



Department for Transport

# Congestion on local 'A' roads, England: January to March 2015



**Main findings: Average speeds during the morning peak have continued to fall for 3 years**

### 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

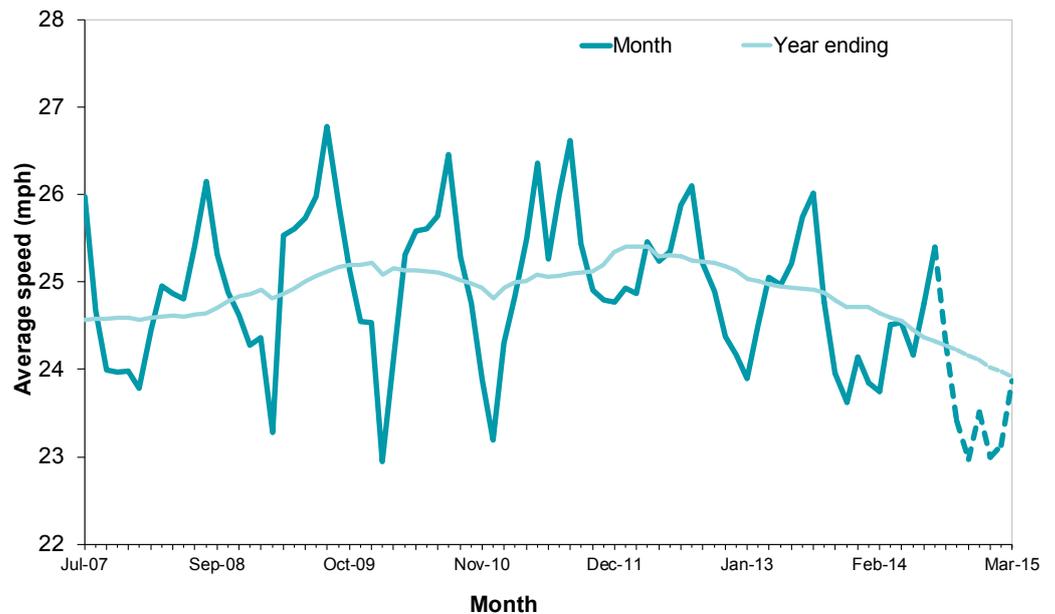


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- ▶ The **average speed on local 'A' roads** in England during the **weekday morning peak** in the year ending March 2015 was **23.9 mph**. This is a **0.8% decrease** on the year ending December 2014.
- ▶ For individual months, average speeds on local 'A' roads in England were slower across January, February and March 2015, with decreases of 3.6%, 2.6% and 2.6% respectively, compared to the same months in 2014.
- ▶ A combination of increases in levels of traffic on the 'A' road network and intermittent periods of high rainfall levels are likely to have contributed to the fall in speeds observed between March 2012 and March 2015.

### Average vehicle speeds during the weekday morning peak<sup>1</sup> 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

## 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?



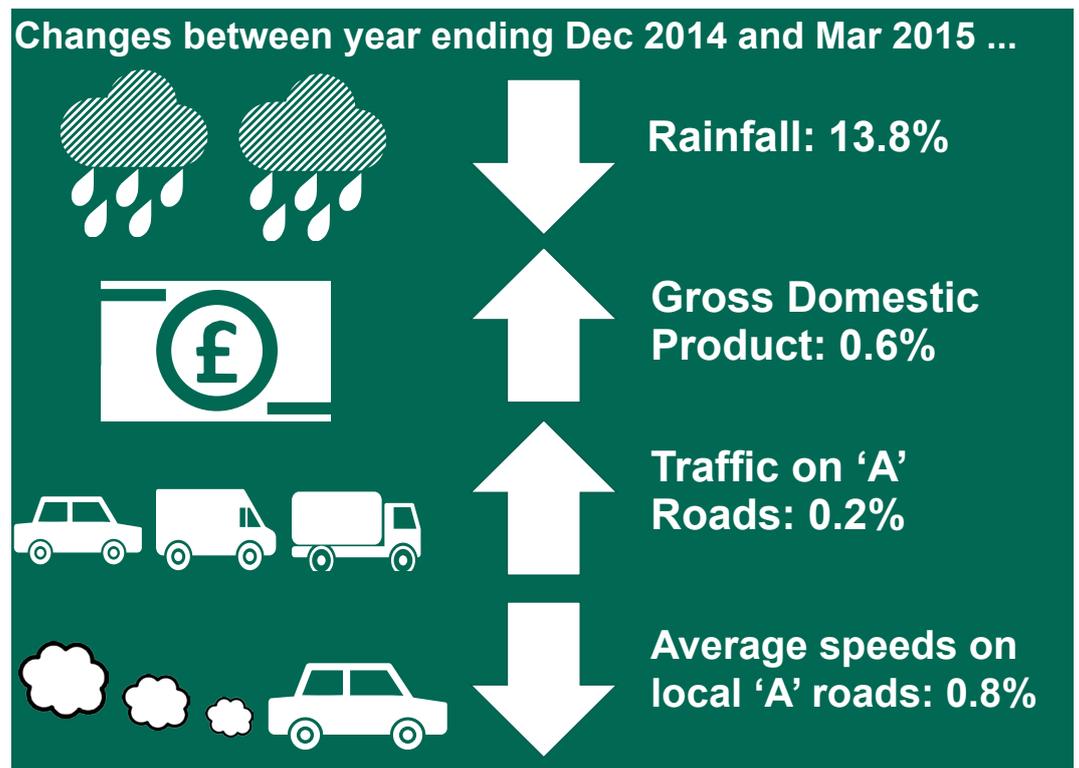
Speeds are measured during the weekday morning peak as this is when demand on local 'A' roads is typically at its highest. This high demand often leads to physical congestion and low speeds.

