

Statistical bulletin

# Access to local amenities in England and Wales: October 2024

Interactive analysis of access to amenities, including post offices, cashpoints and parks, as well as travel time estimates to railway stations and libraries.

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# 1 . Main points

- Access to amenities varies considerably, both within and between local areas.
- Compared with urban local authorities, rural local authorities are relatively well-served for certain amenities, such as community facilities, parks and play areas, and pubs, on a per-resident basis.
- Compared with urban local authorities, rural local authorities are less well-served for amenities such as ATMs (cashpoints), pharmacies and rail stations, on a per-resident basis.
- In England and Wales, approximately 57% of the population are within a 30-minute walk of a railway station, but this figure is higher in areas of the country with light rail and tram stations.
- Predominantly urban local authorities tend to have better walking access to rail stations than predominantly rural local authorities; in 40 urban local authorities, 90% of residents or more can walk to a station within 30 minutes.
- In England and Wales, approximately 43% of the population are within a 15-minute walk of a public library, but this is higher in urban local authorities than in rural local authorities.
- Local authorities with a higher percentage of people aged 65 years and over, which tend to be more rural areas, have less walking access to libraries.

## 2 . Overview of access to amenities

This article develops analysis of access to amenities first introduced in our [Access to sports facilities and other amenities in your local area release](#). Expanding the range of amenities, we describe how provision varies between and within local areas. Amenities covered in this publication are:

- ATMs and cashpoints
- community facilities
- dental practices
- GP surgeries
- libraries
- parks and play areas
- prescribing dispensaries (pharmacies)
- post offices
- pubs
- rail stations
- places of religious worship

Because the number of amenities per resident does not reflect how easy it may be to reach the amenity, this publication provides a deeper analysis of railway stations and libraries, with estimated travel times to reach them by walking. The travel times analysis has been developed in partnership with [Ordnance Survey Great Britain](#).

The analysis is a measure of access to physical amenities, based on their location. It is beyond the scope of this publication to assess service provision, for example train punctuality or the number of appointments available from a GP surgery. We hope the analysis provides a base for further research and because these data are classified as official statistics in development, we welcome your feedback. Please contact the Office for National Statistics (ONS) subnational team by emailing [subnational@ons.gov.uk](mailto:subnational@ons.gov.uk).

## Amenity provision in different local authorities

Figure 1 provides data on 11 different types of local amenity, including GP surgeries, post offices and pubs. The data are shown as the number of amenities per 100,000 residents, which gives an initial overview of amenity provision levels. This provides some evidence that compared with urban local authorities, rural local authorities are relatively well-served for certain amenities, such as community facilities, parks and play areas, and pubs, on a per-resident basis. However, they are less well-served for other amenities such as ATMs (cashpoints), pharmacies, and rail stations.

### Figure 1: Amenities per 100,000 people, by local authority

#### Notes:

1. City of London and Hackney local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
2. Isles of Scilly and Cornwall local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
3. To protect confidentiality, counts below 5 are suppressed. When counts are suppressed, this is signified by a "c" in the data tables where "c" means confidential. As a result, total counts for some population groups may not match between published tables.

For residents seeking to access services, it is useful to know the number of amenities available. However, it is also useful to assess how easy it is to reach the location of the amenities, as this will also likely vary widely by area. Therefore, this publication provides a more in-depth focus on two amenities, railway stations and libraries, including the proportion of people who can walk to each within a certain amount of time.

## 3 . Access to railway stations

### Importance of access to railway stations

Being close to railway stations can help people to access opportunities through work, education, leisure, and culture. The placement of railway stations in England and Wales is strongly influenced by historical factors. These include the original design of the mainline infrastructure in the nineteenth century, a major programme of closures in the 1960s and more recent programmes of light rail construction, including trams, in major cities and their surroundings.

We note that, in addition to access to a railway station, there are other barriers to rail travel and the wider opportunities that can bring. For example, the punctuality, reliability, and affordability of rail travel. These other barriers are not assessed in this analysis.

