

Road Safety Factsheet

July 2019

Rural Road Safety

More deaths occur on rural roads than on urban ones. In 2017, there were 992 fatal accidents on rural roads compared to 607 on urban roads¹.

The number of serious and slight injury collisions is higher in urban areas; in 2016, there were 86,552 on urban roads and 38,643 on rural roads. These figures show that while the number of collisions is higher in urban areas there is a greater chance of dying on rural roads, with 55% of the fatal accidents occurring on these roads.

All Road Accidents, Great Britain 2017¹

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Rural roads	Killed	991	982	943	1,015	992
	Serious injuries	7,644	8,189	7,907	8,698	8,142
	Slight injuries	35,493	36,229	34,536	33,768	29,509
Urban Roads	Killed	520	591	577	593	607
	Serious injuries	11,436	11,892	11,515	12,343	13,764
	Slight injuries	77,179	82,809	79,028	74,792	72,181
Motorways	Killed	97	85	96	87	77
	Serious injuries	544	595	616	682	625
	Slight injuries	4,756	4,950	4,838	4,636	4,701

*Due to changes in severity reporting systems during 2016, serious injury figures and slight injury figures are not directly comparable with previous figures.

Pedestrians

The difference in traffic and pedestrian volumes between rural and urban areas means that numbers of pedestrian accidents are higher in urban areas. However, the issue is no less serious in rural areas. In 2017, 143 pedestrians were killed on rural roads, 677 were seriously injured and 1,794 were slightly injured.

Rural roads are narrow and often have no pavement or crossing facilities. Child pedestrian casualties in rural areas are more likely to occur when children are walking along the road rather than crossing it. Per billion vehicle miles, motor vehicles on minor roads create more pedestrian casualties than motor vehicles on major roads².

By walking in the direction of oncoming traffic (as recommended by the Highway Code), a pedestrian is more likely to see the danger and take avoiding action by moving out of the way.

Cyclists

In 2017, 53 cyclists were killed on rural roads, compared to 48 on urban roads, and 962 were seriously injured. The high number of deaths among cyclists suggests that cyclists involved in a collision on rural roads are more likely to die than their urban counter parts. This indicates that when cyclists are involved in accidents on rural roads, the injuries are more likely to be severe.

This is probably due to the nature of rural roads, which have more bends than their urban counterparts and have fewer cycle facilities to keep the cyclists out of the flow of traffic, especially in areas where a cyclist is at higher risk such as bends and junctions. There is certainly a link between the speed at which a car travels and the severity of an accident; this is particularly relevant in a rural environment where the national speed limit applies over a wide area and also when speeds and speed limits change dramatically when passing through villages.

There are less cycle journeys made in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Car users

Seventy per cent of car user deaths occur on rural roads, and in 2016, there were 570 car user fatalities. The pattern is similar for serious injuries, and in 2017, there were 5,226 serious injuries to car users in rural areas. This accounted for over 55% of the total number of serious injuries to all car users in 2017. The nature of rural roads: narrow, bendy but with high speeds is a likely cause for the severity of collisions experienced.

Motorcyclists

In 2017, 248 motorcyclist fatalities occurred on rural roads, compared to 95 deaths in urban areas. Motorcycle safety on rural roads is a major concern that needs to be tackled. The high number of deaths could be related to the fact that most motorcyclists use rural roads for recreational/weekend driving and might lack sufficient knowledge of the roads.

Road Safety factsheet: Rural Road Safety

The most common types of motorcyclist crashes are:

Failure to negotiate bends on rural A roads

This tends to be the fault of the rider, often because s/he approaches the bend too fast and/or misjudges the bend. They occur more often on leisure rides.

Collision at junctions

This tends to be the fault of the other road user, usually a driver failed to see a rider who was in clear view. Most occur at T-junctions, crossroads and roundabouts.

Collision while overtaking

Usually the rider is at fault, although this also includes riders 'filtering' through stationary or slow moving traffic, in which a driver is more likely to be at fault.

Rider losing control without another vehicle being involved

This is more common on rural roads, and often due to rider error, excessive speed, alcohol, other impairment, careless/reckless behaviour, poor road surfaces or avoiding other road users.
(Data used in these calculations taken from Government statistics)³.

For more information about the most common causes of motorcycle crashes, read our [motorcycle evidence review](#).

Horse Riders

One activity more applicable in rural areas than urban is horse riding. There are around three million horse riders in Great Britain, many of whom ride on the road. Although they prefer not to do so, riders often have no choice because they need to reach bridleways and other off road facilities. Horse riders have a right to use the road, and both riders and motorists are responsible for each other's safety.

Horses are powerful animals that are easily frightened and can panic, especially near fast-moving traffic or at sudden loud noises. Accurate statistics for road accidents involving horses are not available, but the British Horse Society estimates that there are 3,000 such accidents each year, about half of which occur on minor roads.

References

- ¹ GOV UK (2018) 'Table RAS10002: Reported accidents and accident rates by road class and severity, Great Britain, 2010-14 average, 2010-2017'
URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras10-reported-road-accidents>
- ² Aldred, R. (2018) 'Motor traffic on urban minor and major roads: impacts on pedestrian and cyclist injuries', *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers- Municipal Engineer*, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jmuen.16.00068>
- ³ GOV UK (2018) 'Table RAS30018: Reported casualty and accident rates by urban and rural roads, road class, road user type, severity, and pedestrian involvement, Great Britain, 2017'
URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents>
- ³ TRL (2004) 'Accident Analysis on Rural Roads- A Technical Guide'
URL: <https://trl.co.uk/reports/PPR026>
- ⁴ Scottish Executive Social Research (2005) 'Rural Road Safety: A Literature Review'
URL: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/55971/0015834.pdf>
- ⁵ DfT (2005) 'Drivers urged to take care on rural roads'. Think Road Safety Publicity Campaign Notes.