Congestion on local 'A' roads, England: July to September 2014

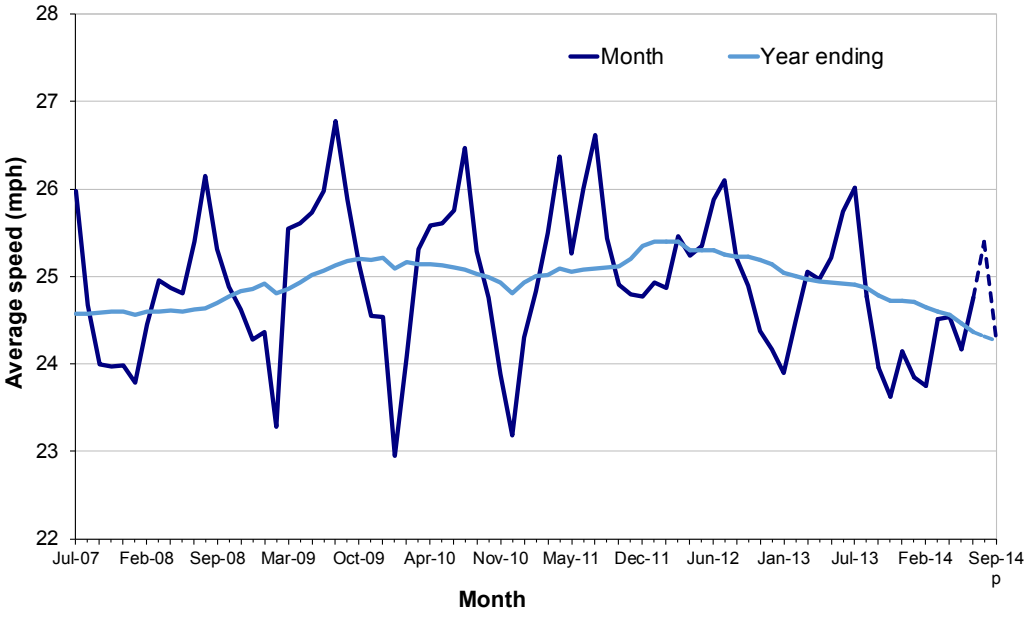
Department for Transport

Main findings: Average speeds during the morning peak continue to fall over the last 2 and a half years

- The **average speed on local 'A' roads** in England during the **weekday morning peak** in the year ending September 2014 was **24.3 mph**. This is a **0.4% decrease** on the year ending June 2014.
- For individual months, average speeds on local 'A' roads in England were slower in July and September 2014, with decreases of 2.3% and 1.9% respectively, compared to the same months in 2013. The month of August is excluded from this measure.
- A combination of increases in traffic on the 'A' road network and increased levels of rainfall are likely to have contributed to the fall in speeds observed between March 2012 and September 2014.

Average vehicle speeds during the weekday morning peak[1] on local 'A' roads: England, monthly and annual averages from 2006/07

(Table CGN0205)



1. Morning peak defined as 7am to 10am. School holiday periods and the month of August are excluded.
2. Average speeds have been flow-weighted using DfT traffic estimates
3. Dashed line on chart indicates the figures are currently provisional

p = provisional

About this release

This statistical release presents information about congestion on local highway authority managed 'A' roads in England. Congestion on locally managed 'A' roads is measured by estimating the average speed achieved by vehicles during the weekday morning peak from 7am to 10am.

In this publication

RESPONSIBLE STATISTICIAN: Jay Symonds
FURTHER INFORMATION: Media: 020 7944 3066 Public: 020 7944 6579 congestion.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

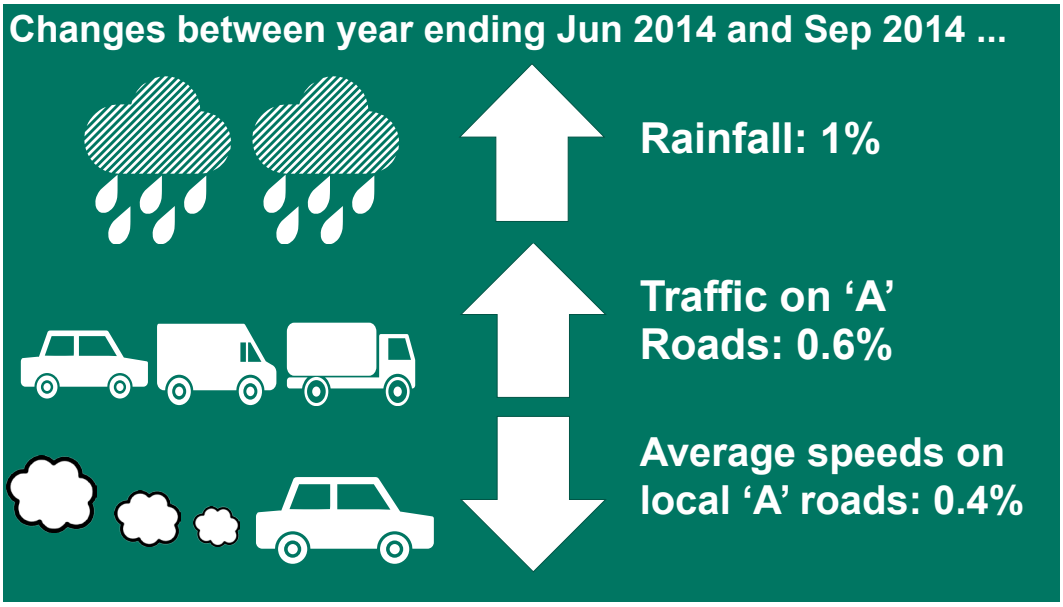
National overview of congestion on local ‘A’ roads

