Department for Transport

Road Traffic Estimates: Great Britain 2017

Methodology change

The Department for Transport has undertaken a review of the methodology used to produce the road traffic estimates. User engagement was sought through published reports. The review has now concluded and the recommended changes have been implemented in this release. More information about the methodology changes can be found on page 35.

About this release

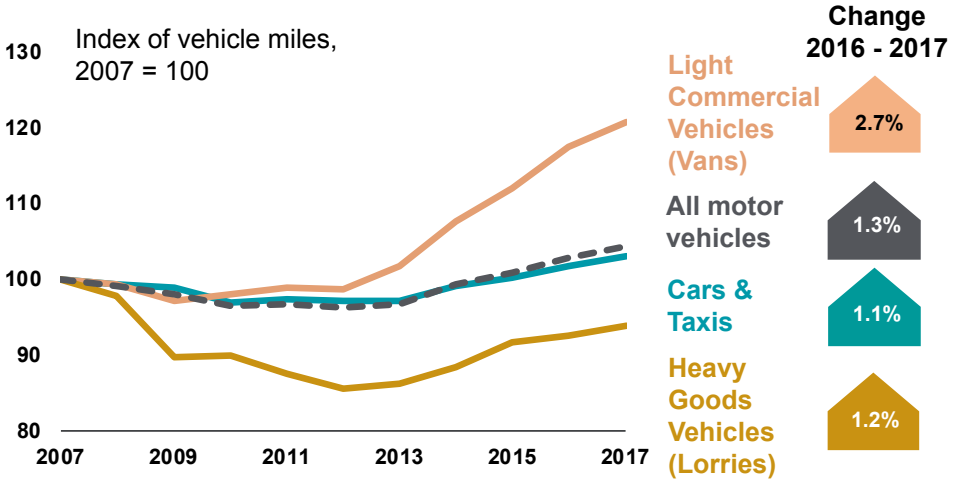
This release presents the latest annual estimates of traffic on Great Britain's roads. It looks at recent and long term trends in traffic broken down by vehicle type, road category and geographic area, in the context of related statistics. Traffic statistics are mostly presented in units of vehicle miles, which combines the number of vehicles on the road and how far they drive.

Annual traffic statistics are compiled using data from around 8,000 roadside 12-hour manual counts, continuous data from around 300 automatic traffic counters, and data on road lengths.

Contents

327.1 billion miles were driven on Great Britain's roads in 2017, a 1.3% increase from the previous year.

Vehicle miles travelled by selected vehicle types in Great Britain, 2007-2017



In 2017:

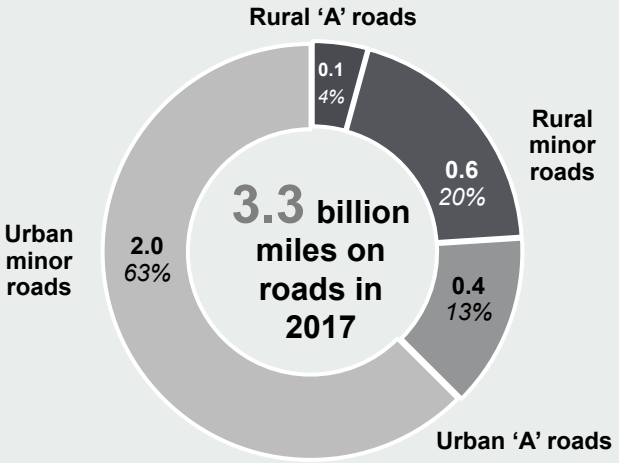
- **Car traffic** grew by 1.1% from 2016 to 254.4 billion vehicle miles (bvm); the highest annual car traffic estimate ever (page 9).
- **Van traffic** continued to grow more quickly than any other motor vehicle type, rising 2.7% from 2016 to 50.5 bvm (page 11).
- **Lorry traffic** increased by 1.2% from 2016, continuing a trend of steady growth for the past five years (page 13).
- **Pedal cycle traffic** was 3.3 bvm, 28.2% above the figure ten years before (page 18).
- **Motorways** carried 68.7 bvm of traffic, 1.4% more than in 2016 and 10% more than ten years ago (page 21).
- **The Strategic Road Network** carried 94.1 bvm of traffic; one-third of all motorised traffic in England, a new high (page 26).
- **'A' roads** saw a 1.1% rise in traffic from 2016 (page 22).
- **Minor road traffic** increased 1.4% since 2016 (page 23).

