



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.gov.uk](mailto:road.length@dft.gov.uk).

Road lengths estimates are derived using information from Ordnance Survey's Highways Network dataset, local authorities, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and Highways England (formerly the Highways Agency). The majority of the data relate to a single time point of April of the year in question.

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. From 2006, minor road length estimates were made using ITN, rather than the OSCAR (Ordnance Survey Centre Alignment of Roads) dataset. This change in methodology led to an increase in minor road lengths due to the greater accuracy of ITN.

### Types of road

**Major roads:** Includes motorways and all '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.

**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 Highways England (formerly the Highways Agency) in England, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government (National Through Routes).

**Non-trunk roads:** These are roads for which local highway authorities are responsible. Non-trunk roads are either classified or unclassified, the former being of two types, principal and non-principal. The classified principal roads are class 'A' roads, plus 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 subdivided 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 that sit within a built up area, with a population of more than 10,000 in England and Wales or more than 3,000 in Scotland.

**Rural roads:** These are major and minor roads that sit outside urban areas (these urban areas have a population of more than 10,000 people in England and Wales or more than 3,000 in Scotland).

**Private Roads:** For the purpose of this publication, private roads are considered to be road not maintained at public expense. For major roads, private roads (usually toll roads, tunnels and bridges) are included in the road length figures as they are accessible to the general public. For minor roads, private roads are not included in the road length figures as they are not usually accessible to the general public.