**Latest statistics:** Provisional data show that the average speed on local 'A' roads in England during the weekday morning peak was 23.9 mph in the year ending March 2015. This is a 0.8% decrease on the year ending December 2014.

Looking at individual months, the average speed in January 2015 was 23.0 mph (3.6% slower than in January 2014), in February 2015 it was 23.1 mph (2.6% slower than in February 2014) and in March 2015 it was 23.9 mph (2.6% slower than March 2014).

**Recent trends:** 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 over the last 3 years can be partly attributed to intermittent periods of high rainfall over this period, as well as the continuous growth in levels of traffic on 'A' roads over the last 2 years.

Between December 2014 and March 2015, preliminary estimates suggest that GDP has increased by 0.6% with traffic levels on 'A' roads increasing by 0.2% and average speeds on local 'A' roads falling by 0.8%. A stronger economy often results in more traffic on roads, particularly if fuel prices are also decreasing - as observed between December 2014 and March 2015.



### 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](#)

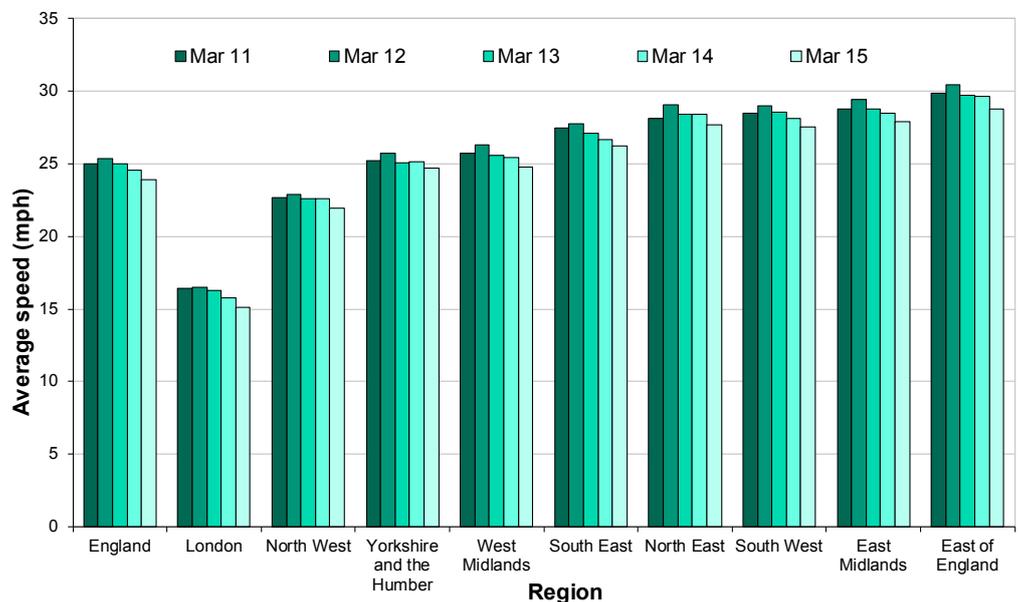
Individual roads, by direction, figures on average weekday morning peak speeds on locally managed 'A' roads, Table [CGN0209](#)

### Regional trends for local congestion

At a regional level, all regions in England experienced slower average weekday morning peak speeds during the year ending March 2015 compared to the year ending March 2014. Between these years, London experienced the greatest fall in average speeds (4.2%) across all nine regions, followed by the North West (with a fall of 2.9% in average speeds) and East of England (with a fall of 2.8% in average speeds). The East of England continues to have the highest average weekday morning peak speed and London continues to have the lowest (at 28.8 mph and 15.1 mph respectively in the year ending March 2015).

The recent falls in average speeds across London may be partly attributed to a reduction in speed limits in some London boroughs (e.g. the introduction of some 20mph wide zones to improve road safety).

