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Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates: Great Britain Quarter 4 (October - December) and Provisional Annual Estimates for 2013



Department
for Transport



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Main findings: Annual traffic across all motor vehicle classes increased by 1.3 per cent according to provisional estimates.

Provisional annual figures suggest that **motorway traffic hit a new peak in 2013** with 64.3 billion vehicle miles travelled on these roads across Great Britain. Provisional figures also show that Light Goods Vehicle (LGV) traffic hit 42.9 billion vehicle miles for 2013, the highest annual total ever recorded.

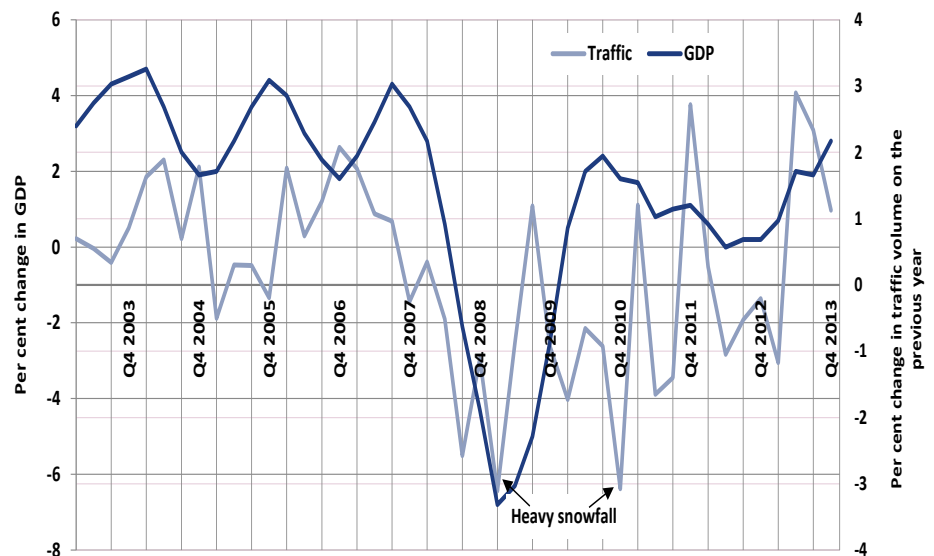
GDP increased over the course of 2013 which suggests that economic growth may have contributed to the upward trend in traffic volume (see chart below). The high levels of rainfall recorded in 2012 may have put people off making trips during that year. This could also be a factor adding to the increase in traffic volumes observed by these provisional annual estimates between 2012 and 2013.

Traffic increased from 2012 levels across all road classifications except on urban 'A' roads where traffic volumes decreased very slightly.

Compared to quarter 4 2012:

- **Car and LGV traffic increased** by 1.0 and 3.4 per cent respectively. Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) traffic also increased by 0.8 per cent.
- **Motorway and minor road traffic rose** (by 2.2 per cent and 1.6 per cent) with 'A' road traffic remaining broadly stable with 2012 levels.

Motor vehicle traffic and GDP: GB quarterly from 2003



About this release

This quarterly release presents estimates for road traffic in Great Britain during quarter 4 (October to December) 2013. Quarterly estimates are provisional until they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year. Both the annual and quarterly figures for 2013 presented in this release are provisional. Final annual estimates for 2013 are due to be published in summer 2014.

Estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a national network of around 200 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs). The ATCs also record some of the physical properties of passing vehicles which are used to classify traffic by vehicle type.

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

Further charts and detailed statistical tables can be accessed on line via the [road traffic statistical series](#).

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Summary figures of provisional annual estimates for 2013

The summary table below shows the annual patterns in vehicle traffic compared to 2012 and across a range of previous years. Provisional annual estimates for 2013 are based on ATC data only. Finalised 2013 figures will also include manual traffic count data and are due to be published in summer 2014. More information on our annual provisional estimates, along with our [TRA01](#) and [TRA02](#) annual traffic volume tables, can be found online [here](#).

