



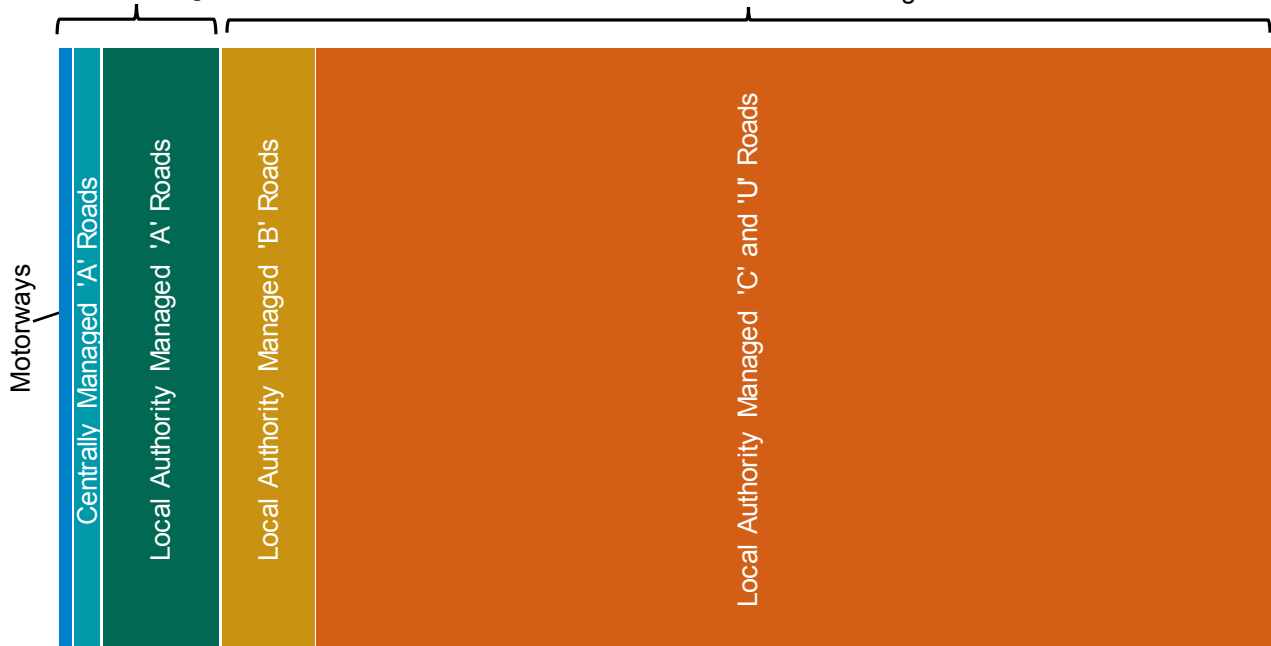
Department for Transport

# Road Lengths in Great Britain 2017

**In 2017 the total road length in Great Britain was estimated to be 246,700 miles.**

Major Roads - 12.7%  
of total road length

Minor Roads - 87.3% of total road length



There was 31,400 miles of major road in Great Britain consisting of:

- 2,300 miles of motorway
- 5,300 miles of centrally managed 'A' road
- 23,900 miles of local authority managed 'A' road

There was 215,300 miles of minor road in Great Britain consisting of:

- 18,800 miles of 'B' road
- 196,400 miles of 'C' and 'U' road

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## About this release

This annual release presents estimates for road lengths in Great Britain. These estimates are based on information from a range of sources, including Ordnance Survey and local authorities. The majority of the data relate to the time point of April 2017. Detailed statistical tables can be accessed online via the [road length statistical series](#).

These statistics only cover roads maintained at public expense. This means that any privately maintained roads and any off road tracks or alleys are not included in the figures in this release. The statistics are also based on 'route miles' and do not reflect the width or number of lanes on sections of road. In 2017 the introduction of a new urban/rural classification (see [page 3](#) for more detail) and some other smaller methodology changes affecting overall length of major roads mean that the figures are not perfectly comparable with previous years.



# Length by Road Type

## Roads in Great Britain

Major roads (Motorways and 'A' roads) in Great Britain are split into trunk roads, which are centrally managed, and principal roads, which are managed by local authorities (including Transport for London).

Trunk motorways and 'A' roads in England are managed by Highways England (formerly the Highways Agency), in Scotland by Transport Scotland and in Wales by the Welsh Government.

