



Department
for Transport

Provisional Road Traffic Estimates

Great Britain:

April 2016 - March 2017

Provisional estimates show that motor vehicle traffic was at a record high in the year ending March 2017.

The provisional figure, of 324.3 billion¹ vehicle miles travelled on Great Britain's roads in the year ending March 2017, was 1.7% higher than the previous year. This is a record level, 3.2% higher than the pre-recession peak in the year ending September 2007. Rolling annual motor vehicle traffic has now increased each quarter in succession for four years.

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About provisional traffic estimates

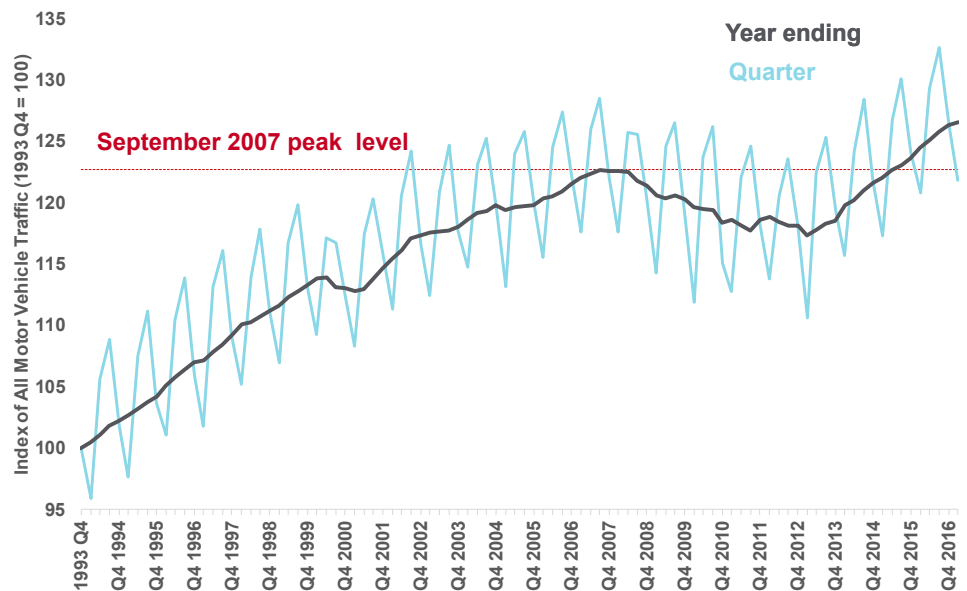
This release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for April 2016 to March 2017. Provisional estimates are published quarterly and remain provisional until after they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year. Final annual estimates for 2017 are due to be published in summer 2018. These provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a network of around 200 automatic traffic counters. Final annual figures also incorporate manual traffic count data.

Traffic shows a seasonal pattern at the national level, being highest in summer and lowest in winter. This publication focuses on rolling annual traffic totals, which better illustrate medium and long term trends in traffic.

Footnote:

1. One billion = 1,000 million

Chart 1: Rolling Annual and Quarterly Indices of Road Traffic in Great Britain, from 1993



