



Congestion on local authority managed 'A' roads, England: April to June 2013

This statistical release presents information about congestion on local authority managed 'A' roads in England between April and June 2013.

Locally managed 'A' roads account for around nine per cent of all roads in England, but carry around a third of all traffic.

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. School holidays and the month of August are excluded from this measure.

The data used to estimate average speeds are based on GPS location reports from a fleet of probe vehicles and, in the case of the statistics published in this release, are weighted to take account of the relative traffic flow on each road.

We are currently reviewing the content and value of the statistics tables that support this release. Proposals to add a table presenting average speeds for individual roads, cease production of some tables and to combine or reduce the content of others are set out at the end of Section 1 of this release. We are keen to receive feedback on these proposals, please contact us using the details provided on this cover page.



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FURTHER INFORMATION

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The key findings from this statistical release include:

- In the year ending June 2013, provisional data show that the average speed on locally managed 'A' roads in England during the weekday morning peak was 24.9 mph. This is a 0.3 per cent decrease on the year ending March 2013.
- For individual months, average speeds on locally managed 'A' roads in England were slightly slower in April 2013 (down 1.4 per cent), May 2013 (down 0.8 per cent) and June 2013 (down 0.8 per cent) compared to the same months in 2012.

1. Congestion on local authority managed 'A' roads

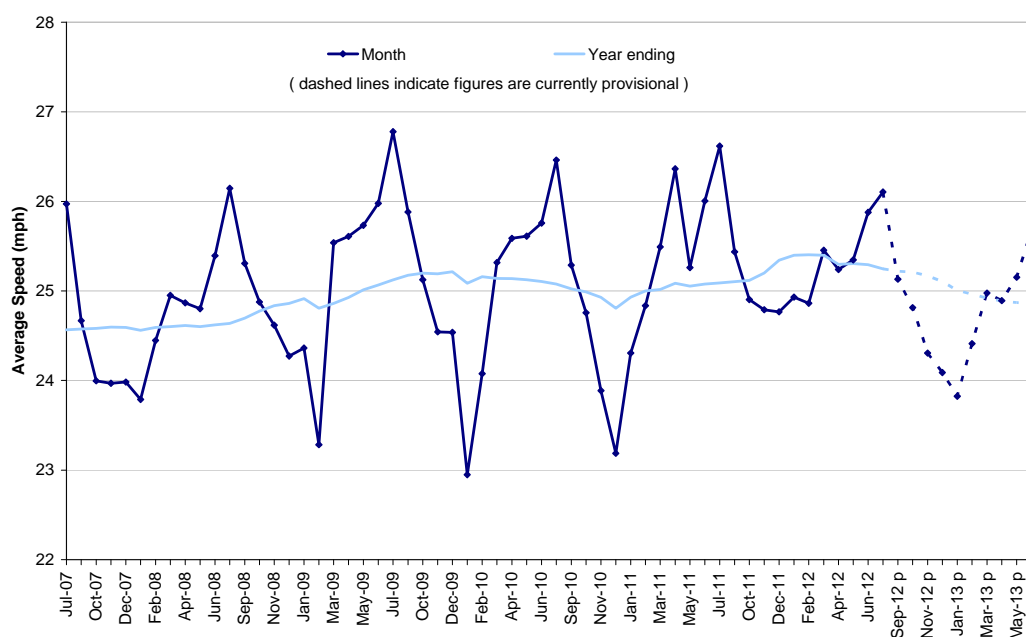
This release contains monthly and annual estimates of average speeds achieved during the weekday morning peak on locally managed 'A' roads in England. Statistics for periods to July 2012 have been finalised, while statistics for the period September 2012 to June 2013 are currently provisional.

The key findings for the period April 2013 to June 2013 were:

- Provisional data show that the average speed on locally managed 'A' roads in England during the weekday morning peak was 24.9 mph between July 2012 and June 2013. This is a 0.3 per cent decrease on the year ending March 2013.
- For individual months, the average speed in April was 24.9 mph (1.4 per cent slower than in April 2012), in May was 25.2 mph (0.8 per cent slower than May 2012) and in June was 25.7 mph (0.8 per cent slower than June 2012).
- There was an upward trend in annual average weekday morning peak speeds between the years ending December 2010 and February 2012. However, from March 2012, annual average speeds have generally decreased. Following a period of relatively large decreases in average speed between the years ending November 2012 and March 2013, decreases have been smaller in recent months with annual average speeds remaining at 24.9 miles per hour between March 2013 and June 2013.