The Government's detrunking programme involved the transfer of some centrally managed trunk roads to local authorities, with most transfers carried out between 2001 and 2003.

Motorways, 'A', 'B' and 'C' roads are classified roads, whilst 'U' roads are unclassified. Unclassified roads are typically residential streets or rural lanes.

**Chart 1: Road length by road type in Great Britain, 1997, 2007, and 2017 in miles** [[RDL0103](#)], in KMs [[RDL0203](#)]



Since 1997 there have been two notable changes:

- The length of principal 'A' roads has increased by 2,400 miles, while the length of trunk 'A' roads has decreased by 2,100 miles. This largely reflects the de-trunking programme which began in 2001, where centrally managed roads were transferred over to local authorities.
- There was an increase of 2.7% (5,100 miles) in the length of 'C' and 'U' roads, while 'B' roads were broadly the same as 20 years ago. This may in part be due to new housing developments and the roads built to support these.

## Factors Affecting Changes in Road Length

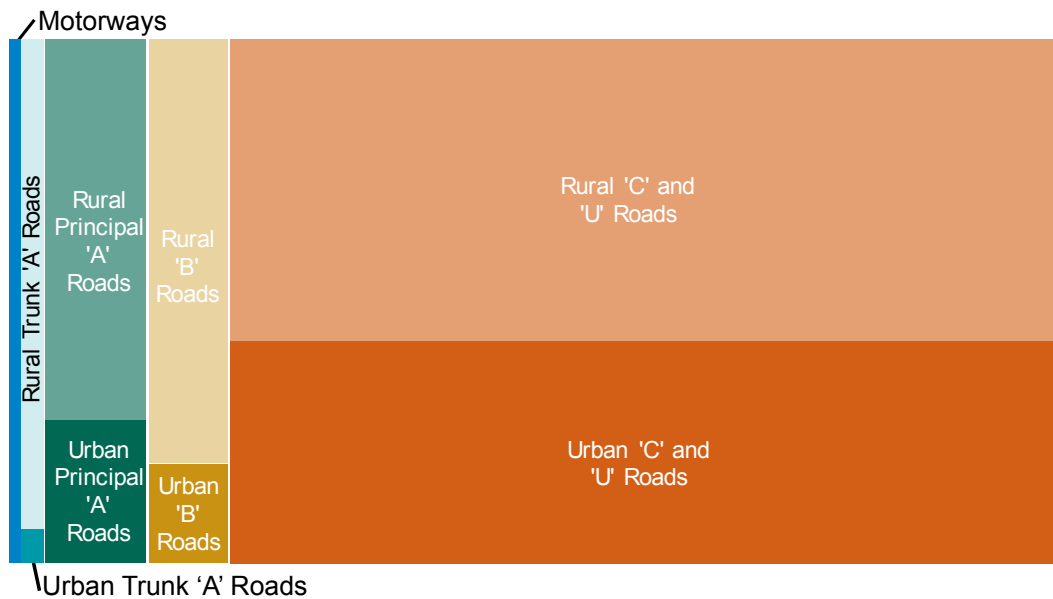
The road length estimates presented in this release show overall net changes in length, resulting from a range of factors:

- roads that have been built, opened and adopted.
- roads that have been reclassified (e.g. from a 'B' road to an 'A' road).
- roads that have been permanently closed.
- improvements or changes to the underlying data sources used.

It is not straightforward to separately identify the impact of each of these factors on the overall changes in the length data.

# Rural / Urban Classification of Roads

Chart 2: Road length by road type in Great Britain, in 2017



In 2017 rural roads made up more of the road network in Great Britain than urban roads, accounting for 76% of all 'A' roads and 60% of all minor roads.

