



Road Statistics 2007: Traffic, Speeds and Congestion

Logo: National Statistics

Revisions: The traffic estimates for 'light vans' and 'buses and coaches' were revised in November 2008. The data in the Excel tables attached contains the updated figures.

This bulletin includes the first release of National Statistics on 2007 Road Traffic, Free Flow Vehicle Speeds in Great Britain, and Traffic Speeds on the Strategic Road Network in England. The bulletin also includes further information about congestion on urban and inter-urban roads.

The bulletin provides a detailed breakdown of statistics related to traffic, speeds and congestion. Key results include:

Road Traffic in Great Britain

- Between 2006 and 2007, total estimated traffic rose by 5.5 billion vehicle kilometres (1.1 per cent) to 513 billion vehicle kilometres. This is a 14 per cent increase over the decade from 1997.
- Car traffic still accounts for the most significant share of the overall traffic, making up 79 per cent of all motor vehicle traffic. In 2007, car traffic totalled 404 billion vehicle kilometres. This is a 0.4 per cent increase from 2006, and is up by 11 per cent since 1997.
- Light van traffic continued to grow faster than overall traffic, as it has done every year since 2000. In 2007, light van traffic was 68.2 billion vehicle kilometres, a 4.6 per cent rise from 2006, and a 40 per cent rise since 1997.
- In 2007, heavy goods vehicle traffic was estimated to be 29.4 billion vehicle kilometres. This was an increase of 0.8 per cent from 2006 and 9.4 per cent from 1997.
- Almost 86 per cent of Great Britain motor vehicle traffic was in England during 2007. Scotland had about 9 per cent of the traffic and Wales 6 per cent.
- It is estimated that foreign registered vehicles accounted for roughly 1 kilometre in every 215 kilometres driven in Great Britain in 2007.
- In 2007, motorways and 'A' roads accounted for 1 per cent and 12 per cent respectively of the road length in Great Britain. In contrast, 20 per cent of all traffic was on motorways and 44 per cent on 'A' roads.
- The minor (i.e. 'B', 'C' and unclassified) road length in Great Britain was estimated to be 345 thousand kilometres in 2007, amounting to 87 per cent of the total road length. These roads carried 37 per cent of all traffic.

Free Flow Vehicle Speeds in Great Britain

- In the ten years from 1997, the percentage of vehicles exceeding the 30 mph speed limit in free flow conditions has dropped for every vehicle type. The most significant decrease was for cars. In 1997, 70 per cent of cars travelled at speeds in excess of the limit; by 2007, this dropped to less than half.
- On motorways in 2007, 54 per cent of cars exceeded the 70 mph speed limit. In addition, 18 per cent of cars were recorded as travelling at 80 mph or faster.
- Very few heavy goods vehicles exceeded their speed limit of 60 mph on motorways. However, over 82 per cent of them exceeded the 50 mph speed limit on dual carriageway non-built-up roads and nearly three-quarters exceeded the 40 mph limit on single carriageway non-built-up roads.
- In 2007, over half of all motorcycles travelled faster than the 30 mph speed limit in built-up areas. Of these, nearly half (or a quarter of the total) exceeded the speed limit by 5 mph or higher.

Congestion and Traffic Speeds on the Inter-Urban Road Network in England

On the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England:

- The average traffic speed over the whole network fell from 55.4 mph in 2005 to 55.0 mph in 2007, a fall of 0.8 per cent. The average speed for the weekday evening peak fell by 1.4 per cent. Speeds on motorways fell by 1.8 per cent and on dual carriageway 'A' roads speeds rose by 1.2 per cent. These speeds are averaged over the whole network including free flow and congested roads.

Congestion in English Urban Areas

- Average morning peak speeds on key routes in the ten largest urban areas vary considerably from route to route and area to area, with 5 per cent of routes achieving average speeds in excess of 30 miles per hour, and 38 per cent with average speeds of 15 miles per hour or lower.
- Traffic on these key routes slows down at the beginning of the morning peak, which in most areas is between 6.30 and 6.45 am, and returns to daytime average speeds by about 9.30 am.

Notes

1. *Road Traffic in Great Britain* - The figures that relate to traffic are measured in terms of vehicle kilometres; this is sometimes known as the volume of traffic. This is not the same as congestion. For example, traffic levels might show an increase but at the same time congestion levels may decline. This could happen if, for example, there is more traffic overall but it is more evenly spread during the day, with less during peak periods and more at other times. Congestion has a number of consequences, such as causing delays and making journey times unreliable.

2. The road traffic estimates are calculated from data collected by some 180 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs) and 10,000 12-hour manual counts per annum, combined with road lengths.

3. *Free Flow Vehicle Speeds in Great Britain* - Data for this survey are collated from 36 sites where a 30 or 40 mph limit applies and at 60 other sites. The sites have been selected so that speeds are not seriously constrained by road layout, traffic congestion or by the proximity of speed cameras. The speeds are recorded as vehicles pass over an automatic counter and do not represent speeds over a longer distance. They do however provide an indication of compliance with speed limits.

4. None of this survey sites in built-up areas were subject to a speed limit lower than 30 mph.
5. Free flow speeds represent speeds under conditions that normally unaffected by congestion. In contrast, the speeds provided in the chapters on urban and inter-urban congestion represent speeds under all conditions.
6. *Congestion and Traffic Speeds on the Inter-Urban Road Network* - The indicator used to monitor inter-urban congestion is the average vehicle delay, derived from the differences between observed journey times and a reference journey time (the time that could theoretically be achieved when the traffic is free-flowing), weighted by traffic flows for each route of the network. The slowest 10 per cent of journeys are selected for each 15-minute departure time between 6am and 8pm for each day of the week, on each of 91 routes.
7. For the Spending Review 2004 (SR04), there was a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target that the inter-urban congestion indicator should be less in the year ending March 2008 than in the baseline period August 2004-July 2005. For the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR07), this indicator is one of four used to measure success against the Department's PSA to deliver reliable and efficient transport networks that support economic growth. The indicator will be monitored from the baseline year ending March 2008 up to the year ending March 2011. Reliability performance will be assessed in the context of an expected increase in traffic of 1-2 per cent per year. There is no specific numerical target. Data on progress with the inter-urban PSA indicator are published monthly and quarterly.
8. Traffic speeds on the Strategic Road Network for 2005-2007 have been produced from the database used for the inter-urban congestion indicator.
9. *Congestion and Traffic Speeds in English Urban Areas* - The Department has a Public Service Agreement indicator relating to movement on main roads in city centres in the ten largest urban areas in England. Data on progress on the urban congestion measure are published quarterly.
10. The bulletin *Road Statistics 2007: Traffic, Speeds and Congestion* is available from DfT, SR2, Zone 3/17, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DR.

Publication details

Available by telephone order on +44 (0)20 7944 3095

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