



Department for Transport

# Congestion on local 'A' roads, England: July to September 2015



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

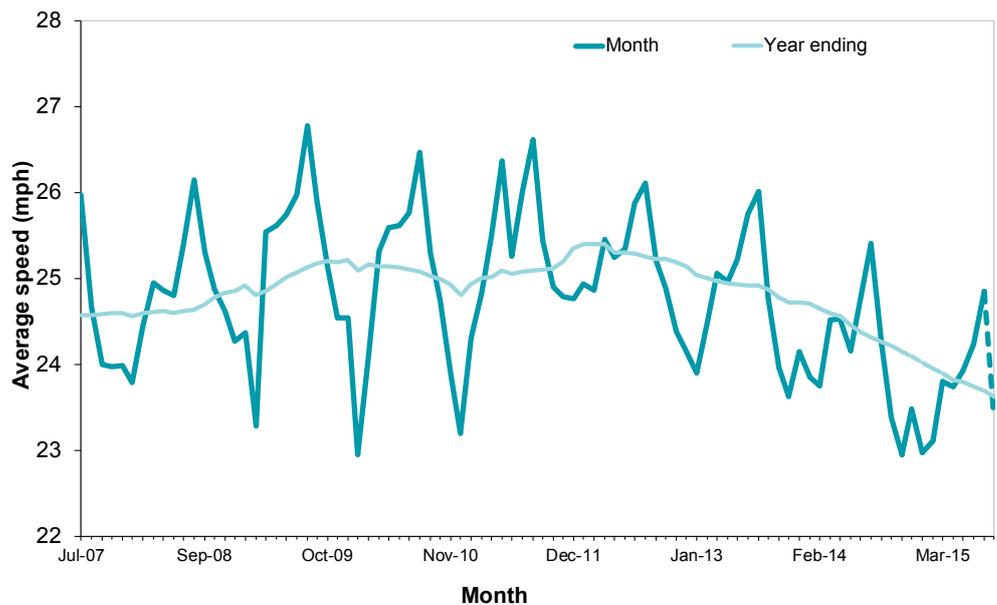


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- ▶ The **average speed on local 'A' roads** in England during the **weekday morning peak** in the year ending September 2015 was **23.6 mph**. This is a **0.5% decrease** on the year ending June 2015.
- ▶ For individual months, average speeds on local 'A' roads in England were slower across July and September, with decreases of 2.2% and 3.5% respectively, compared to the same months in 2014. The month of August is excluded from this measure.
- ▶ The fall in average speeds observed in recent years is likely to be partly attributed to increases in traffic levels on the 'A' road network over the same period. Intermittent periods of high rainfall over this period may also help to explain some of the observed decreases in speed.

**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

## National overview of congestion on local 'A' roads

### 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.

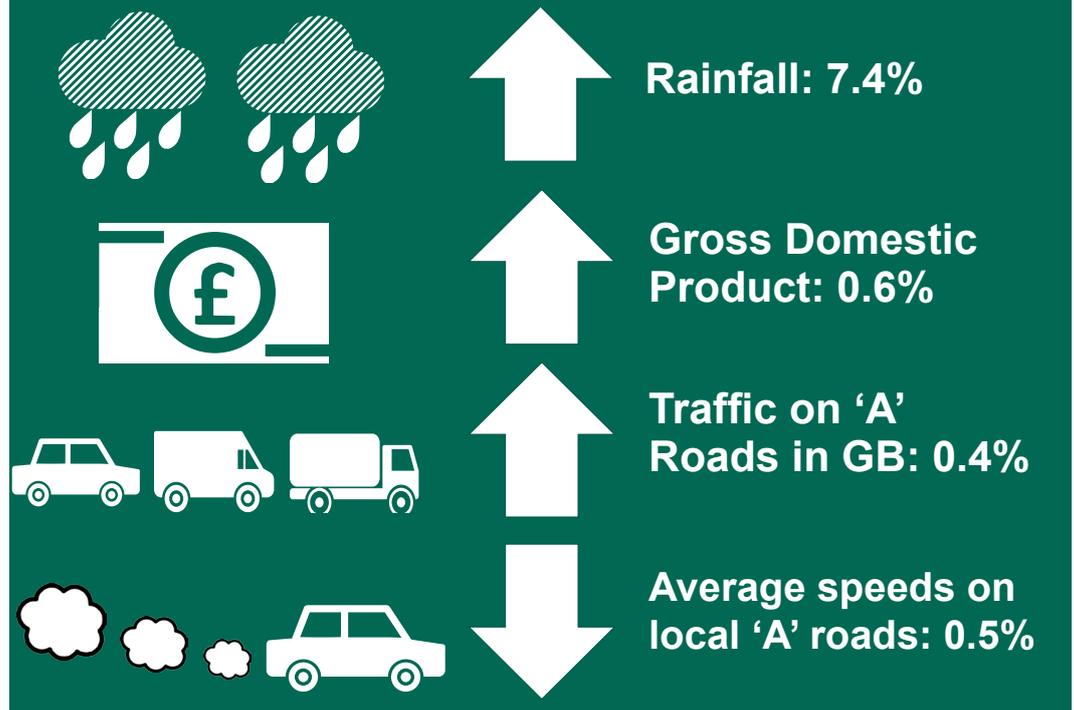
**Latest statistics:** Provisional data show that the average speed on local 'A' roads in England during the weekday morning peak was 23.6 mph in the year ending September 2015. This is a 0.5% decrease on the year ending June 2015.

