

Road Safety Factsheet

March 2021

Rural Road Safety

More deaths occur on rural roads than on urban ones. In 2019, there were 931 fatal accidents on rural roads compared to 627 on urban roads.^{1*}

The number of serious and slight injury collisions is higher in urban areas; in 2019, there were 78,114 on urban roads and 33,707 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 56% of fatal accidents in 2019 occurring on these roads.^{1*}

Accidents on rural roads, urban roads, and motorways, Great Britain 2019^{1*}

		2016	2017	2018	2019
Rural roads	Killed	1,015	992	952	931
	Serious injuries	8,698	8,142	8,326	10,078
	Slight injuries	33,768	29,509	26,998	23,629
Urban Roads	Killed	593	607	626	627
	Serious injuries	12,343	13,764	14,142	16,345
	Slight injuries	74,792	72,181	66,970	61,769
Motorways	Killed	87	77	92	100
	Serious injuries	682	625	686	792
	Slight injuries	4,636	4,701	3,788	3,238

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 2019, 125 pedestrians were killed on rural roads, 880 were seriously injured and 1,424 were slightly injured.²

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 roads.³

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 2019, 60 cyclists were killed on rural roads, compared to 40 on urban roads.² In that year, cyclists travelled 3.5 billion miles on the road. Of these miles, 73% were travelled on urban roads, compared to only 27% on rural roads.⁴ The fact that the amount of deaths on these road types are quite similar despite the fact many more miles are travelled on urban roads shows that cyclists are much more likely to be involved in a fatal accident on a rural road.

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

Around seventy per cent of car user deaths occur on rural roads, and in 2019, there were 527 car user fatalities on these roads. The pattern is similar for serious injuries, and in 2019, there were 6,796 serious injuries to car users on rural roads. This accounted for over 57% of the total number of serious injuries to all car users in 2019.² The nature of rural roads: narrow, bendy but with high speeds is a likely cause for the severity of collisions experienced.

Motorcyclists

In 2019, 221 motorcyclist fatalities occurred on rural roads, compared to 106 in urban areas.² Motorcycle safety on rural roads is a major concern that needs to be tackled. The high number of deaths could be related

Road Safety factsheet: Rural Road Safety

to the fact that most motorcyclists use rural roads for recreational/weekend driving and might lack sufficient knowledge of the roads.

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)⁵

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 (2020) 'Table RAS10002: Reported accidents and accident rates by road class and severity, Great Britain, 2010-14 average, 2009-2019'

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras10-reported-road-accidents>

² GOV UK (2020) 'Table RAS30018: Reported casualty and accident rates by urban and rural roads, road class, road user type, severity and pedestrian involvement, Great Britain, 2019'

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents>

³ 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>

⁴ GOV UK (2020) 'Road Traffic Estimates: Pedal Cycles, Great Britain 2019' URL:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916755/road-traffic-estimates-2019-pedal-cycles.pdf

TRL (2004) 'Accident Analysis on Rural Roads- A Technical Guide'

URL: <https://trl.co.uk/reports/PPR026>

Scottish Executive Social Research (2005) 'Rural Road Safety: A Literature Review'

URL: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/55971/0015834.pdf>

DfT (2005) 'Drivers urged to take care on rural roads'. Think Road Safety Publicity Campaign Notes.

***Due to changes in severity reporting across some police forces since 2016, newer statistics are not comparable to earlier years. Therefore, the DfT provides both adjusted and unadjusted casualty figures in their statistical data tables. RoSPA uses adjusted figures as the DfT states that they are recommended for "the analysis of trends over time".**