normally be expected to grow in line with economic growth, however economic contraction was seen in the sectors most likely to contribute towards traffic levels such as production (-1.2%) and construction (-10.8%).
- As in the second quarter, the third quarter of 2012 saw extremely high levels of rainfall with summer 2012, June to August, being the second wettest since records began in 1910, and had the fewest hours of daylight since 1980. Poor weather may have put people off making trips for leisure purposes and contributed to the fall in motorcycle traffic which drove the fall in other motor vehicle traffic (motorcycles, buses and coaches).
- The Olympics and Paralympics may also have contributed to the continued decline in total traffic levels observed and, in particular, to the lowest estimated levels of traffic on urban roads in any quarter since 1993. Reported drops in visitors to UK tourist attractions, may have resulted in fewer journeys by road contributing to the fall in traffic levels.

4. 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 ten 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.

All motor vehicles traffic	billion vehicle miles/percentage														
	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

5. Background notes

1. Web tables giving further detail of the results presented in this release and statistics on other related topics are available at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics?post_type=table&series=traffic-tag
2. Full guidance on the methods used to compile traffic statistics can be found here: <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/quarterly-road-traffic-estimates-methodology.pdf> or, <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/traffic-estimates-2010-methodology.pdf>
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: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-221---maritime--road-traffic--bus--taxi--light-rail-and-disabled-parking-badge-statistics.pdf>
4. Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/quarterly-traffic-pre-release.pdf>
5. Final annual estimates for 2012 will be published in June 2013. The next Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates release, providing estimates up to Quarter 4 2012, will be published in February 2013.

6. 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](#)'. We continue to welcome any feedback on these statistics.

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.