
Free Flow Vehicle Speeds



Notes and Definitions

This section provides notes and definitions for the free flow vehicle speeds tables published on the Department for Transport website at

http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics?post_type=table&series=speeds-series

For further information on free flow vehicle speeds, please email roadtraff.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

SPE0101 to SPE0105

These statistics provide insight into the speeds at which drivers choose to travel and their compliance with speed limits, but should not be taken as estimates of actual average speed across the road network.

Speeds have been monitored at about 100 sites using Automatic Traffic Counters (ATC), deliberately located where external factors which might restrict driver behaviour (including junctions, hills, sharp bends and speed enforcement cameras) are not present.

Statistics are presented by different road types. The term 'built-up' is used to describe roads on which a 40 mph or lower limit applies; the term 'non-built-up' describes all other roads.

The types of vehicle analysed in the built-up and non-built-up survey are motorcycles, cars, cars towing, LGVs, buses/coaches, rigid 2 axle HGVs, rigid 3 and rigid 4 axles HGVs, 4 axles articulated HGVs and 5 or more axles articulated HGVs. The automatic counters identify rigid 2 axle lorries but cannot distinguish between vehicles weighing less than 7.5 tonnes gross and those weighing more. The weight of this type of vehicle determines its speed limit on non-built-up roads. Consequently it is impossible to tell how many rigid 2 axle HGVs are speeding.

Non-built-up roads: The speeds indicated are average traffic speeds from 27 motorway sites, 7 dual carriageway sites and 26 single carriageway sites.

Built-up roads: Speed measurements were taken from 26 sites with speed limits of 30 mph and from 10 sites with speed limits of 40 mph.

These notes relate to the detailed statistics (tables and charts) on free flow vehicle speeds that can be found on the Department for Transport web pages, [SPE0101 to SPE0105](#)

Definitions

Types of vehicle: The definitions for vehicle types included in the speeds statistics are as follows:

Cars: Includes passenger vehicles with nine or fewer seats, three wheeled cars and four wheel-drive 'sports utility vehicles'. Cars towing caravans or trailers are counted as one vehicle.

Motorcycles etc: Includes motorcycles, scooters and mopeds and all motorcycle or scooter combinations.

Buses and coaches: Includes all public service vehicles and works buses which have a gross weight greater than 3.5 tonnes.

Light vans (LGVs): Goods vehicles not exceeding 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight. Includes all car-based vans and those of the next largest carrying capacity such as transit vans. Also included are ambulances, pickups and milk floats.

Heavy goods vehicles (HGV): Includes all goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

Rigid HGV with two axles: Includes all rigid heavy goods vehicles with two axles. Includes tractors (without trailers), road rollers, box vans and similar large vans. A two axle motor tractive unit without trailer is also included.

Rigid HGV with three axles: Includes all non articulated goods vehicles with three axles irrespective of the position of the axles. Excludes two axle rigid vehicles towing a single axle caravan or trailer. Three axle motor tractive units without a trailer are also included.

Rigid HGV with four or more axles: Includes all non articulated goods vehicles with four axles, regardless of the position of the axles. Excludes two or three axle rigid vehicles towing a caravan or trailer.

Articulated heavy goods vehicles: When a heavy goods vehicle is travelling with one or more axles raised from the road (sleeping axles) then the vehicle is classified by the number of axles on the road, and not by the total number of axles. Articulated goods vehicles with three and four axles are merged into one category, as they are not differentiated during manual traffic counts.

Articulated HGV with three axles (or with trailer): Includes all articulated goods vehicles with three axles. The motor tractive unit will have two axles and the trailer one. Also included in this class are two axle rigid goods vehicles towing a single axle caravan or trailer.

Articulated HGV with four axles (or with trailer): Includes all articulated vehicles with a total of four axles regardless of the position of the axles, i.e. two on the tractive unit with two on the trailer, or three on the tractive unit with one on the trailer. Also includes two axle rigid goods vehicles towing two axle close coupled or drawbar trailers.

Articulated HGV with five axles (or with trailer): This includes all articulated vehicles with a total of five axles regardless of the position of the axles. Also includes rigid vehicles drawing close coupled or drawbar trailers where the total axle number equals five and articulated vehicles where the motor tractive unit has more than one trailer and the total axle number equals five.

Articulated HGV with six or more axles (or with trailer): This includes all articulated vehicles with a total of six or more axles regardless of the position of the axles. Also includes rigid vehicles drawing close coupled or drawbar trailers where the total axle number equals six or more and articulated vehicles where the motor tractive unit has more than one trailer and the total axle number equals six or more.

Types of road: The road definitions included in the speeds statistics are as follows:

Non-built-up roads: Roads which have a speed limit of above 40 miles per hour. Further classified into single carriageway roads, dual carriageway roads and motways.

Built-up roads: Roads which have a speed limit of 40 miles per hour or less. Further classified into 30mph and 40mph roads.

<p>These definitions relate to the detailed statistics (tables and charts) on free flow vehicle speeds that can be found on the Department for Transport web pages, http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/speeds/</p>