### Average vehicle speeds during the weekday morning peak<sup>1</sup> on local 'A' roads: by region, years ending March from 2011 (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



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**

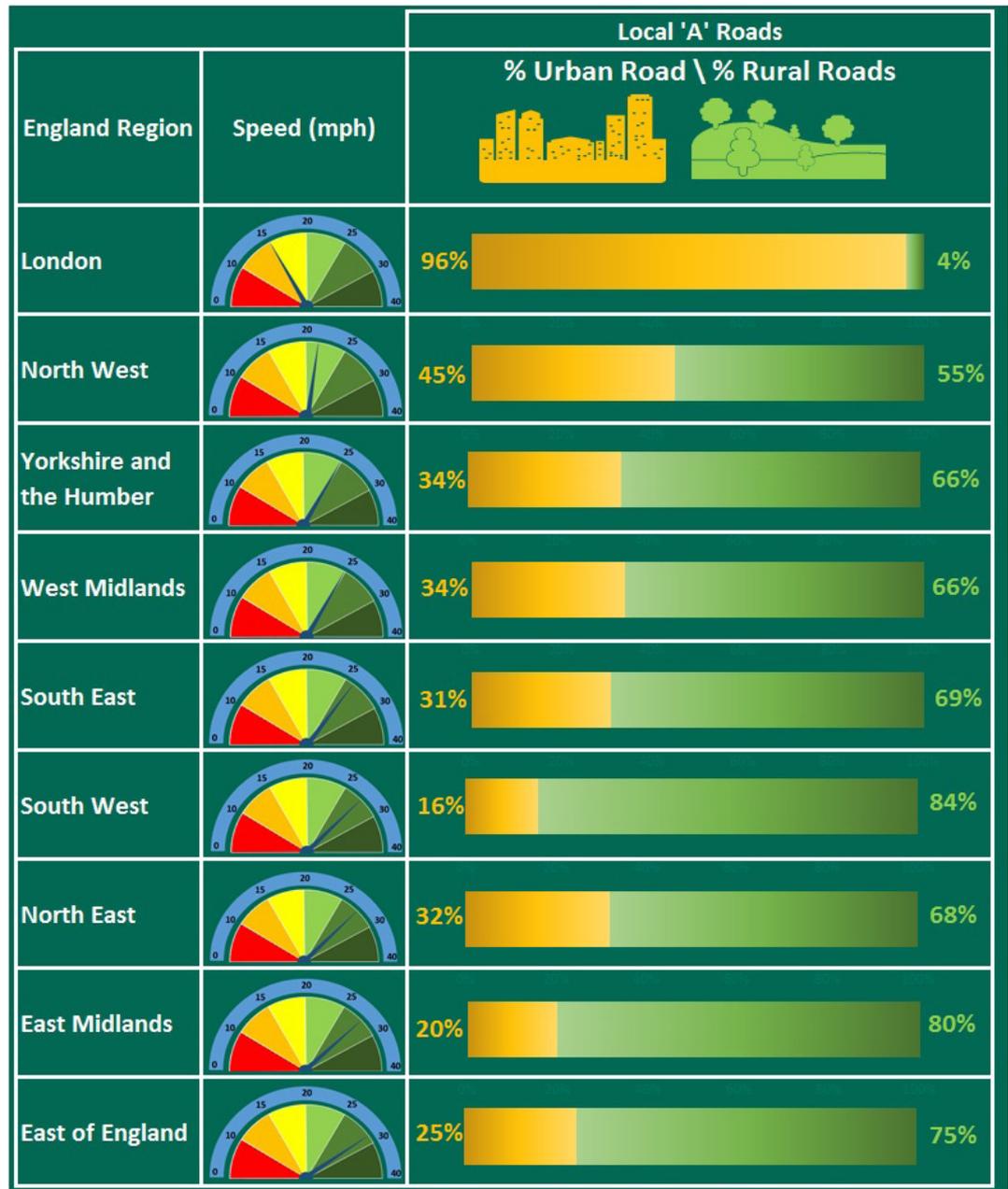


Information on traffic volume and flow used in weighting average speeds is available at: [Road traffic statistics](#)

British Social Attitudes Survey is available at: [British Social Attitudes Survey: 2013](#)

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 on local 'A' roads, by region and urban/rural road length: year ending March 2015**



**Source**

Speeds: DfT Congestion Data

Road lengths: Road lengths in Great Britain 2014, [Table RDL0101](#)

**Following a proposal set out in our previous quarterly release, *Congestion on local 'A' Roads, England: October to December 2014*, we will not be updating Table CGN0201 going forward.** This change is being made as a result of feedback and no objections received on our proposal. Figures on average speeds for each local highway authority are still available in Table [CGN0206](#) and we will continue to update this on a quarterly basis. Figures in Table [CGN0206](#) provide a fuller picture of trends in local authority average speeds on their locally managed 'A' road network, as well as to providing a series that is directly comparable with the national annual average speeds in table [CGN0205](#).

## Update on future plans

We have been working closely with Highways England and have also consulted a number of local authorities and other stakeholders to develop a new suite of travel time measures for the strategic road network. We are planning to publish statistics for the strategic road network on this new suite of measures in August 2015.

The suite of travel time measures consists of average speeds, average delay and reliability. For further information on this please refer to the latest [reliability statistical release](#). We plan to publish some ad hoc analysis of these measures for local A roads alongside our next statistical release in August.

If you would like more information then please get in touch using the contact details on the front cover of this release.

## 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 interpreting 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. This is because 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 in our [Congestion Methodology document](#).

### Next update



Statistics for April to June 2015 will be published on 13 August 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.