

Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates: Quarter 4 2011

This statistical release presents provisional estimates for road traffic in Great Britain for the fourth quarter of 2011 and provisional annual estimates for 2011.

The provisional estimates are based on traffic data collected continuously from a national network of around 180 Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs). In addition to counting traffic, the ATCs record some of the physical properties of passing vehicles which are used to classify traffic by type.

Quarterly estimates are provisional until they have been constrained by the final annual estimates each year.

In February 2012, revised annual road traffic estimates for the period 2000-2010 were also published at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010-revised>. Figures in this quarterly publication have also been revised to reflect these annual estimates. Although the absolute values show small changes as a result of these revisions, the overall trends and the changes between individual quarters are largely unchanged.



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Key results from Quarter 4 2011 include:

- All motor vehicle traffic was 3.6 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the fourth quarter of 2010.
- If the effects of heavy snowfall are removed from the fourth quarter of 2010, it is estimated that the increase in traffic between these two quarters would be below 0.5 per cent.
- Car traffic was 3 per cent higher and light van traffic 5 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the fourth quarter of 2010, whereas heavy goods vehicle traffic was at around the same level.
- Traffic was higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the fourth quarter of 2010 on all road types, with the largest increases on minor rural and minor urban roads, which were both 5 per cent higher.

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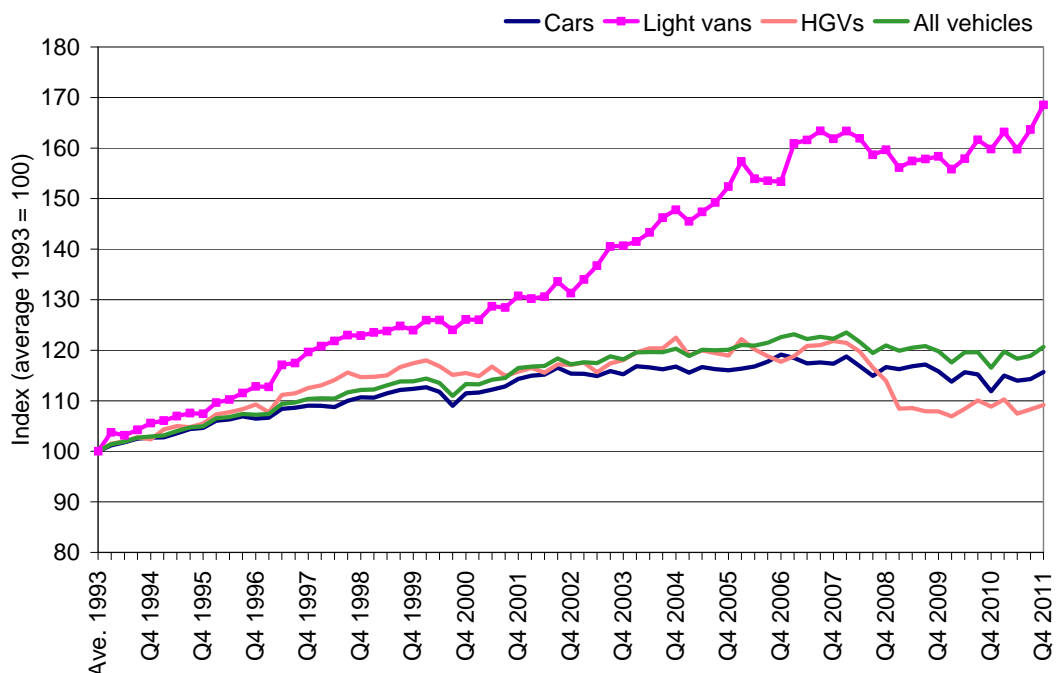
1. Provisional annual estimates

- The latest **provisional** annual estimates show that in **2011**, the overall motor vehicle traffic volume in Great Britain was 0.9 per cent higher than in 2010, at 305.8 billion vehicle miles.
- In 2011, cars accounted for 78.8 per cent of all motor vehicle traffic, light vans accounted for 13.8 per cent and heavy goods vehicles accounted for 5.4 per cent.
- 20.2 per cent of traffic was on motorways in 2011, with 28.5 per cent on rural 'A' roads and 16.3 per cent on urban 'A' roads. 35.0 per cent of traffic was on minor roads in 2011.

2. Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type

- The provisional quarterly estimates show that all motor vehicle traffic was 3.6 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the fourth quarter of 2010.
- Quarterly estimates do not take into account the impact of extreme weather. Part of the reason for the latest increase in traffic may be the effect of heavy snowfall in the fourth quarter of 2010. If the effects of this snowfall are removed, it is estimated that the overall increase in traffic between the fourth quarters of 2010 and 2011 would be below 0.5 per cent.
- Car traffic was 3 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the same quarter in 2010, whilst heavy goods vehicle traffic was at around the same level.
- Light van traffic and other motor vehicles traffic, which includes two-wheeled motor vehicles, buses and coaches, were both 5 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the fourth quarter of 2010.