Vehicle Miles	This Year Provisional 2013	Annual percentage change over time			
		Last Year 2012	Five Years ago 2008	Ten Years ago 2003	Twenty Years ago 1993
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	306.4 billion	↑ 1.3%	↓ 1.5%	↑ 1.3%	↑ 19.6%
Cars and Taxis	242.3 billion	↑ 0.8%	↓ 1.3%	- 0.0%	↑ 15.3%
LGVs	42.9 billion	↑ 3.9%	↑ 3.2%	↑ 20.3%	↑ 66.0%
HGVs	15.7 billion	↑ 0.9%	↓ 11.8%	↓ 11.2%	↑ 4.0%
Motorways	64.3 billion	↑ 3.0%	↑ 3.3%	↑ 11.2%	↑ 51.7%
Rural A-Roads	87.4 billion	↑ 0.1%	↓ 1.5%	↑ 1.0%	↑ 24.1%
Urban A-Roads	48.5 billion	↓ 0.2%	↓ 2.6%	↓ 4.6%	↑ 0.8%
Rural Minor Roads	41.1 billion	↑ 2.3%	↓ 5.9%	↑ 3.9%	↑ 18.0%
Urban Minor Roads	65.2 billion	↑ 1.5%	↓ 2.1%	↓ 3.7%	↑ 7.8%

Provisional annual estimates: traffic trends by vehicle type and road class

- The latest provisional annual estimates for 2013 show that traffic across all vehicle types in Great Britain increased against levels recorded for 2012. All motor vehicle traffic rose by 1.3 per cent to 306.4 billion vehicle miles. LGV traffic experienced the sharpest increase growing 3.9 per cent from 2012.
- LGV traffic is estimated to be around 20 per cent higher now than it was ten years ago. Conversely, HGV traffic is now estimated to be around 11 per cent lower than it was in 2003.
- In 2013, cars and taxis accounted for 79.1 per cent of all motor vehicle traffic in Great Britain. This is broadly similar to the proportions recorded in recent years.
- Motorway traffic has continued to increase since 2010, reaching a new peak in 2013 of 64.3 billion vehicles. This represents a 3 per cent increase from 2012.
- Traffic on urban 'A' roads decreased by 0.2 per cent in 2013 compared to 2012 whilst rural 'A' roads (0.1 per cent) and minor roads (rural 2.3 per cent and urban 1.5 per cent) all experienced increases in traffic volumes.
- Traffic levels are broadly expected to change in line with the economy, amongst other factors. GDP rose over the course of 2013 which suggests that economic growth may have contributed to the upward trend in traffic volumes.
- Extreme weather conditions, such as heavy snowfall, can also have an impact on annual traffic volumes. 2012 saw a large amount of rainfall which may have put people off making trips during that year. This may be a factor adding to the increase in traffic volumes observed by the 2013 provisional annual estimates.

Summary figures for Quarter 4 2013 (October – December)

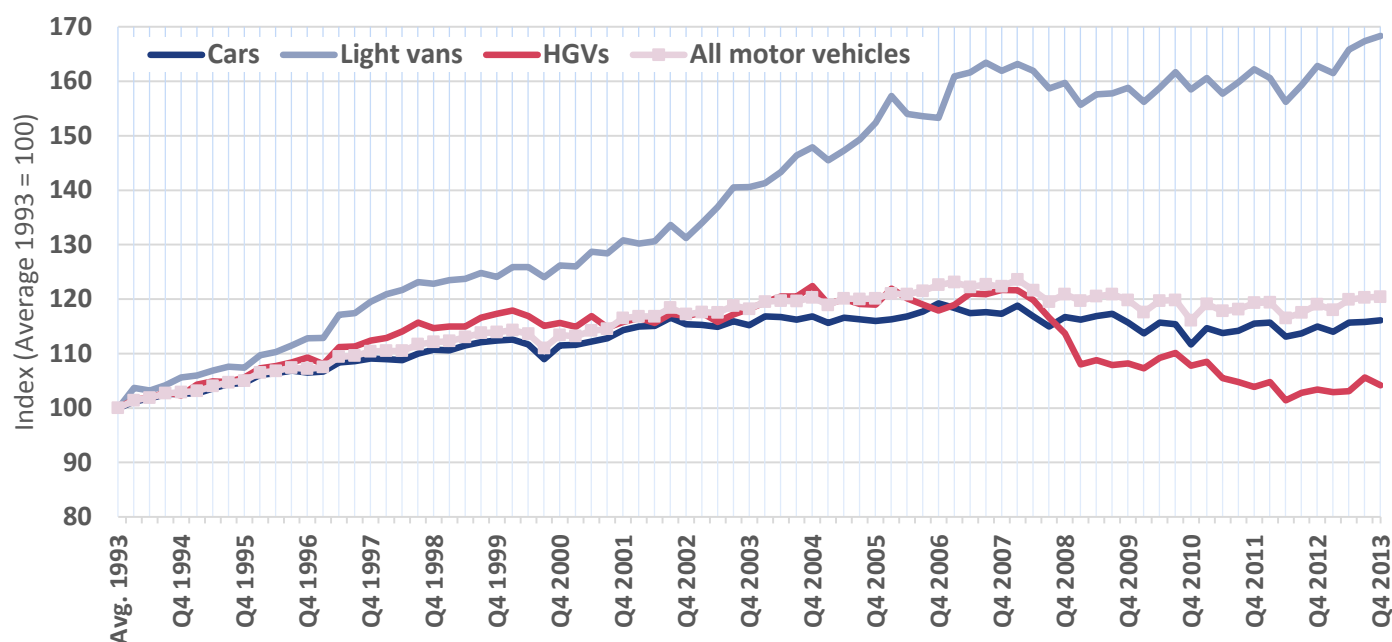
The summary table below shows the patterns in vehicle traffic compared to the last quarter and previous quarter 4 figures across a range of years. More information on our quarterly estimates, along with our [TRA25](#) quarterly traffic tables, can be found online [here](#).