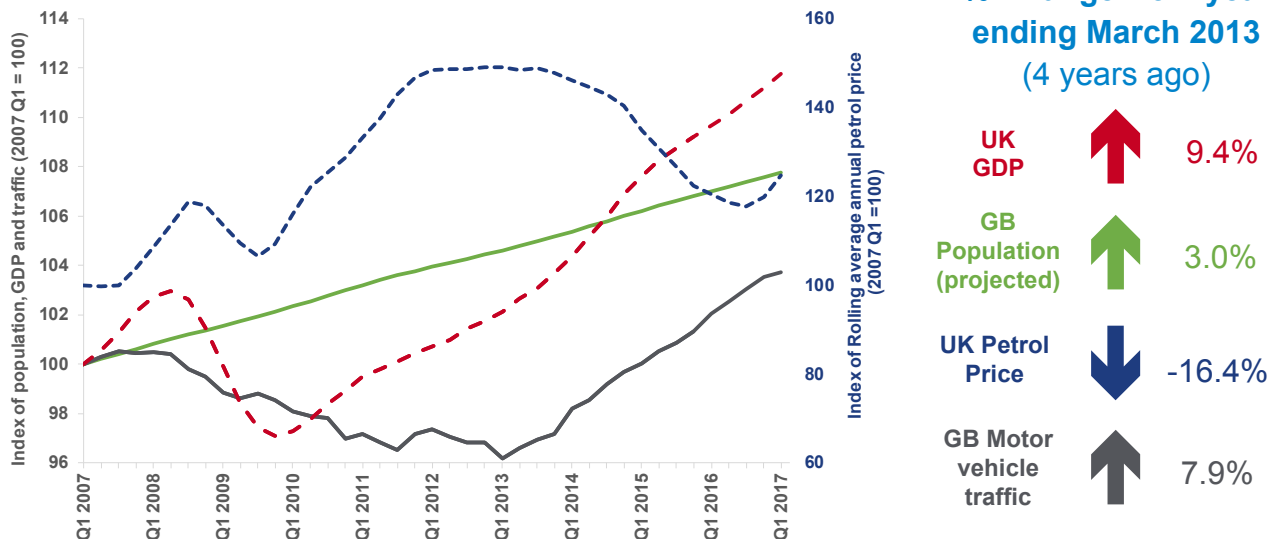
Compared to the previous year, in the year ending March 2017:

- ▶ **Car traffic increased** by 1.4% to a record 252.9 billion vehicle miles, 4.7 billion more vehicle miles travelled than the pre-recession peak in the year ending September 2007.
- ▶ **Van traffic continued to rise**, increasing by 4.5% to a new peak of 49.6 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Lorry traffic fell** by 0.8% to 16.6 billion vehicle miles.
- ▶ **Traffic rose on all road types** apart from urban 'A' roads, where it stayed broadly stable.
- ▶ **New record traffic levels** were seen on rural 'A' roads and rural minor roads, of 94.3 and 45.7 billion vehicle miles, respectively.

In Context

Road traffic trends are affected by a wide range of factors, including population levels, personal travel choices, and the demand for goods and services. The increase in traffic over the last four years is likely to reflect the growth both in the UK economy² and population² over the same period, and also the decline in average fuel prices³ from mid-2013 until February 2016.

Chart 2: Index of rolling annual motor vehicle traffic in Great Britain, UK GDP, GB population and UK unleaded petrol prices, from 2007



Summary Figures

The summary table below shows how vehicle traffic in the year ending March 2017 compares to that in the year ending December 2016, and across a range of earlier years. More information on our provisional estimates, along with our [TRA25](#) series of provisional traffic estimate tables, can be found online [here](#).

	Vehicle Miles (Provisional)	Percentage change from...				
		Last Quarter	Last Year	Five Years Ago	Ten Years Ago	Twenty Years Ago
		Year ending Dec 2016	Year ending Mar 2016	Year ending Mar 2012	Year ending Mar 2007	Year ending Mar 1997
↔ is used for changes of 0.5% or less	Year ending Mar 2017					
All Motor Vehicle Traffic	324.3 billion	↔ 0.2%	↑ 1.7%	↑ 6.5%	↑ 3.7%	↑ 18.1%
Cars and Taxis	252.9 billion	↔ 0.1%	↑ 1.4%	↑ 4.8%	↑ 2.0%	↑ 12.9%
Light Commercial Vehicles (Vans, or LCV)	49.6 billion	↑ 1.0%	↑ 4.5%	↑ 19.7%	↑ 23.3%	↑ 71.7%
Heavy Goods Vehicles (Lorries, or HGV)	16.6 billion	↔ -0.3%	↓ -0.8%	↑ 4.6%	↓ -7.5%	↑ 1.9%
Motorways	67.7 billion	↔ -0.1%	↑ 1.0%	↑ 9.3%	↑ 9.1%	↑ 38.2%
Rural 'A' Roads	94.3 billion	↔ 0.5%	↑ 2.4%	↑ 7.4%	↑ 5.6%	↑ 22.2%
Urban 'A' Roads	49.9 billion	↔ -0.3%	↔ 0.2%	↑ 1.2%	↓ -2.7%	↔ -0.2%
Rural Minor Roads	45.7 billion	↔ 0.5%	↑ 2.3%	↑ 12.1%	↑ 7.2%	↑ 24.8%
Urban Minor Roads	66.6 billion	↔ 0.3%	↑ 2.1%	↑ 3.3%	↓ -1.0%	↑ 7.9%

Footnotes:

- Economic and population data are sourced from the Office for National Statistics, available [here](#) and [here](#) respectively.
- Fuel price data is sourced from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, available [here](#).