Latest statistics: Provisional data show that the average speed on local ‘A’ roads in England during the weekday morning peak was 24.3 mph in the year ending September 2014. This is a 0.4% decrease on the year ending June 2014.

Looking at individual months, the average speed in July 2014 was 25.4 mph (2.3% slower than in July 2013) and in September 2014 it was 24.3 mph (1.9% slower than September 2013). The month of August is excluded from this measure.

Recent trends: Looking further back, there were increases in annual average weekday morning peak speeds between the years ending December 2010 and February 2012. However, since March 2012, annual average speeds have generally decreased. The general downward trend in annual average weekday morning peak speeds observed for two and half years can be partly attributed to the amount of rainfall over this period and growth in levels of traffic on ‘A’ roads.

The fall in annual average speeds, for the year ending September 2014, is likely to have been affected by increases in traffic on ‘A’ roads and a small increase in rainfall levels observed over the same period compared to the year ending June 2014. Traffic levels on Great Britain’s ‘A’ roads increased by 0.6% and rainfall levels in England increased by 1% over this period.



Introduction

Local ‘A’ roads account for around 9% of all roads in England, but carry around a third of all traffic.

Congestion on local ‘A’ roads is measured by estimating average speeds achieved by vehicles during the weekday morning peak, 7am to 10am. Any weekdays falling during school holiday periods and the month of August are excluded.

The data are based on journey times estimated using in-vehicle Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and flows estimated using the Department’s traffic count information.

Why measure speeds during morning peak?

Speeds are measured during the weekday morning peak as this is when demand on local ‘A’ roads is typically at its highest. This high demand often leads to physical congestion and low speeds.

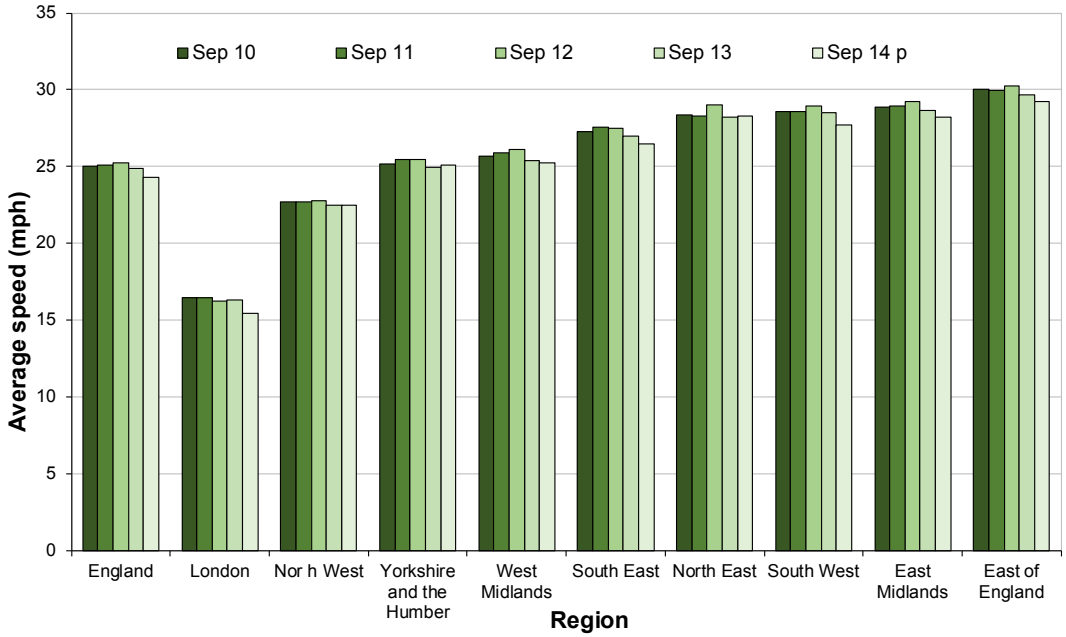
Regional trends for local congestion

At a regional level, most regions in England experienced slower average weekday morning peak speeds during the year ending September 2014 compared to the year ending September 2013. Between these years, London experienced the greatest fall in speeds (5.1%) across all nine regions, followed by the South West and South East (with falls of 2.8% and 2.0% respectively). North East and Yorkshire and the Humber were the only two regions to experience an increase in speeds (of 0.2% and 0.7% respectively). The East of England continues to have the highest average weekday morning peak speed and London continues to have the lowest (at 29.2 mph and 15.5 mph respectively in the year ending September 2014).

