

---

# Road lengths statistics



## Methodology note



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)

The Department for Transport publishes estimates of road length in Great Britain on an annual basis. The estimates are published approximately six months following the end of the calendar year and refer to the 1st April of the reference year. These estimates are designated as National Statistics.

Road lengths are categorised by different road types, incorporating major and minor roads, and also whether the roads are in urban or rural locations. Major roads are also split into trunk roads, which are centrally managed, and principal roads, which are managed by local authorities. A full list of road categories is available in the associated [Notes and definitions](#) file. Road lengths are presented for Great Britain as a whole, and are also available by region and by local authority.

Road lengths estimates are based on information from Ordnance Survey' Integrated Transport Network (ITN) dataset, local authorities, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Highways Agency.

### R199b consultation

Every year the Department for Transport carries out a road length consultation exercise with each local authority in England. This consultation helps the Department to maintain an up to date record of the road network for each authority and therefore for the England as a whole, and also provides a validation on the data held by Department on road lengths.

---

## Major roads

The lengths of major roads (motorways and 'A' roads) are obtained from the major roads database maintained by the Department for Transport using information from Ordnance Survey's Integrated Transport Network (ITN), local authorities, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Highways Agency.

The major roads database contains a series of links, which are unique sections of road which make up the entirety of the major roads network in Great Britain. This database contains various fields of information about these links, including link length. As this database contains links which cover the whole of the major road network in Great Britain, the length of major roads can be estimated by summing all of the relevant links to give a total road length for a local authority area, a particular road type, or the whole country.

As road lengths estimates are fixed at 1<sup>st</sup> April in the reference year, only those links in the database which were active on this date are included when calculating our estimates for the year. This prevents any links which have been closed over time, or opened since this date from being included in these estimates.

## Minor roads

Road length information for minor roads, further classified as 'B', 'C' and unclassified roads, are obtained from Ordnance Survey's the Integrated Transport Network (ITN) dataset, local authorities, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government.

### 'B' roads

B road estimates for each local authority are produced from the R199b consultation with local authorities (see above), and data from the Scottish and Welsh administrations. B road lengths for each authority are initially calculated from ITN. These are then sent to local authorities and may be changed where the local authority can provide evidence that these lengths are incorrect.

### 'C' and unclassified roads

The total length of 'C' and unclassified roads for each local authority is calculated by summing the total of 'minor roads' and 'local streets' from ITN. These categories do not match exactly to the required definitions so information from the R199b consultation and data from the Scottish and Welsh administrations is used to split this total. The total length of 'C' road provided by authorities is subtracted from the total length of 'minor roads' and 'local streets' to give the unclassified road length. The total for 'C' and unclassified roads is therefore equal to the total in ITN, but this is split using local authority data.

---

## Data improvements

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 the Integrated Transport Network (ITN) dataset dataset, 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.

## Urban and rural breakdown

Urban areas are defined as settlements with a population of at least 10,000. All other locations are said to be rural areas. The Department for Transport holds a shapefile of all urban areas, which can be used in conjunction with the Integrated Transport Network and the Major Roads database to give urban and rural breakdowns.

For major roads, each link is defined as urban or rural based on its location, so these breakdowns are calculated simply by summing the relevant links in the database.

For minor roads, the total road length in each category is broken down into urban and rural lengths using proportions carried forward from the previous year. In 2008, minor road rural and urban splits for each local authority were calculated using the urban and rural definitions from the Integrated Transport Network.

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