Vehicle Type

Provisional estimates indicate that car and van traffic increased, while lorry traffic fell, over the last year.

Compared to the previous year, in the year ending March 2017:



Car and taxi traffic reached a new high of 252.9 billion vehicle miles, 1.9% above the pre-recession peak of 248.2 billion vehicle miles for the year ending September 2007. Car traffic has grown for the last four years by an average of 1.5% per year.



Van traffic increased by 4.5% to a record high of 49.6 billion vehicle miles. For the last four years, van traffic has increased on average by 4.8% per year, and has been the fastest growing traffic type (in percentage terms) over this period.



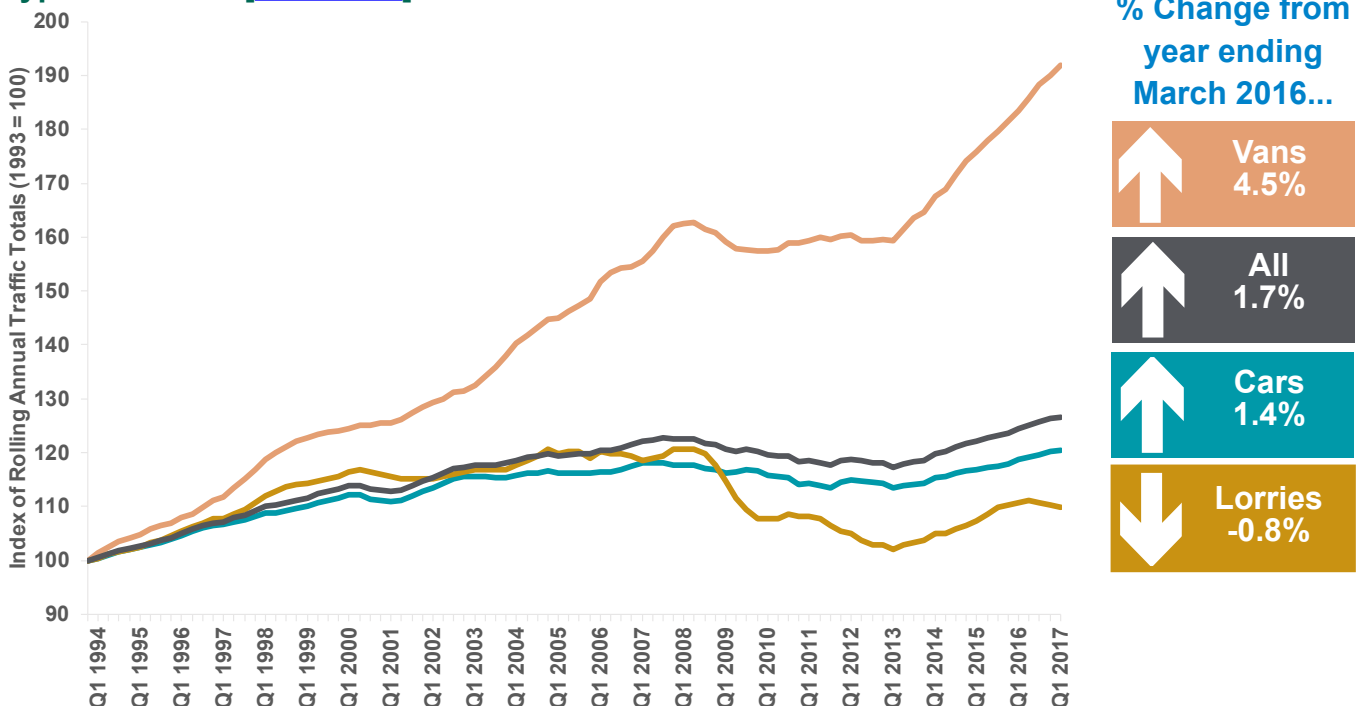
Lorry traffic fell by 0.8% to 16.6 billion vehicle miles. Despite this, HGV traffic is 7.5% higher than four years ago, making it the second fastest growing traffic type in this period. However, lorry traffic remains below the peak of 18.2 billion vehicle miles observed in the year ending June 2008.