Average vehicle speeds (flow-weighted) during the weekday morning peak¹ on locally managed 'A' roads: England, monthly and annual averages from 2006/07

(Congestion web table [CGN0205](#))



1. Morning peak defined as 7am to 10am. School holiday periods and the month of August are excluded.

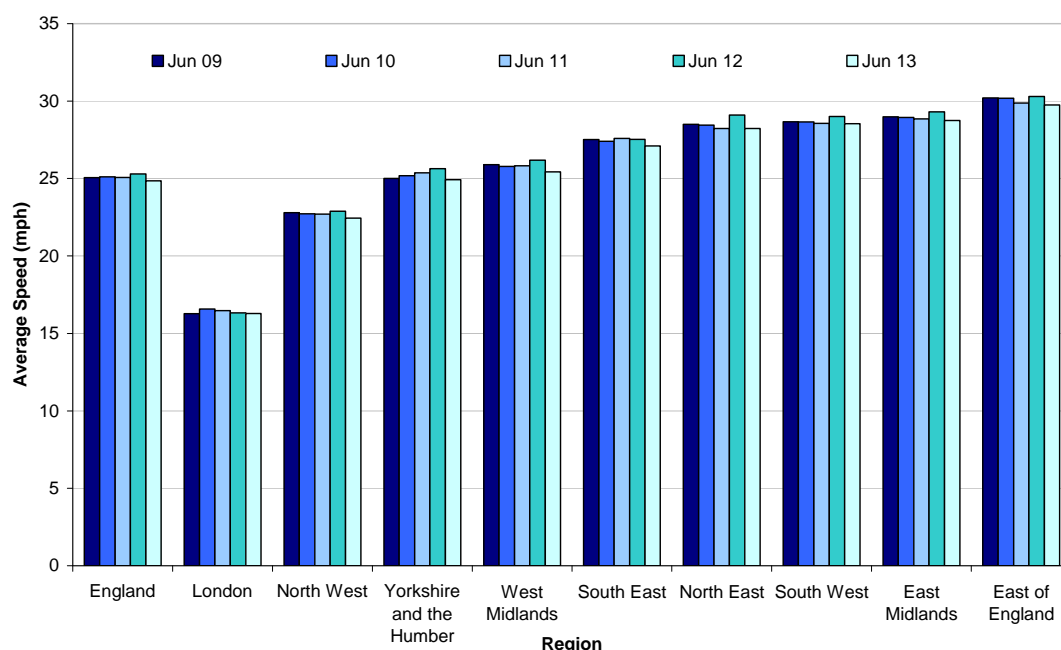
2. Figures in this chart have not been seasonally adjusted.

p = provisional

- The downward trend in annual average weekday morning peak speeds observed since March 2012 can be partly attributed to the amount of rainfall over this period. Met office data show that rainfall in England was higher in each of the months between March 2012 and March 2013 compared to the same months in the previous year. In addition, the larger decrease in average weekday morning peak speeds in January 2013 is likely to be explained by a period of significant snowfall across much of the country in that month, which caused considerable disruption on the road. It is less clear why annual average speeds have continued to decrease (albeit at a slower rate) between the years ending April 2013 and June 2013. The smaller decreases may be partly explained by a small increase in traffic on urban 'A' roads over this period. In addition, the introduction of new guidance for local highway authorities for setting speed limits on local roads in their area published in January 2013 may have had some impact on average speeds on locally managed 'A' roads in recent months.
- At a regional level, each of the nine regions in England had slower average weekday morning peak speeds during the year ending June 2013 compared to the year ending June 2012. Between these years, North East experienced the greatest proportional decline in speed (3.0, per cent) while London experienced the smallest decline (0.3 per cent). The East of England continues to have the highest average weekday morning peak speed and London continues to have the lowest (at 29.7 mph and 16.3mph respectively in the year ending June 2013). The differences in regional average weekday morning peak speeds will partly reflect physical differences in the types of roads in these areas (e.g. in the East of England around 80 per cent of locally managed 'A' roads are classified as rural compared to only 4 per cent in London).

Average vehicle speeds (flow-weighted) during the weekday morning peak¹ on locally managed 'A' roads: by region, years ending June from 2009/10

(Congestion web table [CGN0903](#))



1. Morning peak defined as 7am to 10am. School holiday periods and the month of August are excluded.

2. Figures in this chart have not been seasonally adjusted.

p = provisional

Statistics tables and maps on *Congestion on local authority managed 'A' roads* broken down by regions and local highways authorities can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-congestion-and-reliability-statistics#statistical-data-sets>

Review of statistics tables supporting this release

The proposals set out below are intended to rationalise the statistics tables which support this release. Some of the tables currently produced are done so primarily for historical reasons and there is little evidence that these tables add much value to users. Some tables contain figures which are already presented in other tables, or could easily be added to tables with similar content.

