Introduction

Southwark Council frequently commission traffic counts across the borough. These can be done manually (by a person standing on the street counting vehicles) or more often via ‘automatic traffic counts’ (normally ‘tubes’ laid across the carriageway). The data collected by the automatic traffic counts (ATCs) is stored in an Excel spreadsheet and on a map so we can see the data in a visual way. It is this data that is available on our website.

Why is the data collected?

The data is collected for a variety of reasons; sometimes it is used to monitor the changes on a street e.g. before and after a traffic scheme has taken place, other times counts are done to investigate an issue reported by local residents. Since 2010 we have been carrying out a set of annual ‘screen line’ counts to monitor how traffic levels are changing within the borough over the longer term. The counts measure volume, composition of traffic (ratio of cars to large goods vehicles etc) and vehicle speeds.

How is the data collected?

ATCs are carried out by consultants on behalf of the council. The consultants lay pneumatic tubes on the road which will detect when vehicles pass over them. The gaps between the tubes allows for calculations regarding how fast the vehicles are going and what type of vehicles they are. The vehicles are then classified using the ARX class system which tells us how many of each type of vehicle have passed over the tubes.

Key indicators

The data available on our website is the result of the ‘virtual day’ which is an average based on all the days when data was recorded (counters usually collect 7 – 14 days of data).
The ‘direction’ of the count shows which way the vehicles were travelling, the start date shows when the count took place and the total flow counts the total number of vehicles travelling in that given direction. The average speed is the mean speed of all the vehicles travelling in that direction on the street. The 85th percentile speed is the speed that 85% of the vehicles travel below e.g. 85 out of 100 vehicles recorded are travelling at or below this speed. This measure is the most commonly used in assessing vehicle speeds.

Caveats

The counts are not 100% accurate and the inaccuracy of the counters increases when cars are moving slowly i.e. if there is a queue that forms over the counters. The counters will stop counting completely if cars are parked on them or if they are damaged which may mean less data than desirable to estimate the virtual day. The virtual day is made up of weekdays and weekend days and often flows are higher in the week and lower at the weekends. The time of year a count took place affects the results, for example traffic is reduced in school holidays. Similarly, the flows over the day tend to be concentrated over the morning and evening peaks with much less traffic through the night.

Please note road works nearby when counts are taking place may lead to higher (or lower) than usual vehicle flows as vehicles travel alternative routes to avoid them (and these are not necessarily recorded).

ATC counts cannot record pedal cycle movements accurately and so the council carries out specific counts to capture these movements.

There are many other organisations that collect traffic data in Southwark including but not limited to Transport for London (TfL), Department for Transport (DfT) and Department for Trade and Industry (DTI). In addition some other Southwark departments, especially those collecting data for specific schemes, carry out traffic surveys. Whilst we gather and collect as much data as possible (from a wide range of sources) we are only able to publish our own data. In addition we have chosen to publish the data in one spreadsheet / map so data of other formats (collected in other ways or broken down by different traffic types/time periods) will not be shown by this method.

We are working to publish more Southwark owned data but this will take time and we appreciate your patience as we do this.

Contact us

If you would like any further information about the traffic count data or a more detailed breakdown for a particular street please contact us on:

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You can also find further information on our website here: http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200107/transport_policy/2641/transport_data which also has a link to the annual report which contains analysis on some of this data along with information and conclusions on the other transport data we collect.