Looking at individual months, the average speed in July 2015 was 24.8 mph (2.2% slower than in July 2014) and in September 2015 it was 23.4 mph (3.5% slower than in September 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 recent years is likely to be partly attributed to increases in traffic levels on 'A' roads over the same period. To a lesser extent, intermittent periods of high rainfall over this period may also help to explain some of the observed decreases in speed.

Between June 2015 and September 2015, preliminary estimates suggest that GDP has increased by 0.6% with traffic levels on 'A' roads (in Great Britain) increasing by 0.5% and average speeds on local 'A' roads falling by 0.5%. A stronger economy often results in more traffic, which can increase levels of congestion on roads.

### Changes between year ending Jun 2015 and Sep 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](#)

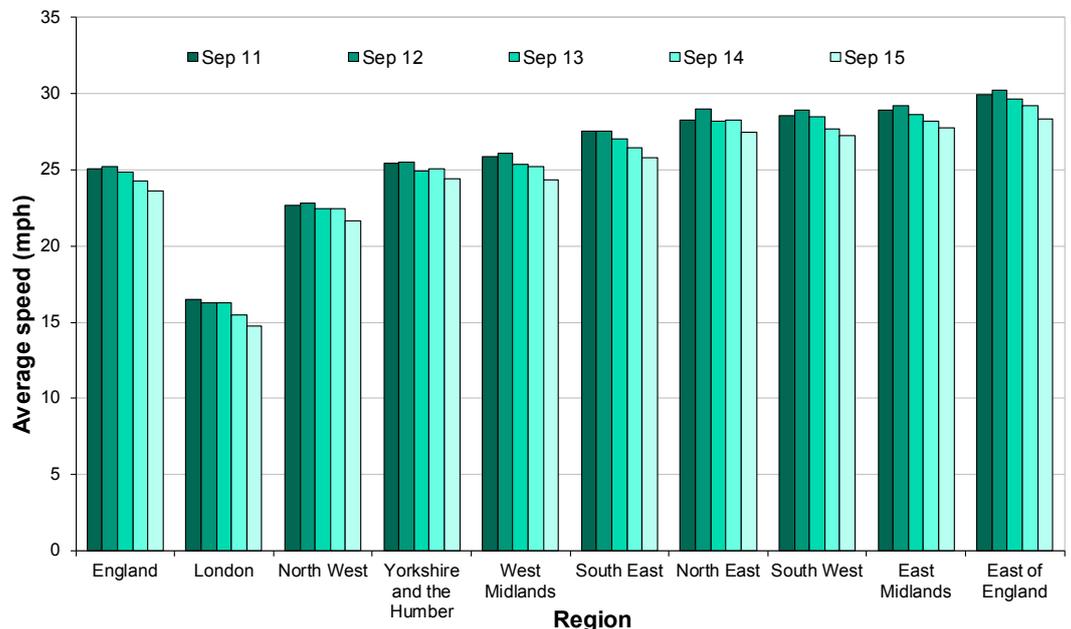
Individual roads, by direction, figures on average weekday morning peak speeds on locally managed 'A' roads, Table [CGN0209](#)

## Regional trends for local congestion

At a regional level, all regions in England experienced slower average weekday morning peak speeds during the year ending September 2015 compared to the year ending September 2014. Between these years, London experienced the greatest fall in average speeds (4.5%) across all nine regions, followed by the North West and West Midlands (both with a fall of 3.5% 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 28.3 mph and 14.8 mph respectively in the year ending September 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 September 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**