### Travel times to railway stations

In England and Wales, approximately 57% of the population are within a 30-minute walk of a railway station. However, this access varies considerably within and between local areas.

### Urban local authorities in England have better walking access to railway stations

As may be expected, local authorities in England classified as predominantly urban in our [2011 rural/urban classification methodology](#), updated for 2023 local authorities, tend to have a higher percentage of their population able to walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes. The 2011 rural/urban classification does not cover local authorities in Wales. Within the "Urban with Major Conurbation" category, there are 36 local authorities where more than 90% of the population can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes. The majority of these are either London boroughs or within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, highlighting the impact of light rail and underground services.

"Mainly Rural" or "Largely Rural" local authorities, by contrast, include a lower percentage of population that can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes, typically averaging between 20% and 40%.

### Figure 2: Percentage of resident population within certain travel times of their nearest railway station, by local authority and rural-urban classification

#### Notes:

1. City of London and Hackney local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
2. Isles of Scilly and Cornwall local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
3. Rural Urban Classifications (RUC) for local authorities in England are from the 2011 rural-urban classification (RUC2011). RUC2011 for local authorities in Wales are not available.

Some local authorities do not follow this general trend. For example, approximately 86% of the population of the local authority of High Peak, classified as "Largely Rural", can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes. This may be because High Peak's primary population centres, the towns of Chapel-en-le-Frith, Buxton, and Whaley Bridge all have railway stations. In comparison, in the local authority of Sunderland, classified as "Urban with Major Conurbation", approximately 35% of the population can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes.

This place-to-place variability is most clear in the "Urban with City and Town" category. Within this category, our analysis estimates that while 0% of the population of Gosport and Rossendale local authorities can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes, approximately 97% of Adur's population can.

## Similar local areas have large disparities in walking access to railway stations

Local authorities of similar typology can have large differences in railway station access. The famous university towns of Oxford and Cambridge are assigned to the same clusters in our [Clustering similar local authorities in the UK](#) analysis. Furthermore, their populations estimates, published in our [Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2023 bulletin](#), are extremely similar. However, while approximately 61% of the Cambridge population can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes, only approximately 26% of the Oxford population can do so. This reflects the location of the main stations in the two cities with the station in Oxford being in a more central location in the town centre, while the station in Cambridge is in a more suburban location. These data help to show that while the former may often be considered a more helpful location for visitors to the cities, the placing of mainline railway stations in large town and city centres does not always favour local populations that have grown on the outskirts of an urban centre.

## Neighbouring local areas have large disparities in walking access to railway stations

Built-up areas that are different socio-demographically, and in terms of their built environment, but are geographically adjacent can also have large disparities in walking access to railway stations. For example, the area of Hampshire surrounding Portsmouth. In the Built-up Area (BUA) of Fareham, approximately 81% of the population of around 42,000 can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes. Similarly, in the BUA of Havant, approximately 84% of the population of around 47,000 can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes.

In the neighbouring BUA of Waterlooville, approximately 2% of the population of around 34,000 can walk to a railway station in less than 30 minutes. In other nearby BUAs, Gosport (approximately 70,000 population), Horndean (approximately 34,000 population), and Lee-on-the-Solent (approximately 24,000 population) this analysis estimates that using standard travel time measures 0% of the population can walk to a railway station within 30 minutes.

Figure 3 shows this more detailed information for neighbourhoods across England and Wales, allowing users to focus in and see how the levels of access differ across neighbourhoods within local authorities.

### Figure 3: Percentage of resident population within certain travel times of their nearest railway station, by Middle layer Super Output Area

## Common characteristics of local authorities with better walking access to railway stations

While there are exceptions, densely populated urban local authorities with a higher percentage of people living in a flat, maisonette, or apartment, tend to have better walking access to a railway station. In addition, this analysis highlights some other common characteristics of local authorities with better walking access to railway stations. For example:

- higher number of railway stations per head of population
- younger median age
- higher working age (16 to 64 years) population
- higher percentage of no car ownership

Figure 4 illustrates how local authorities with a higher percentage of people within a 30-minute walk of a railway station are also characterised by a younger median age, and a higher percentage of their population aged 16 to 64 years. Although made stronger by the inclusion of London boroughs, this relationship exists for local authorities outside London. This suggests that places near railway stations may be more attractive for younger people to live.

