

Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates: Quarter 2 2012

This statistical release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain between April and June (Quarter 2) 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.



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Key results from Quarter 2 2012 include:

- All motor vehicle traffic was 1.0 per cent lower in the second quarter of 2012 than in the second quarter of 2011 at 74.7 billion vehicle miles.
- Light goods vehicle traffic was the only vehicle type to experience growth in traffic volumes in the second quarter of 2012 compared with the same period in 2011, increasing by 1.5 per cent. Traffic for all other vehicle types fell between these two quarters.
- Traffic fell on all road types in the second quarter of 2012 compared with the second quarter of 2011, with the exception of rural 'A' roads, which increased by 0.5%.

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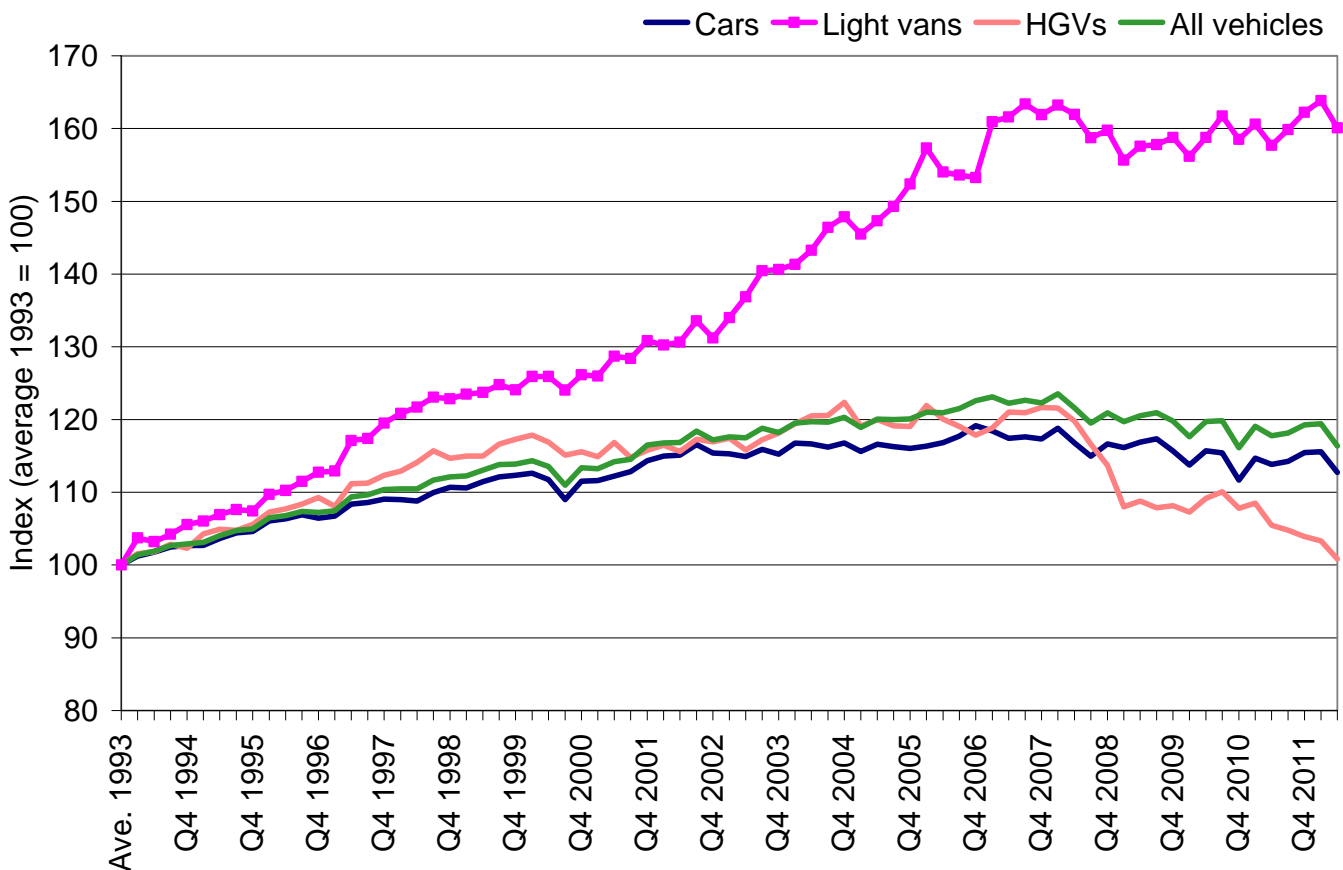
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1. Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- The provisional quarterly estimates show that all motor vehicle traffic was 1.0 per cent lower in the second quarter of 2012 than in the second quarter of 2011 at 74.7 billion vehicle miles.
- Car traffic decreased by 0.7 per cent, to 59.4 billion vehicle miles, over the same period.
- Light goods vehicle traffic totalled 10.3 billion vehicle miles in quarter 2 2012, 1.5 per cent higher than the same quarter of the previous year. Light goods vehicle traffic has grown by 23 per cent in the last 10 years - much more than other vehicle types.
- Heavy goods vehicle traffic decreased by 4.4 per cent, to 3.8 billion vehicle miles, in April to June 2012 compared with the same period in 2011.
- Other motor vehicle traffic, which includes motorbikes, buses and coaches, fell 19.2 per cent, from 1.5 billion vehicle miles in the second quarter of 2011 to 1.2 billion vehicle miles in the second 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.