Long term trends

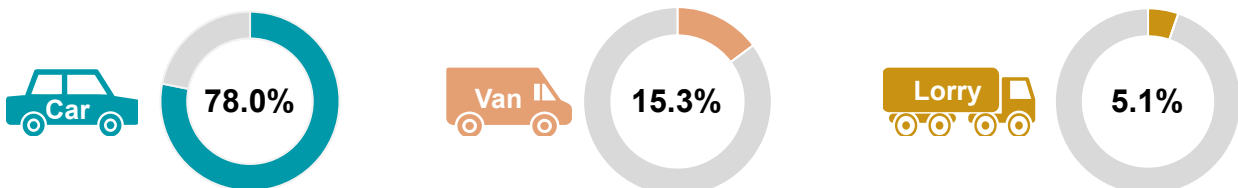
Over the last 20 years, traffic has increased at varying rates across vehicle types:

All Motor Vehicles 18.1% Car 12.9% Van 71.7% Lorry 1.9%

Chart 3: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain, by vehicle type from 1993 [TRA2501f]



Share of traffic by vehicle type, in the year ending March 2017



Road Type

Provisional estimates for traffic on rural 'A' roads and rural minor roads were the highest ever recorded.

Compared to the previous year, in the year ending March 2017:

- **Motorway traffic** increased by 1% to 67.7 billion vehicle miles. Over the last six years, motorway traffic has increased on average by 1.7% per year.
- **'A' road traffic** showed an increase of 1.6%. This was mainly driven by traffic on **rural 'A' roads**, which grew by 2.4% to 94.3 billion vehicle miles. Traffic on **urban 'A' roads** stayed broadly stable at 49.9 billion vehicle miles.

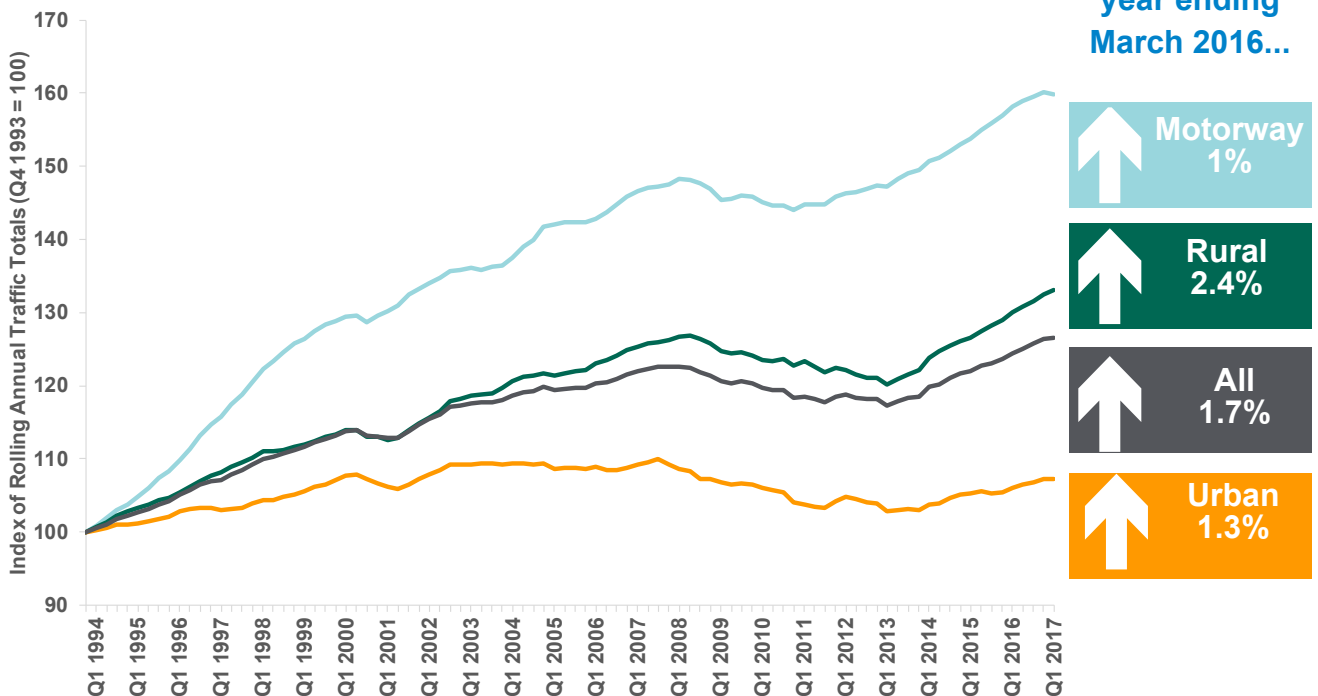
Minor road traffic increased in total by 2.1%, reaching 45.7 billion vehicle miles for rural minor roads, and 66.6 billion vehicle miles for urban minor roads.

