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HOT WEATHER & HARD TIMES SEE THE RETURN OF THE WEEKEND TRIPPER

The best British summer for years sees cash-strapped families opting for old-fashioned weekend outings that are bringing traffic jams to popular holiday routes, says Trafficmaster

With some of the highest temperatures on record for May and June this year already and predictions for a barbecue summer, families hard-pressed for holiday cash, are opting for regular weekend breaks and outings instead of jetting off abroad. Trafficmaster, the leading traffic information provider, has seen a weekend congestion pattern emerging since the beginning of May which looks set to continue. Coupled with research from the AA/Populus panel that shows over 50% more people are intending to holiday in the UK this summer*, roads are set to be even busier.

Even with the slightly more unsettled weather recently, Trafficmaster still expects to see the traffic congestion levels compounded on the afternoon of Friday 24 July 2009, as the majority of schools in England and Wales break that week for the holidays. Add sudden downpours into the equation, which make for difficult driving conditions and this will slow journey times even more.

“We have been monitoring a definite trend towards weekend getaway traffic and Sunday tripping since the beginning of May,” said Graham Smith, Data Manager at Trafficmaster. “This is very much reverting to the trend there used to be years ago for family trips out on a regular basis rather than a major summer break abroad. Interestingly, this congestion peak on Fridays and Sundays is in contrast to overall traffic congestion levels during the working week that we have seen decreasing for the last year as the recession deepened, reducing freight and commuter traffic on the roads.”

The most popular long weekend routes are proving to be those down to the West Country, the South Coast and East Anglia, although longer distance routes to and

from the North are increasingly congested on Friday afternoons. For example, during June on the Western section of the M25 which feeds traffic down to the M4 westwards and the M3 south, congestion on weekdays was up by 43% and on the A14 to & from East Anglia, it was up by 40% – when compared with June 2008. On the M6 between the Midlands and the North West, congestion on Fridays during June 2009 was up by 18% compared with June 2008.

Higher levels of congestion are expected to cause an increase in breakdowns, particularly if temperatures climb as forecast. In the recent heatwave, the AA attended 70,000 breakdowns with a 43% increase in the number of cars overheating.

Stewart Topp, AA patrol of the year, advises: “A few basic checks before you leave home can prevent your day trip or long weekend turning into a nightmare. A quick check that coolant levels and tyre pressures are correct can save you money as well as time.”

The top Summer weekend break and holiday congestion hotspots are expected to be:

- The M25 Western sector. Motorists will be heading out onto the M4 and the M3 to travel to the West Country and the South coast.
Traffic to & from terminal 5 at Heathrow and long-term widening work around Rickmansworth are also now impacting on congestion here
- The M4 from London towards South Wales and the South West
- The M3 & M27 towards Southampton and the Dorset coast
- M5 south of Bristol will be busy as traffic heads towards the West Country
- The A303 and the A30 are also main holiday routes into the West Country and will be busy throughout the summer
- The A14 Huntingdon to Cambridge and A11 & A47 to Norfolk and the East Coast
- M6 in Staffs, Cheshire & Lancashire for routes to the North, North West and Lake District
- A55 into North Wales

Motorists can avoid unnecessary delays by calling the traffic and travel advice line, AA Roadwatch, provided by Trafficmaster, on 84322 or 'the AA' on a mobile phone keypad or 0906 88 84322 from a landline.

For information about traffic conditions in your region, please contact Gill Houghton, PR Manager, Trafficmaster on 01234 759 315 or Graham Smith, Data Manager, Trafficmaster on 01234 759 118.

For more information about Trafficmaster go to www.trafficmaster.co.uk

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* AA / Populus poll, conducted on-line, between 30 January and 6 February 2009 which received 11,147 responses from AA members

Technology Solution

Trafficmaster is able to provide drivers with smarter route planning and more accurate estimated arrival times than ever before because of the latest IBM data collation technology. This is able to retrieve and process huge volumes of vehicle location data and collates this with historic data and real road speeds to identify congestion hotspots and give accurate journey times on any given day.

About Trafficmaster

Trafficmaster is an expert in intelligent driving. The Group comprises US-based Teletrac Inc. and Trafficmaster Plc in the UK. Both organisations focus on intelligent vehicle services which enhance the driving experience and improve business performance by saving companies and drivers time and money and reducing their environmental impact.

Teletrac Inc offers fleet tracking, management and navigation solutions under the Fleet Director brand across the US, serving 5,000 fleets and a total of 75,000 commercial vehicles, using wireless and GPS technology.

The group has also developed a suite of Trafficmaster services in the UK. Trafficmaster's key product is the award-winning Smartnav, an intelligent satellite navigation system, which uses live traffic information and real-time road speeds to calculate optimum routes and avoid traffic congestion on the way. Trafficmaster's comprehensive traffic data means Smartnav is continually updated with traffic information, road closures and speed camera locations, without the need for CDs or internet-sourced updates.

Trafficmaster also offers Trackstar stolen vehicle tracking, monitored 24 hours a day in the Trafficmaster Control Centre. Stolen vehicles can automatically inform Trafficmaster and are then monitored remotely and police informed of their whereabouts for fast and efficient recovery.

The company provides live traffic information direct via mobile phone services and Radio Data System -Traffic Message Channel (RDS TMC) to other aftermarket and factory-fit satellite navigation systems.

Trafficmaster also maintains its own unique traffic monitoring network of road-side sensors, covering 8,000 miles of UK motorways and trunk roads.

In 2007 the company launched its fleet management solution, Fleet Director, in the UK. Combining all of Trafficmaster's intelligent technology businesses can save time and money, whilst reducing the environmental impact of driving.

Trafficmaster was founded in 1988 and floated on the London Stock Exchange in 1994. Teletrac Inc is a wholly owned US subsidiary company.

www.teletrac.net

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