

TRAVEL: Transport Networks

The UK has a network of interlinked roads, railways, waterways and airways.

Our road networks

In Roman times, roads were built to be long and straight; whatever was in the way was cleared. Over the years, road networks have twisted and turned to avoid going through farmland and communities. Modern developments, however, can sometimes damage these areas.

Road maintenance and road building are paid for by everybody through either council tax (for small, local roads) or general taxation (for larger, regional and national schemes).

Advantages and disadvantages

Our road networks connect places and communities, making journeys quicker. The development of new roads and the maintenance of existing roads can improve accessibility and make travel safer. However, the building of new roads can be expensive and can cause harm to the environment, communities and habitats. Sometimes building a road to shorten a distance is only a temporary solution, as a shorter-route may encourage others to drive more often which may create congestion, noise and CO₂ pollution.

Our rail networks

During the Industrial Revolution our rail networks were developed, linking urban and smaller rural communities together across the country. Today, although many rural railway stations have been closed, main line rail networks continue to be developed enabling people to travel even further.

Advantages and disadvantages

Rail networks provide efficient and high speed travel, for instance linking England and France through the Channel Tunnel, allowing fast travel within Europe. Rail is also a very environmentally friendly way to travel. However, the UK's railway network is old, requiring constant maintenance to ensure safety. The services offered can also be unreliable at times and are limited during off-peak periods and within rural areas.

Our air networks

Air travel has grown dramatically over the last 50 years and has changed the way we travel within the UK and throughout the world.

During the late 1880s and early 1900s the concept of air travel was developed, with the Wright Brothers pioneering the first controllable, stable flight. From then on planes were developed further, from the turbine jet engine to military jet aircrafts and commercial planes.

Advantages and disadvantages

Air networks provide quick, long-distance travel, allowing new places and cultures to be discovered. They also provide opportunities for trade and tourism, contributing to the country's overall wealth and growth. However, flying is not generally regarded as environmentally friendly, and an increase in flights and expansion of airports around the world is often argued as contributing to global warming. See fact sheet **3.4 Environment Issues - Climate Change** for more information.