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# Road lengths statistics



## Notes and definitions



These notes and definitions relate to the road lengths statistics published on the Department for Transport website at: [www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/road-lengths/](http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/road-lengths/).

For further information on these statistics please email [road.length@dft.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:road.length@dft.gsi.gov.uk).

Road lengths estimates are based on information from Ordnance Survey's Integrated Transport Network (ITN) dataset, local authorities, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Highways Agency. The lengths estimates refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> April of each year.

There are step changes in the minor road length figures in 2004 and 2006 due to changes in the base data. In 2004, amendments were made to the data for private roads in Scotland which had been incorrectly recorded as public roads. Since 2006, minor road length estimates have been made using ITN, rather than the OSCAR (Ordnance Survey Centre Alignment of Roads) dataset. This change in methodology leads to an increase in minor road lengths due to the greater accuracy of ITN.

### Types of road

**Major roads:** Includes motorways and all class 'A' roads. These roads usually have high traffic flows and are often the main arteries to major destinations.

**Motorways** (built under the enabling legislation of the Special Roads Act 1949, now consolidated in the Highways Acts of 1959 and 1980): Includes major roads of regional and urban strategic importance, often used for long distance travel. They are usually three or more lanes in each direction and generally have the maximum speed limit of 70mph.

**'A' Roads:** These can be trunk or principal roads. They are often described as the 'main' roads and tend to have heavy traffic flows though generally not as high as motorways.

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**Trunk roads** (designated by the Trunk roads Acts 1936 and 1946): Most motorways and many of the long distance rural 'A' roads are trunk roads. The responsibility for their maintenance lies with the Secretary of State and they are managed by the Highways Agency in England, the National Assembly of Wales in Wales and the Scottish Executive in Scotland (National Through Routes).

**Non-trunk roads:** These are roads for which local authorities are highway authorities. The Secretary of State, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Assembly Government have power to classify non-trunk roads in agreement with the local highway authority. Non-trunk roads are therefore either classified or unclassified, the former being of two types, principal and non-principal. The classified principal roads are class 'A' roads, except for a small amount of local authority motorway, and are of regional and urban strategic importance. The non-principal roads are those which distribute traffic to urban and regional localities. The non-principal classified roads are sub-divided into 'B' and 'C' classes. Unclassified roads are those in the least important categories, i.e. local distributor and access roads.

**Principal roads:** These are major roads which are maintained by local authorities. They are mainly 'A' roads, though some local authorities do have responsibility for some motorways.

**Minor Roads:** These are 'B' and 'C' classified roads and unclassified roads (all of which are maintained by the local authorities), as referred to above. Class III (later 'C') roads were created in April 1946. 'B' roads in urban areas can have relatively high traffic flows, but are not regarded as being as significant as 'A' roads, though in some cases may have similarly high flows. They are useful distributor roads often between towns or villages. 'B' roads in rural areas often have markedly low traffic flows compared with their 'A' road counterparts. 'C' Roads are regarded as of lesser importance than either 'B' or 'A' roads, and generally have only one carriageway of two lanes and carry less traffic. They can have low traffic flows in rural areas. Unclassified roads include residential roads both in urban and rural situations and rural lanes, the latter again normally having very low traffic flows. Most unclassified roads will have only two lanes, and in rural areas may only have one lane with "passing bays" at intervals to allow for two-way traffic flow.

**Urban roads:** These are major and minor roads within a settlement of population of 10,000 or more. The definition is based on the 2001 Communities and Local Government definition of Urban Settlements. The definition for 'urban settlement' is in Urban and rural area definitions: a user guide which can be found on the Communities and Local Government web site at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/urbanrural](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/urbanrural).

**Rural roads:** These are major and minor roads outside urban areas (these urban areas have a population of more than 10,000 people).

**Private Roads:** These are included in the major roads as these private roads (usually toll roads, tunnels or bridges) are accessible to the general public, whereas private minor roads, not usually being accessible to the general public, are not included.