Road traffic in Great Britain by vehicle type, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)

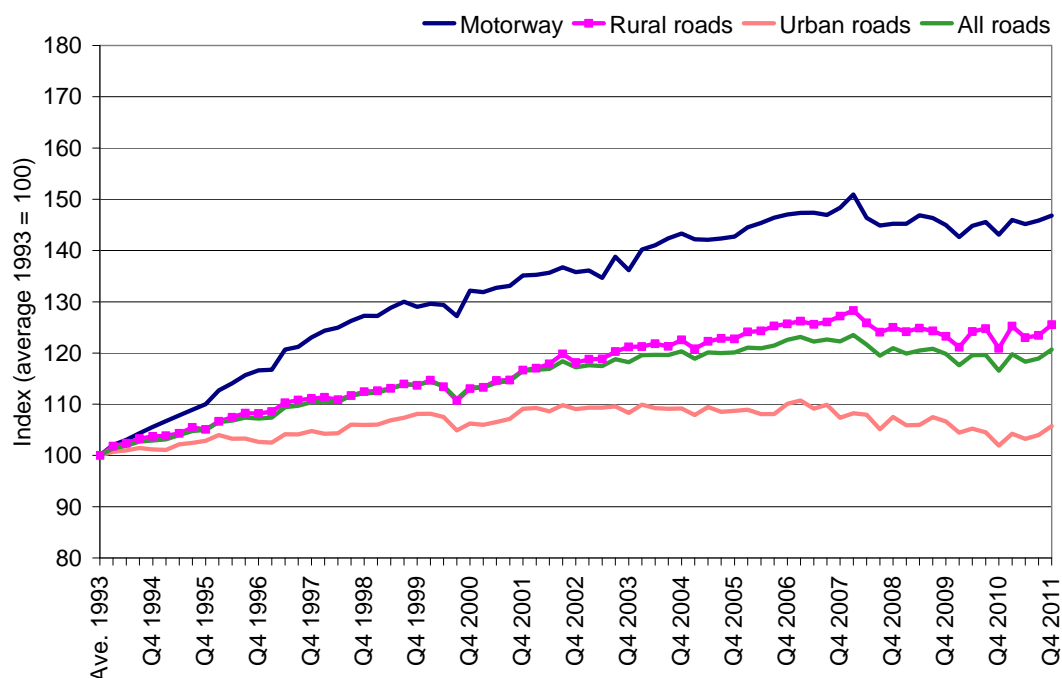


Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on “Quarterly road traffic by vehicle type” can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables¹, [TRA2501](#), [TRA2502](#)

3. Quarterly road traffic by road class

- The latest estimates show that traffic on motorways and on rural 'A' roads was 3 per cent higher in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the same quarter of 2010. Traffic on urban 'A' roads was 2 per cent higher than in the fourth quarter of 2010.
- Provisional estimates for the fourth quarter of 2011 show that traffic on minor urban roads and on minor rural roads was 5 per cent higher than in the fourth quarter of 2010.

Road traffic in Great Britain by road class, seasonally adjusted indices (Ave. 1993=100)



Detailed statistics (tables and charts) on “Quarterly road traffic by road class” can be found in the Traffic Statistics web tables ¹, [TRA2503](#)

4. Recent trends in traffic estimates

- The increase in provisional traffic estimates between 2010 and 2011 follows 3 consecutive years of declining traffic, which represents the first period where traffic has decreased in consecutive years since records began in 1949.
- This increase does not necessarily indicate a long term return to traffic growth however, as traffic levels in 2010 were affected by periods of heavy snowfall in the first and fourth quarters. Annual estimates for 2011 are currently provisional and may differ from final estimates.
- Provisional estimates for 2011 show increases in traffic in the first and fourth quarters compared to the same quarters of 2010. However if the effects of snowfall in 2010 are removed, it is estimated that there would have been little change in traffic levels between these quarters of 2010 and 2011.
- The second and third quarters of 2011 both show small decreases in traffic compared to the same quarters of 2010. All estimates for 2011 are provisional until the publication of final annual estimates for 2011 (see Background Notes).

5. Strengths and weaknesses of the data

- Quarterly estimates are based on data from 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.
- Annual estimates make use of data from around ten 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 quarterly 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. The classification algorithms are continually developed to ensure that vehicle classification is as accurate as possible.
- Provisional quarterly traffic estimates for all motor vehicles have historically been quite accurate when compared to the final quarterly estimates.

billion vehicle miles/percentage

All motor vehicles traffic	2008					2009					2010				
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Ann
Provisional estimates at time of publication ¹	74.0	79.5	79.9	76.3	310.5	72.1	78.6	80.7	75.7	307.0	70.6	78.2	79.9	72.9	301.7
Final estimates	74.8	79.9	79.8	76.5	311.0	72.5	79.1	80.9	75.6	308.1	71.0	78.6	80.3	73.3	303.2
Difference (%)	-1.1	-0.6	0.1	-0.4	-0.2	-0.7	-0.6	-0.2	0.1	-0.3	-0.6	-0.5	-0.5	-0.6	-0.5

¹ Adapted to revised annual estimates

6. Background notes

1. Web tables giving further detail of the results presented in this release and statistics on other related topics are available at: http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics?post_type=table&series=traffic-tag
2. Full guidance on the methods used to compile traffic statistics can be found here: <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/quarterly-road-traffic-estimates-methodology.pdf> or, <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/traffic-estimates-2010-methodology.pdf>
3. 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: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>
4. Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010/pre-release.pdf>
5. Final annual estimates for 2011 will be published in summer 2012. The next Quarterly Road Traffic Estimates release, providing estimates up to Quarter 1 2012 will be published in May 2012.
6. Annual road traffic estimates from 2000 to 2010 have been revised as a result of a planned benchmarking exercise to adjust minor road traffic estimates. These revisions are published at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/traffic-estimates-2010-revised>.