In addition, we are currently investigating whether we can publish average speeds for individual roads. In particular, we are looking at whether estimates at this disaggregated level are sufficiently robust for publication purposes.

None of the proposals outlined below involve the removal of any statistics or analysis contained in this release.

We are keen to receive feedback on these proposals. Please contact us using the details on the cover page of this release **by 4 October 2013**.

Proposal 1 – Start publishing average speeds (during weekday morning peak) for individual roads if estimates are judged to be sufficiently robust.

Proposal 2 – Cease production of un-weighted average speed estimates (i.e. tables CGN0203, CGN0902 and map CGN0204). *These are believed to add little value to the more representative flow-weighted average speed estimates.*

Proposal 3 – Cease production of average journey time data (in minutes per mile) in all tables. *These data can be derived directly from the speed data and will follow similar (inverse) trends over time, adding little value to the average speed data published.*

Proposal 4 – Cease production of regional tables (CGN0901-03). *Content is already published in the local authority tables.*

Proposal 5 – Cease production of separate Transport for London (TfL) tables (CGN0207-08).and integrate TfL content from these tables to corresponding local authority level tables (CGN0201 and CGN0206) changing the TfL 3 month averages to rolling annual averages (as currently in CGN0206).

2. 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.

The measure estimates average speeds achieved by vehicles during the weekday morning peak, 7am to 10am. Any weekdays falling during school holiday periods or on bank holidays are excluded so that the measure reflects conditions when demand for the network is highest. Therefore, sample sizes for some months will vary significantly depending on when school holidays fall. Data for August are excluded due to very low sample sizes. None of the statistics in this series are seasonally adjusted.

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: <https://www.gov.uk/transport-statistics-notes-and-guidance-road-congestion-and-reliability#technical-information>

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 not take a direct comparison of the average speeds reported for different local authorities or regions as a measure of the relative levels of congestion within these areas as physical differences in the types of roads in these areas and their speed limits will also have a large bearing on driving speeds.

The congestion statistics for September 2012 to June 2013 are currently published as provisional estimates as they have been weighted by traffic flow information from 2011. These estimates will be updated using 2012 traffic data in November 2013 and made final at this point. The small differences between the provisional and final versions of the national-level statistics published in previous years are shown below.

Difference between final and provisional monthly speed statistics

Month	Difference
September 2011	0.10%
October 2011	0.08%
November 2011	0.10%
December 2011	0.08%
January 2012	0.10%
February 2012	0.10%
March 2012	0.11%
April 2012	0.10%
May 2012	0.09%
June 2012	0.10%
July 2012	0.11%

In addition, a detailed table showing the effect of re-weighting the statistics at a local authority level is available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51135/la-data-quality-provfinaldiff.xls

3. Background notes

1. The web tables give further detail of the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other related topics. They are available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-congestion-and-reliability-statistics#statistical-data-sets>

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

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51130/Methodology_for_calculation_of_flow-weighted_vehicle_speeds_on_locally_managed_A_roads.pdf

3. A useful introduction into the Department's congestion and reliability statistics, providing more detail as to what the different statistics measure, how they are published and the ways in which they are used is available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51125/An_introduction_into_the_Department_for_Transport_s_congestion_statistics.pdf

4. A short paper outlining the differences between the flow-weighted and un-weighted vehicle speeds on locally managed 'A' roads can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51131/Exploration_of_differences_between_flow-weighted_and_un-weighted_estimates_of_vehicle_speed_on_locally_managed_A_roads.pdf

5. There are many interlinking factors that may have a bearing on the statistics published in this release. Amongst others, these include traffic volumes, road conditions, localised traffic interventions, driver behaviour and the weather. Recent statistics published by the Department relating to some of these areas are available at:

- Traffic volume and flow;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/road-traffic-statistics>
- Public attitudes towards road congestion;
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51137/Public_attitudes_towards_road_congestion_November_2009_to_February_2010.pdf
- British social attitudes survey: attitudes to transport.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-social-attitudes-survey-2012-attitudes-towards-transport>

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

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

7. In July 2012, the United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

The assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the letter confirming the designation of these statistics can be found here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51139/Assessment_of_compliance_with_the_Code_of_Practice_for_Official_Statistics_-_Statistics_on_Road_Reliability_and_Congestion.pdf

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51140/Letter_of_confirmation_as_National_Statistics.pdf

8. 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/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/51142/Pre-release_access_list_-_Congestion_on_local_authority_managed_A_roads.pdf

9. The next Congestion Statistics release will be published on 14 November 2013. It will contain provisional estimates of vehicle speeds on locally managed 'A' roads between July and September 2013.

4. 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.