## Figure 4: Percentage of resident population within a 30-minute walk of their nearest railway station, by local authority, rural urban classification, and percentage of population aged 16 to 64 years

### Notes:

1. City of London and Hackney local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
2. Isles of Scilly and Cornwall local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
3. Rural Urban Classifications (RUC) for local authorities in England are from the 2011 rural-urban classification (RUC2011). RUC2011 for local authorities in Wales are not available.

A higher proportion of people aged 16 to 64 years are living in local areas well-served by railway stations and are utilising the development of high-density housing in more populated urban areas that have better walking access to railway stations. This is particularly the case for local areas with light rail infrastructure.

## 4 . Access to libraries

### Importance of access to libraries

Libraries are important centres within local communities. Arts Council England emphasises, on their [Working with libraries webpage](#), that "Public libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter, and open to all. In them, people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge, and culture." Many libraries offer a wide variety of services, including stay-and-play sessions for children, social activities and clubs for older people, digital-independence training, and access to computers.

The [UK Government Participation Survey 2023–24](#) estimates that 25.0% of adults visited a public library building or mobile library in person in the last 12 months, an increase from 19.5% in 2022 to 2023 and 15.2% in 2021 to 2022. These figures demonstrate their continued value to many within local communities.

This analysis provides travel time estimates to public libraries and is not intended to be a complete representation of library access. For example, students may access a library at their education centre, such as a school or university and these are not included. It is also beyond the scope of this publication to estimate overall access to the service provided, for example, library opening hours, or the services provided.

### Travel time to libraries

In England and Wales, approximately 78% of the population are within a 30-minute walk of a public library. In only 3 of the 318 local authorities in England and Wales, less than one-third of the population is within a 30-minute walk of a library. This close alignment to current population centres suggests a physical adaptability of library services that successfully target the England and Wales population as a whole. However, this access varies within and between local areas.

Figure 5 shows access to libraries by local authority, by rural-urban classification. It is clear that urban, densely populated local authorities in England generally have a higher percentage of their population within a 15-minute walk of a public library, compared with surrounding rural, sparsely populated local authorities.

## Figure 5: Percentage of resident population within certain travel times of their nearest library, by local authority and rural-urban classification

### Notes:

1. City of London and Hackney local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
2. Isles of Scilly and Cornwall local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
3. Rural Urban Classifications (RUC) for local authorities in England are from the 2011 rural-urban classification (RUC2011). RUC2011 for local authorities in Wales are not available.

Unlike with walking access to railway stations, this general pattern with rural-urban classification is more consistent across the country. Local authorities within each of the six rural-urban classifications are quite tightly grouped, with few deviating from this general trend. The notable exception being the grouping of six "Urban with Major Conurbation" local authorities in which more than 85% of their population are within a 15-minute walk of a library, all of which are London Boroughs.

Of the three local authorities classified as "Urban with Significant Rural", in which more than half of the population can walk to a library in less than 15 minutes, two of them (Folkestone and Hythe, and Tunbridge Wells) are in Kent in the South East of England.

Figure 6 shows detailed information for neighbourhoods across England and Wales, allowing users to focus in and see how the levels of access differ across neighbourhoods within their local authority.

### **Figure 6: Percentage of resident population within certain travel times of their nearest library, by Middle layer Super Output Area**

## **Access to libraries for people aged 65 years and over**

Figure 7 illustrates a trend where local authorities with a higher proportion of residents aged 65 years and over tend to have fewer people living within a 15-minute walk of a library. This reflects our earlier analysis that rural areas, which often have more limited walking access to libraries, also tend to have older populations.