## Road Length Rural / Urban Classification

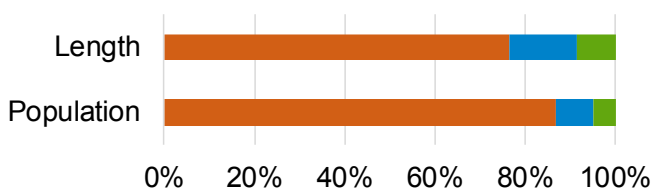
The rural / urban classification presented in this release has been updated across all road types (both major and minor roads). For England and Wales, figures are based on the latest definition published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is derived from the 2011 census. The figures for Scotland are based on the 2013-14 definition published by the Scottish Government in November 2014. Data for years prior to 2017 are still based on the older classification (2001 for England and Wales). More information on both definitions can be found at the following links:

- 2011 ONS definition: [bit.ly/2011ONSDef](http://bit.ly/2011ONSDef)
- Scottish Government 2013-14 Classification: [bit.ly/201314ScotlandDef](http://bit.ly/201314ScotlandDef)

With the methodology change the proportion of urban minor roads in Great Britain in 2017 increased by 1.5 percentage points compared to the previous year making up 40% of the minor road network. For major roads, urban 'A' roads accounted for broadly the same amount as the previous year at 24%. Further detail on the characteristics of the new definition and how this compares with the previous definition used in earlier releases can be found at: [bit.ly/2011ONSMethodology](http://bit.ly/2011ONSMethodology)

## Road Length by Country and Region

Chart 3: Road length by country in Great Britain, in 2017



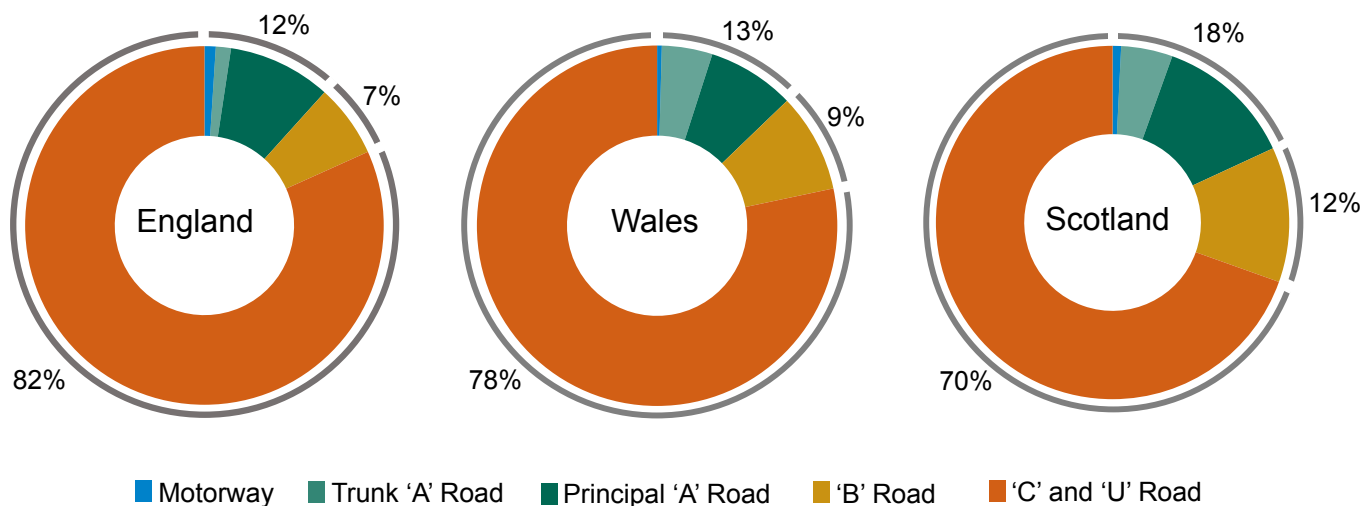
ONS population estimates (mid-2016)

Of the 246,700 miles of public roads in Great Britain in 2017:

- 76.5%, 188,800 miles in England
- 14.9%, 36,800 miles in Scotland
- 8.5%, 21,000 miles in Wales