RESPONSIBLE STATISTICIAN: Anna Heyworth
AUTHOR: Behnom Havaei-Ahary
FURTHER INFORMATION: Media: 020 7944 3066
Email: roadtraff.stats@dft.gov.uk
Public: 020 7944 3095

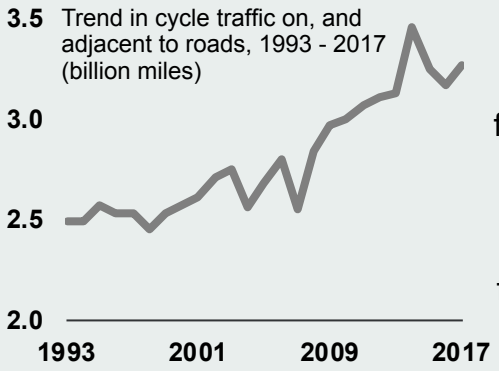
Follow @DfTStats

Pedal cycles

Pedal cycles travelled 3.3 billion miles on roads* in 2017, 3% further than in the previous year, and almost 30% more than twenty years ago.

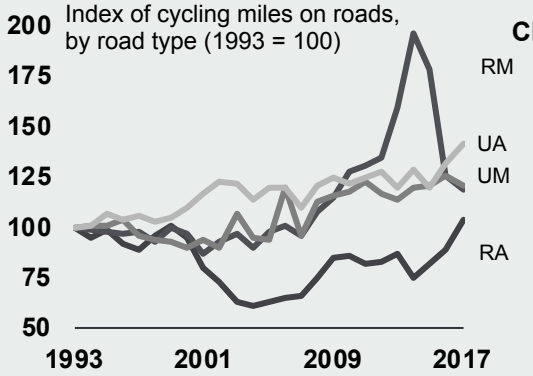


1% of all traffic on roads



3.1% from 2016

28.2% from 2007



Change in cycling miles travelled on...

	Rural 'A' roads (RA)	Rural minor roads (RM)	Urban 'A' roads (UA)	Urban minor roads (UM)
From 5 years ago	↑ 25.8%	↓ -11.5%	↑ 3.5%	↑ 10.9%
From 10 years ago	↑ 57.3%	↑ 24.5%	↑ 26.8%	↑ 28.0%

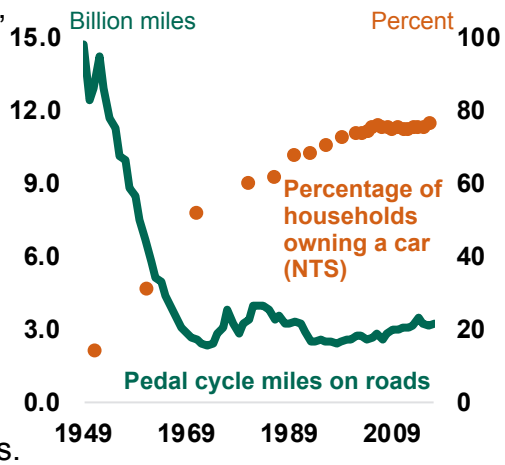
Between 2016 and 2017, cycle traffic increased to 3.3 billion vehicle miles; this was around 0.2 billion lower than 2014, which was the highest figure since 1987. Although over four-fifths of the road cycle miles ridden in 2017 were on minor roads, the largest proportional increases in cycle traffic were rural 'A' roads.

Long-term trends in cycle traffic

Year-to-year changes in cycle traffic can be volatile due to factors such as the weather, so long-term changes are more reliable indicators of underlying trends.

Despite the recent growth in cycle traffic, cyclists in 2017 travelled only around one quarter of the 14.7 billion miles ridden in 1949. Cycle traffic fell most quickly during the 1950s and 1960s, coinciding with a large rise in car ownership. The lowest annual cycle mileage on Great Britain's roads was seen in 1973, at 2.3 billion miles.

Pedal cycle traffic and car ownership (NTS) in Great Britain, 1949 - 2016



*Cycling on roads

DfT road traffic statistics report activity of cyclists on public highways, and on cycle paths and footpaths adjacent to them.

Cycle activity elsewhere (for example on canal towpaths, byways or bridleways) is not included in road traffic statistics.

Statistics from the National Travel Survey (NTS) and Active Lives Survey also provide information on cycling.