Vehicle Miles	This Quarter Q4 2013	Q4 percentage change over time			
		Last year Q4 2012	Five years ago Q4 2008	Ten years ago Q4 2003	Twenty years ago Q4 1993
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	77.1 billion	↑ 1.1%	↓ 0.5%	↑ 1.8%	↑ 19.1%
Cars and Taxis	61.0 billion	↑ 1.0%	↓ 0.5%	↑ 0.7%	↑ 15.1%
LGVs	10.9 billion	↑ 3.4%	↑ 5.3%	↑ 19.7%	↑ 63.6%
HGVs	3.9 billion	↑ 0.8%	↓ 8.4%	↓ 11.9%	↑ 2.5%
Motorways	16.1 billion	↑ 2.2%	↑ 4.9%	↑ 11.9%	↑ 49.1%
Rural A-Roads	21.9 billion	↑ 0.4%	↓ 0.5%	↑ 1.0%	↑ 23.3%
Urban A-Roads	12.1 billion	↑ 0.1%	↓ 2.2%	↓ 4.7%	↑ 0.6%
Rural Minor Roads	10.4 billion	↑ 2.8%	↓ 3.8%	↑ 2.3%	↑ 18.5%
Urban Minor Roads	16.4 billion	↑ 0.8%	↓ 1.8%	↓ 1.3%	↑ 7.9%

Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- All motor vehicle traffic increased by 1.1 per cent compared to 2012 figures and has grown by 19.1 per cent since 1993. LGV traffic has continued to increase across each time period as illustrated in the table above. Other vehicle types have experienced falls in traffic at certain points, particularly around 2008. These decreases are most likely linked to trends in the economy or extreme weather.
- Car and taxi traffic increased by 1.0 per cent, to 61.0 billion vehicle miles, between quarters 4 of 2012 and 2013.