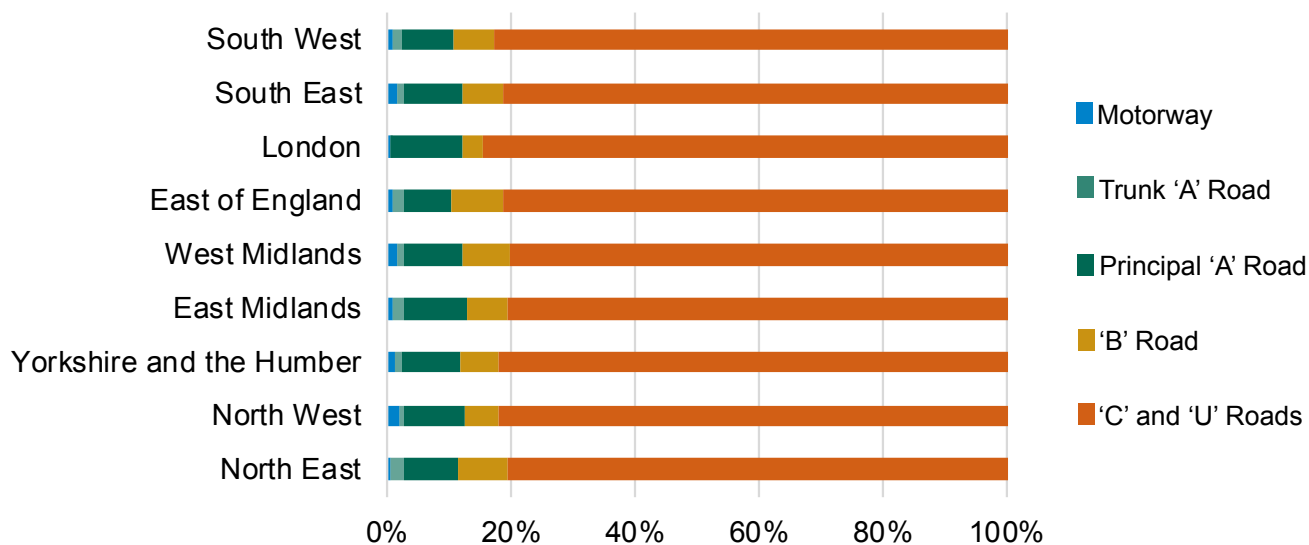
The road networks for Scotland and Wales account for a higher proportion of all road length in Great Britain compared to the population of these countries, which are more sparsely populated.

**Chart 4: Road length by country and road type in Great Britain, in 2017**



In 2017, a higher percentage of the road network in Scotland consisted of major roads compared with England and Wales. Scotland also had a lower proportion of 'C' and 'U' roads compared with England and Wales.

**Chart 5: Road length by region and road type in England, in 2017**



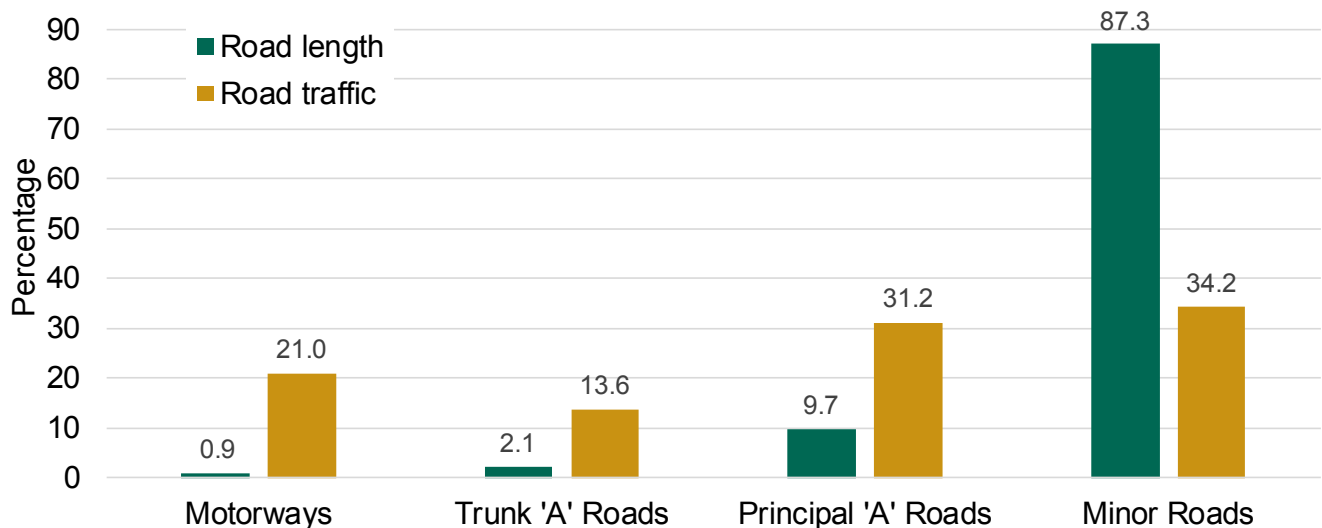
In 2017 the proportion of road length in England accounted for by each region varied between 5% (London and North East) and 17% (South West). Major Roads accounted for between 10% (East of England) and 13% (North West and East Midlands) of the total road length within a region. These differences reflect the different road networks at local authority level.