Long term trends over the last 20 years

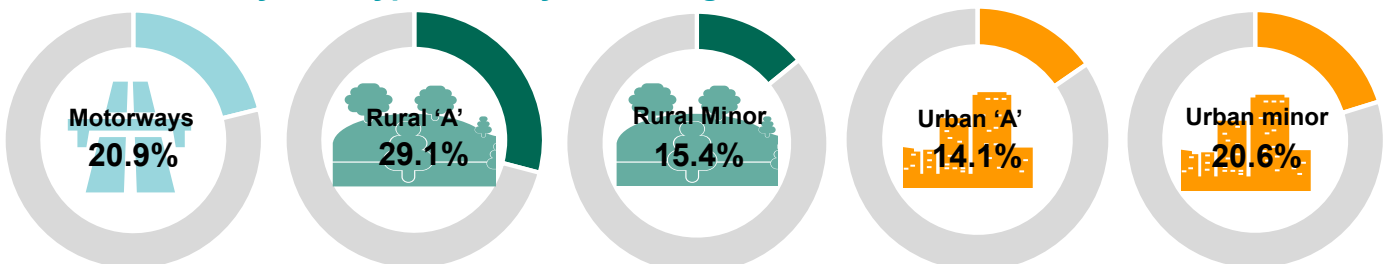
Levels have changed at varying rates across road types.



Chart 4: Rolling annual index of road traffic in Great Britain by road type from 1993 [TRA2502f]



Share of traffic by road type, in the year ending March 2017



Vehicle Type and Road Type

Provisional estimates indicate that car traffic was higher than ever before on rural 'A' roads in the year ending March 2017.

Compared to the previous year, in the year ending March 2017:



Car traffic increased on rural 'A' roads to the highest ever level of 72.4 billion vehicle miles.