### **Figure 7: Percentage of resident population within a 15-minute walk of their nearest library, by local authority, rural urban classification, and percentage of population aged 65 and over**

#### **Notes:**

1. City of London and Hackney local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
2. Isles of Scilly and Cornwall local authority districts have been combined because of low population counts.
3. Rural Urban Classifications (RUC) for local authorities in England are from the 2011 rural-urban classification (RUC2011). RUC2011 for local authorities in Wales are not available.

Public libraries contribute to the well-being of older people, for example by organising high-quality enrichment and socialising activities to help reduce loneliness and by giving lessons in digital technology to support independent living, as described in the [Arts Council for England's report, 2017 \(PDF, 4.1MB\)](#). However, the analysis on walking times suggests that although libraries are generally well distributed geographically, some older people, who are more likely to live in sparsely populated areas, may not easily be able to access the library services designed for them.

## 5 . Data on access to amenities

### [Travel time to libraries in local areas, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 17 October 2024

Travel time to the nearest library in England and Wales. Geographies include local authority districts (LADs), built up areas (BUAs) and combined authorities.

### [Travel time to railway stations in local areas, England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released 17 October 2024

Travel time to the nearest railway station in England and Wales. Geographies include local authority districts (LADs), built up areas (BUAs) and combined authorities.

## 6 . Glossary

### 2011 local authority rural-urban classification

Local authorities are categorised as rural or urban, based on the percentage of their resident population in rural areas or "rural-related" hub towns. More information is published in the [2011 Local Authority Rural Urban Classification](#).

### Built-up area (BUA) geography

Built up areas (BUAs) are a geography based on the physical built environment, using Ordnance Survey topographic data to recognise developed land, such as cities, towns, and villages. More information is published in our [Towns and cities, characteristics of built-up areas, England and Wales: Census 2021 article](#).

## 7 . Data sources and quality

This article only provides estimates of access to physical amenities. It does not seek to estimate access to the service provided, for example train punctuality, dental appointments, or library opening hours.

### Ordnance Survey National Geographic Database

Data about community facilities, libraries, parks and play areas, post offices, public houses, and places of worship are from the [Sites dataset](#), within the [Land Use theme](#) of the [Ordnance Survey \(OS\) National Geographic Database \(NGD\) API Features database](#). The OS NGD provides [descriptions](#) used to determine the classification of sites. Sub-categories are provided within the community facilities, parks and play areas, and places of religious worship datasets. Size analysis is provided within the community facilities, parks and play areas, and pubs datasets.

### Further Data Sources

#### Libraries

We supplement the OS NGD libraries data using data from the [Arts Council for England Basic Dataset for Libraries](#) and from the [CILIP Cymru Wales Public libraries by operator dataset](#). For this analysis, we exclude prison, archive, and mobile libraries, as well as static libraries with less than two opening hours per week from the Arts Council for England dataset. This analysis contains the locations of 3,159 static public libraries, accurate to May 2024.



## Rail services

Data about rail, tram, metro, and underground services are from the [National Public Transport Access Nodes \(NaPTAN\) dataset](#), cross validated against the [Office for Rail and Road mainline stations](#). Only nodes with a status of active are included. The following NaPTAN stop types are used for the geographical distribution of stations:

- RLY – rail access area
- MET – metro access area.

Some stations within the NaPTAN dataset have been excluded from this analysis. For example, stations on heritage lines that have a seasonal service and stations having a parliamentary service. This analysis contains the locations of 2,808 rail stations in England and Wales in June 2024.

## ATMs

Data about ATMs are from the [Link ATM location information report](#) from June 2024. As of June 2024, there were 43,161 ATM and cash-at-the-till counter locations on the LINK Network in England and Wales. The 46 ATMs without postcodes are unassigned. The analysis refers to whether an ATM is free or pay to use. These data relate to the network at a point in time and may not reflect the latest position.

## Dental practices

Data about general NHS dental practices are from the "General Dental Practices" dataset in NHS Digital's [Miscellaneous data](#) section. This dataset contains the locations of 9,607 dental practices that provided an NHS service in England and Wales in August 2024.

## GP surgeries

Data about GP practices and branch surgeries are from [NHS Digital GP and GP practice related data](#). When combined, this dataset contains the locations of 8,189 GP practices and surgeries in England and Wales in August 2024.