Road traffic in Great Britain by vehicle type, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)

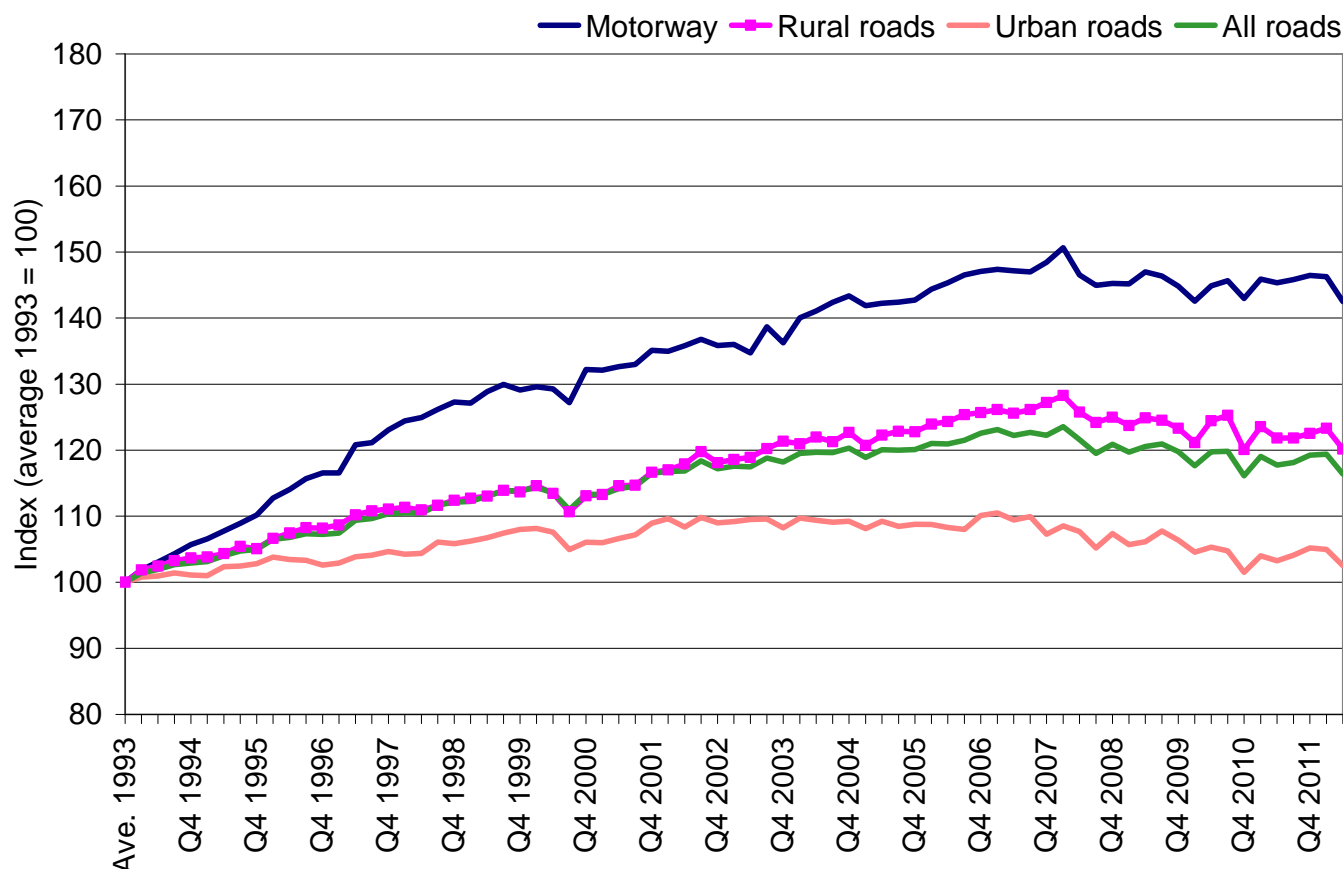


Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on “Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type” can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables¹, [TRA2501](#), [TRA2502](#)

2. Quarterly road traffic by road class

- Provisional estimates for the second quarter of 2012 show that traffic volumes fell on motorways, urban and rural roads compared with the same quarter of the previous year.
- Rural roads experienced the largest fall in traffic (both in absolute and relative terms), driven by a fall in traffic on minor rural roads (-5.2%). In contrast traffic on rural 'A' roads increased by 0.5 per cent.

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

- This is the fifth consecutive year that a decrease has been observed between second quarter 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 has shown a very small increase in traffic volumes and quarter two a decrease.

There were a number of events in the second quarter of 2012 that may have contributed to the observed decrease in the level of road traffic:

- GDP estimates show that the economy shrank by 0.5 per cent during the second quarter of

2012. Economic activity is a key determinate of transport demand, including road transport. Holding everything else equal, during a period of economic contraction the volume of traffic would also be expected to contract.

- The second quarter also saw extremely high levels of rainfall which may have put people off making trips for leisure purposes. April 2012 was the wettest April and June 2012 the second wettest June in England since records began in 1910. In particular, the fall in other motor vehicle traffic is driven by a fall in motorcycle traffic; poor weather conditions may make use of this vehicle type less desirable.
- Also during the second quarter, a dispute between fuel distributors and the trade union's representing fuel tanker drivers caused concerns about fuel supplies with reports in the media of panic buying. These concerns peaked towards the end of quarter one but continued to gain some coverage in the media in quarter two. Additionally, the price of fuel increased to over 140 pence per litre for the first time, a price that was maintained throughout April. Concerns about the supply of fuel and increases in the pump price may have resulted in people reducing the number and distance of trips they made by road.

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.

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

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 3 2012, will be published in November 2012.