Data on all of the charts in this section can be found in tables [\[RDL0101\]](#) (miles) and [\[RDL0201\]](#) (kilometres)

## Road Length by Traffic

Major roads accounted for 12.7% of total road length in Great Britain in 2017 but carried 66% of total road traffic, with minor roads carrying the remaining 34%.

**Chart 6: Percentage of road traffic and road length accounted for by each road type in Great Britain, in 2017**



The Strategic Road Network (SRN) includes all trunk motorways and 'A' roads in England. In 2017 the SRN was 4,500 miles long and made up 2.4% of total road length in England. By contrast it carried 34% of road traffic in England.

DfT road traffic statistics referred to above are published separately: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics>

### Future plans for Road Length Statistics

The Department plans to review some aspects of the methodology used to produce road length estimates for the next release. Under the current road length formula road links for roundabouts are halved, for future releases however the full length of the road link shall be included in this calculation. This will have a relatively minor impact on the figures given that roundabouts account for a small proportion (less than 1%) of the road network in Great Britain. If you have any queries about this change please contact: [road.length@df.gov.uk](mailto:road.length@df.gov.uk)

The Department is also continuing to assess how the Highways Network dataset, which is continuously being developed with Ordnance Survey (OS), GeoPlace and other stakeholders, can be used to produce improved estimates of road length in future. This coincides with the planned withdrawal of OS's Integrated Transport Network (ITN) product from 31 March 2019.

More detail on the nature of this migration can be found at the following link: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/help-and-support/products/itn-highways-migration.html>

## Background Information

### Changes to methodology in 2017

As well as the introduction of the new urban/rural classification in this release, there have also been some other smaller methodology changes. For example, in previous years urban/rural road length was determined by using a minimum threshold, whereby if a road section was predominantly urban or rural then the entire link would be classified in that way. For 2017, in most instances exact lengths of urban/rural road have been used, such that even if a road section is 95% rural, the small urban section will still be counted. More general updates and improvements have also been made to the underlying data sources, meaning that the 2017 major road length figures are more accurate compared with previous years. As a result, 2017 data are not perfectly comparable with previous years.

Following discussion with the ONS, an adjustment has been made to the 2017 figures based on the degree of urbanisation within a local highway authority. Where a local highways authority is more than 95% urban, road length estimates are adjusted such that all roads in the area are classed as fully urban. This ensures that roads in primarily urban areas are not classified as rural.

As well as factoring in whether an area is built up or not, a population filter has also been applied to establish whether a road runs through an urban or rural area. Road links are classified as urban where they are in a built up area that has a population of over 10,000 in England and Wales, or over 3,000 in Scotland.

### Technical Information

Up to 2012 and in 2015, the Department for Transport (DfT) conducted a consultation exercise with local authorities to compare records for the roads they manage with those held by DfT. The main purpose of the collection is to provide the latest road length information for funding allocations made by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It also enabled DfT to validate road length data and identify changes to the road network.

Due to changes to the system of Local Government Funding introduced by DCLG in 2013-14 and the stable nature of the statistical series, a consultation did not take place in 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2017. Minor road lengths in these years have therefore been estimated differently to previous years, using the Ordnance Survey Integrated Transport Network in conjunction with data collected in previous years. For this reason 'C' and 'U' roads have been combined in the accompanying tables.

All figures quoted in this publication are rounded to the nearest 100 miles, however percentage changes are based on unrounded figures.

All data related to this statistical release can be found in tables in the road length statistics series: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-network-size-and-condition>.

## Background Information

Further guidance can also be found on the Road Network Size and Condition Statistics webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-network-size-and-condition-statistics-guidance>.

Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found in the pre-release access list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-network-size-and-condition-statistics-pre-releaseaccess-list>.

### National Statistics

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance to ensure customer needs are met.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

As road length estimates are based on information from a range of sources, the final estimates are reliant on all of these sources being accurate and up to date. Some of the changes between years may be due to improved accuracy of data sources rather than actual changes to the road network.

The next update, Road Lengths in Great Britain 2018 are due to be published in April/May 2019.



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