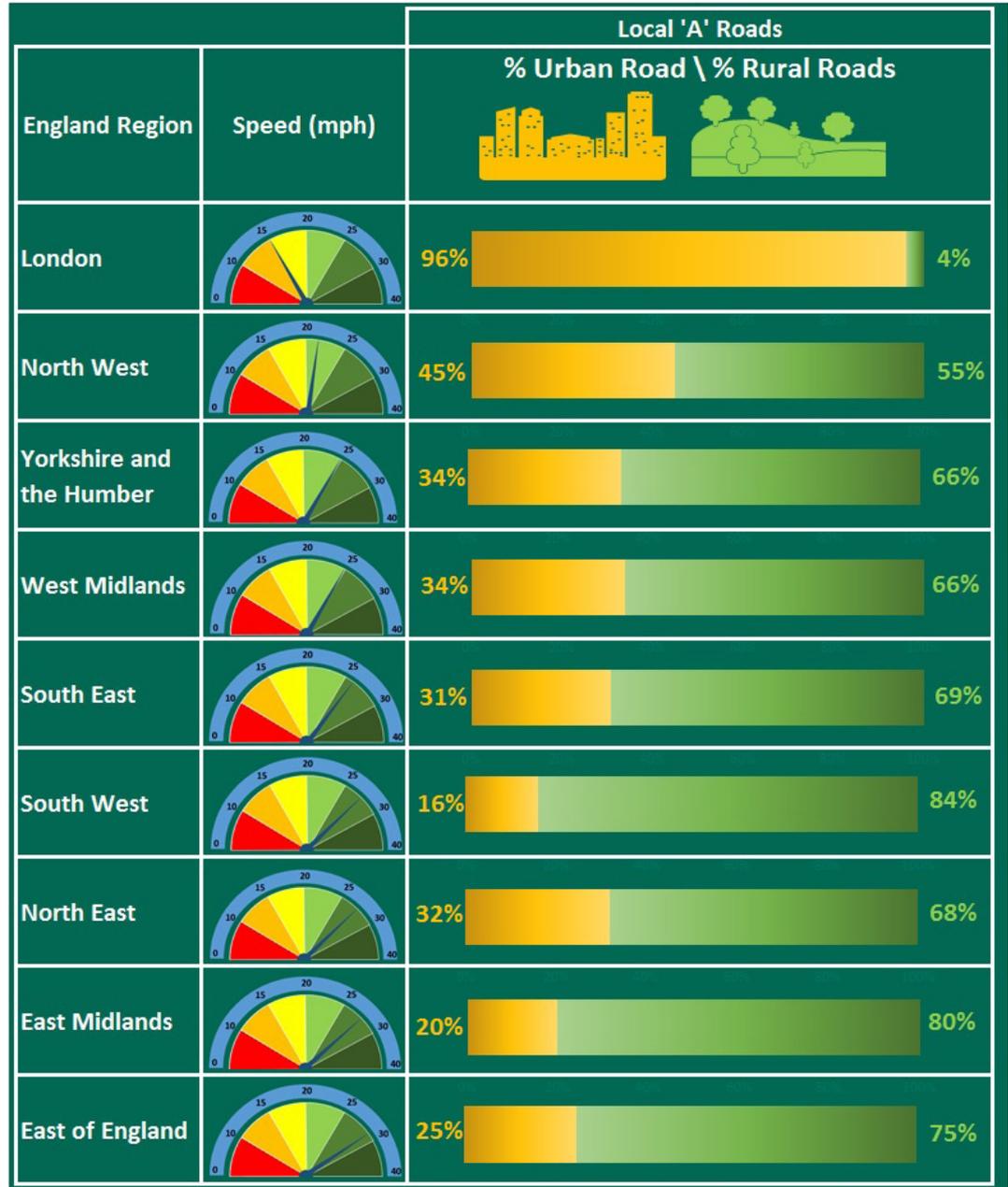


Information on traffic volume and flow used in weighting average speeds is available at: [Road traffic statistics](#)

Attitudes on road congestion can be found in the British Social Attitudes Survey, which 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 September 2015**



**Source**

Speeds: DfT Road Congestion Data

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

## Update on future plans

Following our collaboration with Highways England and consulting with a number of local highway authorities and other stakeholders, we have developed a new suite of travel time measures for the strategic road network. In July 2015 we published ad-hoc [analysis of travel time on the strategic road network](#) for England in 2014. The new suite of travel time measures consists of average speeds, average delay and reliability.

We are planning to produce similar analysis on travel time measures for local A roads in England soon. We are keen to seek feedback on these new measures and are planning to produce a short survey to capture this.

If you would like to participate in the survey or have any feedback then please get in touch using the contact details in the front cover of this release.

## Background information

### Next update



Statistics for October to December 2015 will be published on 11 February 2016.

Congestion statistics to July 2015 are now final. Statistics for September 2015 onwards will be provisional until they are finalised in November 2016, once they are weighted by traffic flow information for 2015. 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](#).

## 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 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](#).