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



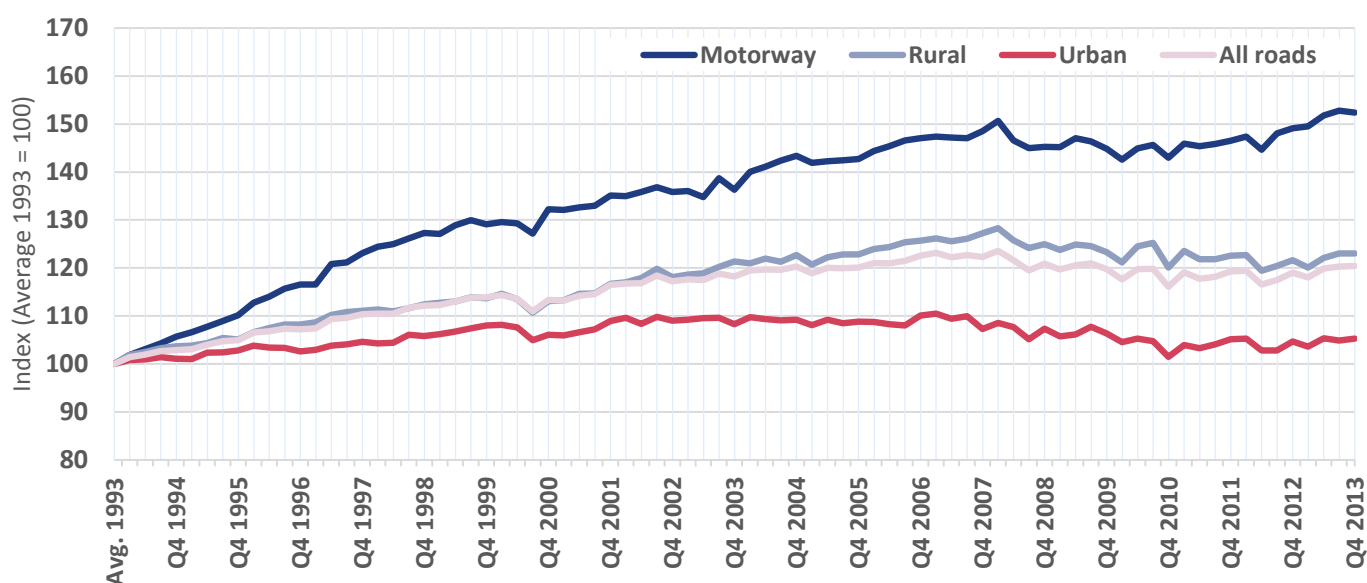
- Quarter 4 2013 saw the highest quarterly LGV traffic figure since the series began in 1993.
- LGV traffic totalled 10.9 billion vehicle miles in quarter 4 of 2013, 3.4 per cent higher than in the same quarter in the previous year. This contributes to a near 20 per cent growth in LGV traffic over the past ten years.
- HGV traffic increased slightly from the levels recorded in quarter 4 of 2012 (3.9 billion vehicle miles, up 0.8 per cent). This class of vehicle traffic has remained consistently around this level since 2011.
- Other motor vehicle traffic, which includes motorcycles, buses and coaches, has dropped from 1.4 to 1.3 billion vehicle miles in quarter 4 of 2013 compared to quarter 4 2012. All figures for this vehicle classification should be treated with caution, however, as they are based on smaller recorded totals.

Quarterly road traffic by road class

Latest figures: Increase in traffic on motorways and minor rural roads.

- Traffic on motorways in Great Britain increased from 15.8 to 16.1 billion vehicle miles compared to quarter 4 2012, representing growth of 2.2 per cent. Traffic across minor roads also increased (2.8 per cent on rural roads and 0.8 per cent on urban roads respectively).
- Estimates for 'A' road traffic in quarter 4 also increased slightly when compared to 2012 levels. In quarter 4 2013 traffic on rural 'A' roads was 21.9 billion vehicle miles (up 0.4 per cent on 2012) and 12.1 billion vehicle miles on urban 'A' roads (up 0.1 per cent).
- Estimates for minor rural roads show the largest percentage rise for any road type when comparing quarter 4 estimates for 2012 and 2013. Traffic volumes rose by 2.8 per cent to 10.4 billion vehicle miles.
- Motorways have seen a 49.1 per cent increase in traffic over a twenty year period. Rural 'A' roads (23.3 per cent), minor rural roads (18.5 per cent) and minor urban roads (7.9 per cent) have likewise experienced significant growth in traffic levels over the same period. Traffic on urban 'A' roads has increased marginally in comparison (0.6 per cent) since 1993.

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



Background information

Sources, 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.
- Further statistical guidance and methodological notes methodology note can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-statistics-guidance> .

All motor vehicles traffic	2010					2011					2012				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann
Provisional estimates at time of publication	71.8	79.5	81.1	74.1	306.6	76.7	75.8	76.2	77.3	305.8	76.5	74.6	75.0	76.7	302.6
Final estimates	72.2	79.9	81.5	74.6	308.1	76.3	75.4	75.7	76.4	303.8	76.5	74.6	75.3	76.2	302.6
<i>Difference (%)</i>	<i>-0.6</i>	<i>-0.5</i>	<i>-0.5</i>	<i>-0.6</i>	<i>-0.5</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>1.2</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>-0.1</i>	<i>-0.4</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.0</i>

billion vehicle miles/percentage

Users and uses of Road Traffic Estimates

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 by the Strategic Framework on Road Safety.
- Traffic estimates are used to produce the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (NAEI)

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

National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-series> .

Next update

The next Quarterly Road Traffic estimates, for Q1 (January to March) 2014 are due to be published in May 2014. Annual Road Traffic estimates for 2013 are due to be published in summer 2014.