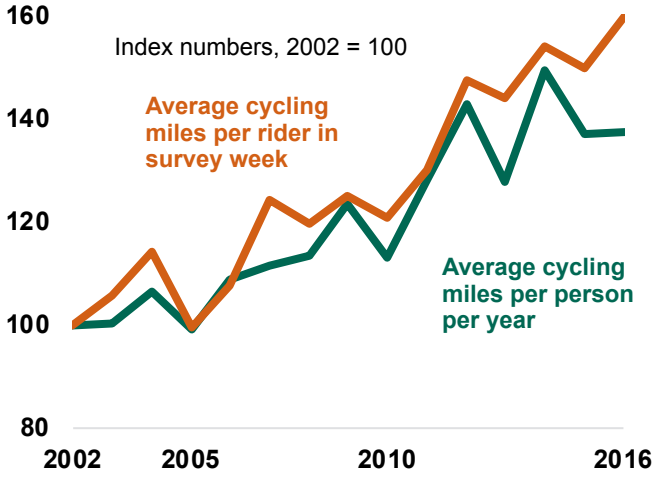
Understanding trends in cycle traffic

Information on cycling from other sources, such as the National Travel Survey (NTS), provide context for the trends in the estimates of cycle traffic from the road traffic statistics.

Between 2002 and 2016, average cycle mileage per person per year (including both people who cycle and those who do not) in England rose by 37%, though the trend is somewhat erratic.

When only considering respondents who cycled at least once during the survey week, the average distance cycled during the week has grown at a similar rate to the whole of England average. This suggests that people who cycle have been cycling further, but that the proportion of the population who cycle has not changed substantially.

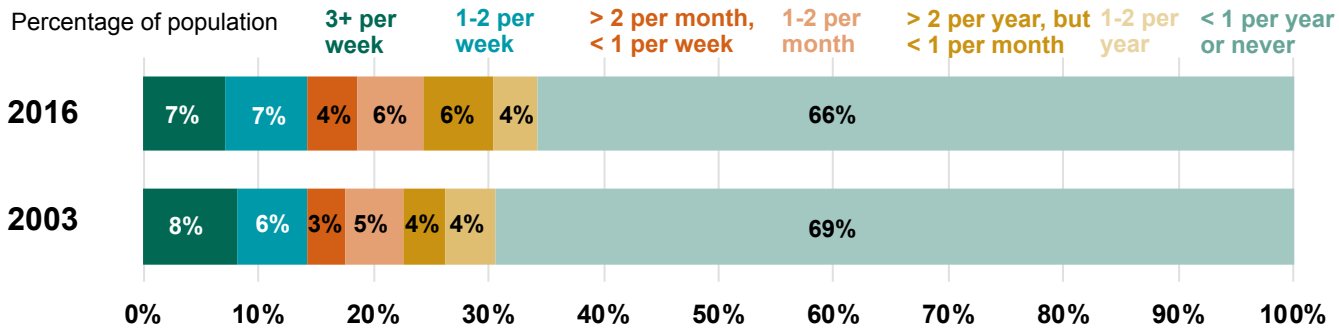
Average cycle miles per capita and per active cyclist in England, 2002-2016 (NTS)



This picture is broadly supported by NTS figures on cycling frequency (below), which show that the proportion of people cycling at least once per week stayed roughly constant between 2003 and 2016, remaining at 14% in both years.

In general, cycling activity is unevenly distributed within the population, with 66% of people rarely or never cycling, but almost half of those cycling doing so more than once per week.

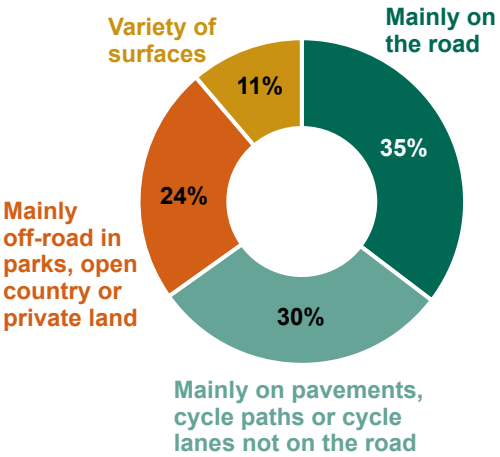
Cycle trip frequency in England, 2003 and 2016 (NTS0313)



Both road traffic estimates and NTS statistics show that cycle traffic has been growing over the last decade, but the NTS figures suggest higher levels of growth than the road traffic estimates.

Some of this difference could be due to off-road cycling, which is not covered in the traffic statistics data collection. In 2016, nearly one-quarter of NTS respondents reported mainly cycling off-road.

Main cycling location in the last 12 months, England 2016 (NTS0315)



Note on National Travel Survey figures

The number of actively cycling respondents in the National Travel Survey is relatively low, so figures on average cycling miles per capita and per rider are expected to fluctuate from year to year as a result of sampling error.

As such, interpretation should focus on long-term trends rather than year-to-year changes.