## Prescribing dispensaries (pharmacies)

Data about prescribing dispensaries are from [NHS Digital GP and GP practice related data](#). This dataset contains the locations of 11,184 dispensaries in England and Wales in August 2024.

## Geographies and populations (England and Wales)

Counts of amenities are presented:

- for [Lower tier local authorities](#) (LADs) from April 2023
- for [Combined authorities](#) from May 2024
- for [Built up areas](#) (BUAs) from April 2024

Because of low populations estimates, we have combined the Isles of Scilly local authority with Cornwall, and the City of London local authority with Hackney when presenting estimates in this release. Individual estimates are presented separately in the accompanying data tables.

Estimates per head of the population for local authorities are calculated using [our mid-year population estimates for lower tier local authorities -- England and Wales: 30 June 2023](#).

Estimates per head of the population for combined authorities are calculated using the [May 2024 Open Geography portal lower tier local authority to combined authority lookup](#) and our [Mid-year population estimates for lower tier local authorities -- England and Wales: 30 June 2023](#).

Estimates per head of the population for built up areas are calculated using a bespoke Output area 2021 to built up area 2024 lookup and [our Census output area population estimates for 2022 \(supporting information\) dataset](#).

## More quality and methodology information

### Travel time analysis

Distance and travel time analysis was performed in collaboration with Ordnance Survey (OS). For this analysis we provide travel times analysis to railway stations and libraries. We plan to perform distance and travel time analysis to further amenities in the future. Distance and travel time analysis requires identification of origins and destinations, and a routable network from origin to destination.

- Origin – centroids of 100-metre grid squares.
- Destinations – railway stations and static libraries from the [OS NGD Land Use dataset](#)
- Routable network – taken from the [OS Multi-modal Routing Network \(MRN\)](#)

For routing analysis, a buffer from a destination is generated from the MRN. This indicates which 100-metre grid squares lie within a one-hour walk. The network generated by MRN is then used to calculate the travel time between each 100m grid and destination. If a grid square is within a catchment of multiple destinations, the shortest time is chosen. Analysis parameters, including a walking speed of 4.8 kilometres per hour, closely follow the standard parameters of the [Department for Transport Journey time statistics \(2019\)](#).

We used official statistical geographic boundaries to link [Census 2021 output area \(OA\) population weighted centroid \(PWC\) data](#) to a 100 metre by 100 metre grid square. The travel times from the grid square to the nearest amenity were then used as an estimate for the whole population of the OA.

We then used our [OA Population Estimates for 30 June 2022](#) and official statistical geographic lookups to estimate the proportion of the population within each travel time band for larger geographic areas.

By aggregating distances and travel times for entire OAs, the estimates are not exact proportions of the larger area's population. This approach might result in identical proportions across different time bands and variables because the same OAs are included or excluded.

## 8 . Related links

### [Access to sports facilities and other amenities in your local area](#)

Article | 07 March 2024

An interactive analysis of amenity access at Local Authority District (LAD) and smaller geographical areas, showing the level of provision across the UK. In this publication, the source of analysis is sports facilities, chain supermarkets and museums.

### [Childcare accessibility by neighbourhood in England](#)

Article | 04 June 2024

Analysis of access to registered childcare places across England in 2023. This article analyses the characteristics of areas with particularly low or high levels of childcare access.

### [Access to green space in England](#)

Article | 01 August 2024

Statistics describing the percentage of households that are within different walking distances of different types of green space for small neighbourhoods in England.

### [Office of Rail and Road Passenger rail performance 1 April to 30 June 2024](#)

Article | 12 September 2024

Quarterly statistics on punctuality, reliability and causes of delay for passenger trains operating on the mainline network in Great Britain.

### [Participation Survey 2023–24 annual publication](#)

Article | 24 July 2024

Estimates of physical and digital engagement with the arts, heritage, museums and galleries, and libraries, as well as engagement with tourism, major events, live sports and digital.

## 9 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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