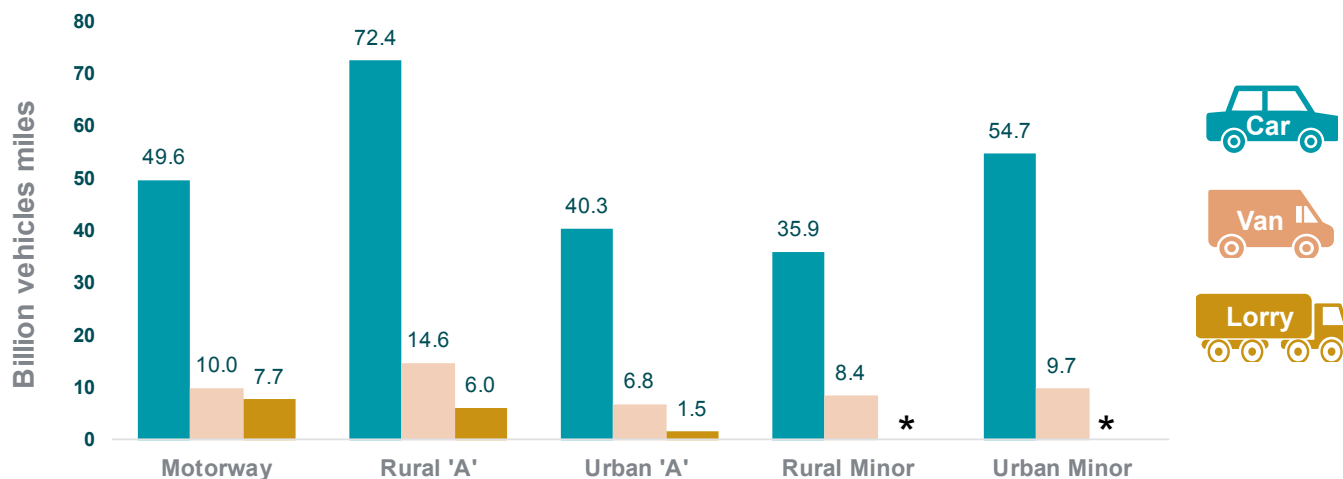


Van traffic grew on all road types. Van traffic reached new peaks on all road types, apart from urban 'A' roads.



Lorry traffic stayed broadly stable on motorways and increased slightly on rural 'A' roads. Lorry traffic decreased by 3.4% on urban 'A' roads.

Figure 5: Provisional annual vehicle traffic (billion vehicle miles) by road class and selected vehicle types in Great Britain for year ending March 2017 [TRA2503e]



* Data not published for these breakdowns.

Note: Provisional traffic estimates are based on a sample of roads. Therefore, estimates split by vehicle and road type may be more prone to change when constrained by the final annual estimates.

Background Information

Users and uses of these statistics

Road traffic data are a key source of management information on the country's infrastructure. Main uses of road traffic statistics are summarised online in our report "[Meeting customers' needs: Users and uses of road traffic statistics and data](#)". These include:

- Highways England, Local Authorities (including Transport for London) and devolved governments, who use the data for transport planning, road engineering and policy monitoring at a regional or local level.
- Road accident and safety statistics, who use our annual and quarterly traffic estimates to produce road safety and accident rates, as required for the Strategic Framework for Road Safety.

We welcome **feedback** on any aspects of the Department's road traffic statistics including content, timing, and format. Please send any queries you have by email, to roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

Sources, strengths and weaknesses of the data

Provisional estimates are based on data from around 200 automatic traffic counters and give an indication of changes in traffic levels for different types of vehicle and on different types of road in Great Britain as a whole. Final annual estimates make use of data from around eight thousand manual traffic counts in addition to the data from the automatic traffic counters and can estimate traffic levels in local areas and on specific road links, which cannot be produced from the provisional data.

Automatic traffic counters classify vehicle types based on characteristics such as axle-spacing and vehicle length. This creates the possibility for misclassification of vehicles with atypical characteristics, meaning that **provisional estimates** for different vehicle types are less robust than the final estimates which also utilise the more accurate manual count data. The classification algorithms are continually developed to ensure that vehicle classification is as accurate as possible.

Further statistical guidance can be found online here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-traffic-statistics-guidance>.

Due to the methodology used to produce provisional traffic estimates, historic figures are subject to revision. However, these revisions are typically minor and will not affect qualitative patterns in the data. Provisional quarterly and annual traffic estimates for all motor vehicles have historically been accurate (typically within 1.5%) when compared with the final estimates, as illustrated in the table below.

All motor vehicle traffic	Billion vehicle miles/percentage									
	2015					2016				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann.
Provisional estimates at time of publication	79.0	79.3	79.5	80.0	317.8	80.3	79.9	80.1	80.2	320.5
Final estimates	78.8	79.2	79.2	79.6	316.7	80.8	80.5	80.9	81.4	323.7
Difference (%)	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.3	-0.5	-0.8	-1.0	-1.5	-1.0

Next release

The next Provisional Road Traffic Estimates, for the year ending June 2017, are due to be published in August 2017. Final annual traffic estimates for 2017 are due to be published in May 2018.

National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards, as 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: www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-road-traffic-speeds-and-congestion-series

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