The recent decrease in average speeds in London may also relate to a reduction in speed limits in some London boroughs (e.g. the introduction of some 20mph zones to improve road safety).

The differences in regional average weekday morning peak speeds partly reflect physical differences in the types of roads in these areas. For example, in the East of England around 75% of locally managed 'A' roads are classified as rural compared to only 4% in London.

Average vehicle speeds during the weekday morning peak[1] on local 'A' roads: by region, years ending September from 2010 (Table CGN0206)



1. Morning peak defined as 7am to 10am. School holiday periods and the month of August are excluded.
2. Average speeds have been flow-weighted using DfT traffic estimates

p = provisional

Further Information

For further information, a useful introduction to the Department's congestion and reliability statistics, including the different measures, how they are published and the ways in which they are used is available.

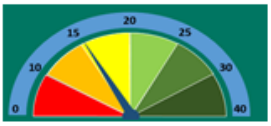
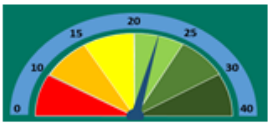
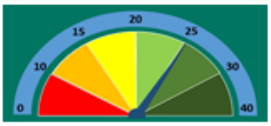
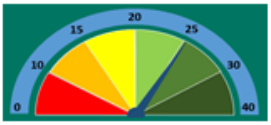
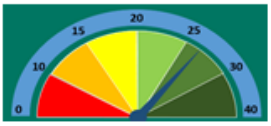
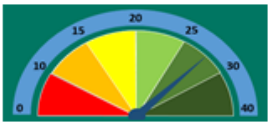
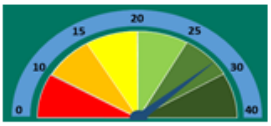
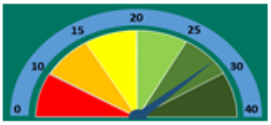
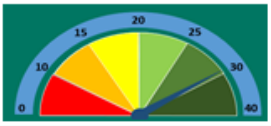
Detailed statistical tables

Detailed statistical tables can be accessed online via our road congestion statistical series.

Regional and Local Highway Authority figures on average weekday morning peak speeds on locally managed 'A' roads, Table CGN0206

Individual roads, by direction, figures on average weekday morning peak speeds on locally managed 'A' roads, Table CGN0209

Average vehicle speeds during the weekday morning peak on local 'A' roads, by region and urban/rural road length: year-ending September 2014

		Local 'A' Roads	
England Region	Speed (mph)	% Urban Road	% Rural Road
London		96	4
North West		45	55
Yorkshire and the Humber		35	65
West Midlands		34	66
South East		31	69
South West		16	84
East Midlands		20	80
North East		32	68
East of England		25	75

Data source for speeds: DfT Congestion Data

Data source for road lengths: Road lengths in Great Britain 2013, Table RDL0101

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

The statistics in this release were designated as National Statistics in July 2012.

Related information

Information on traffic volume and flow used in weighting average speeds is available at: Road traffic statistics

British Social Attitudes Survey is available at: British Social Attitudes Survey: 2013

Background information

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

Being a measure of the average speed achieved during one of the busiest time periods, these statistics allow users to assess the trends in the level of congestion on locally managed 'A' roads over time. Reductions in the speeds reported suggest that general congestion levels on these roads have increased over the period while increases in speeds suggest congestion levels have fallen.

Because the measure estimates average speeds during school-term weekday morning peak period (classified as 7am to 10am), sample sizes for some months will vary significantly depending on when school holidays fall.

Trends in speeds, and therefore congestion, can be reliably assessed both nationally and at a regional or local authority level and although some data imputation is necessary, this is generally very small and has a minimal effect on the published estimates. However, users should exercise some caution as any small fluctuations in average speed estimates over time may be due to large changes in imputation levels. Different levels of imputation may be a result of the number of school days in an individual month (e.g. months with school holidays are likely to have higher levels of imputation). Detailed tables showing the amount of data imputation necessary in the calculation of each published statistic are available at: speeds and congestion statistics guidance

Users should also exercise caution when assessing the statistics over short periods of time when temporary factors such as road works or bad weather may have influenced the speeds reported. This is particularly important when interpreting the data for relatively small areas where a small change on one or two roads can have a large effect on the overall average speeds reported. In addition, users should be cautious when comparing average speeds reported for different local authorities or individual local 'A' roads as a measure of the relative levels of congestion within these areas as physical differences in the types of roads and their speed limits will also have a large bearing on driving speeds.

Methodology and technical detail

Full guidance on the methods used to compile the flow-weighted vehicle speeds on locally managed 'A' roads can be found here: Methodology

Next update

Statistics for October to December 2014 will be published on 12 February 2015.

Congestion statistics to July 2014 are now final. Statistics for September 2014 onwards will be provisional until they are finalised in November 2015, once they are weighted by traffic flow information for 2014. Changes in our estimated figures on average speeds, from provisional to final, at local authority level can be found at:

Differences in provisional and final figures

Request for Feedback

We are always keen to receive feedback from users of transport statistics. If you have any comments about how the statistics in this release are presented or analysed, please contact us using the details listed on the first page of this release.