



Department for Transport

# Domestic Road Freight Statistics, United Kingdom 2020

## About this release

This statistical release summarises the latest statistics on the domestic activity of GB-registered HGVs operating in the UK, up to year ending 31 December 2020. The information is derived from the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Great Britain (CSRGT GB).

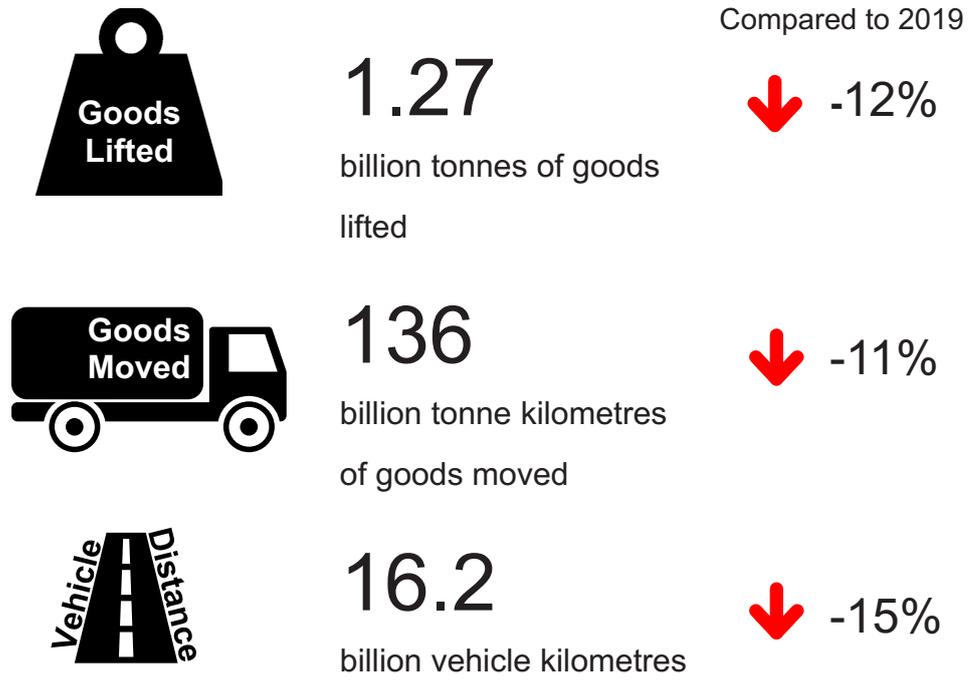
This release also summarises economic statistics about HGVs and the road freight industry.

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## Domestic road freight activity decreases in 2020

In 2020, for GB-registered HGVs operating in the UK, there were:



- ▶ **Goods lifted** in the UK by GB-registered heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) in the twelve months ending December 2020 decreased by 12% to 1.27 billion tonnes compared with the previous twelve months
- ▶ **Goods moved** in the UK by GB-registered HGVs in the twelve months ending December 2020 decreased by 11% to 136 billion tonne kilometres compared with the previous twelve months

[See [Table RFS0101](#) for detailed statistics]

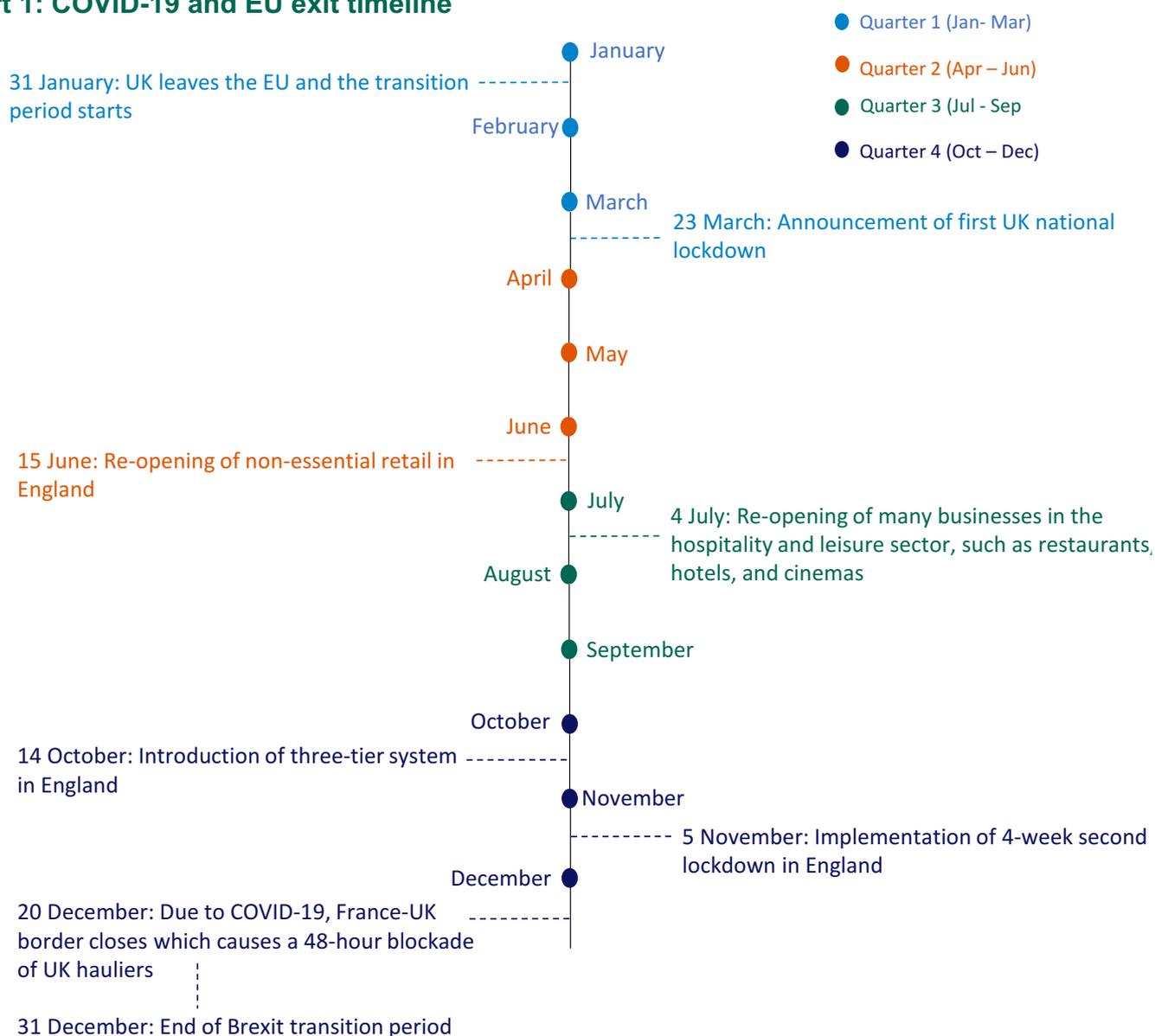
### Definitions

-  **Goods lifted:** the weight of goods carried, measured in tonnes.
-  **Goods moved:** the weight of goods carried, multiplied by the distance

## The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and EU exit on domestic road freight

These statistics cover the period following the government's announcement of measures to limit the impact and transmission of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. COVID-19 has had a wide impact on UK society and economic activity since March 2020. These figures should be considered within this context, and so a timeline has been provided to assist.

**Chart 1: COVID-19 and EU exit timeline**



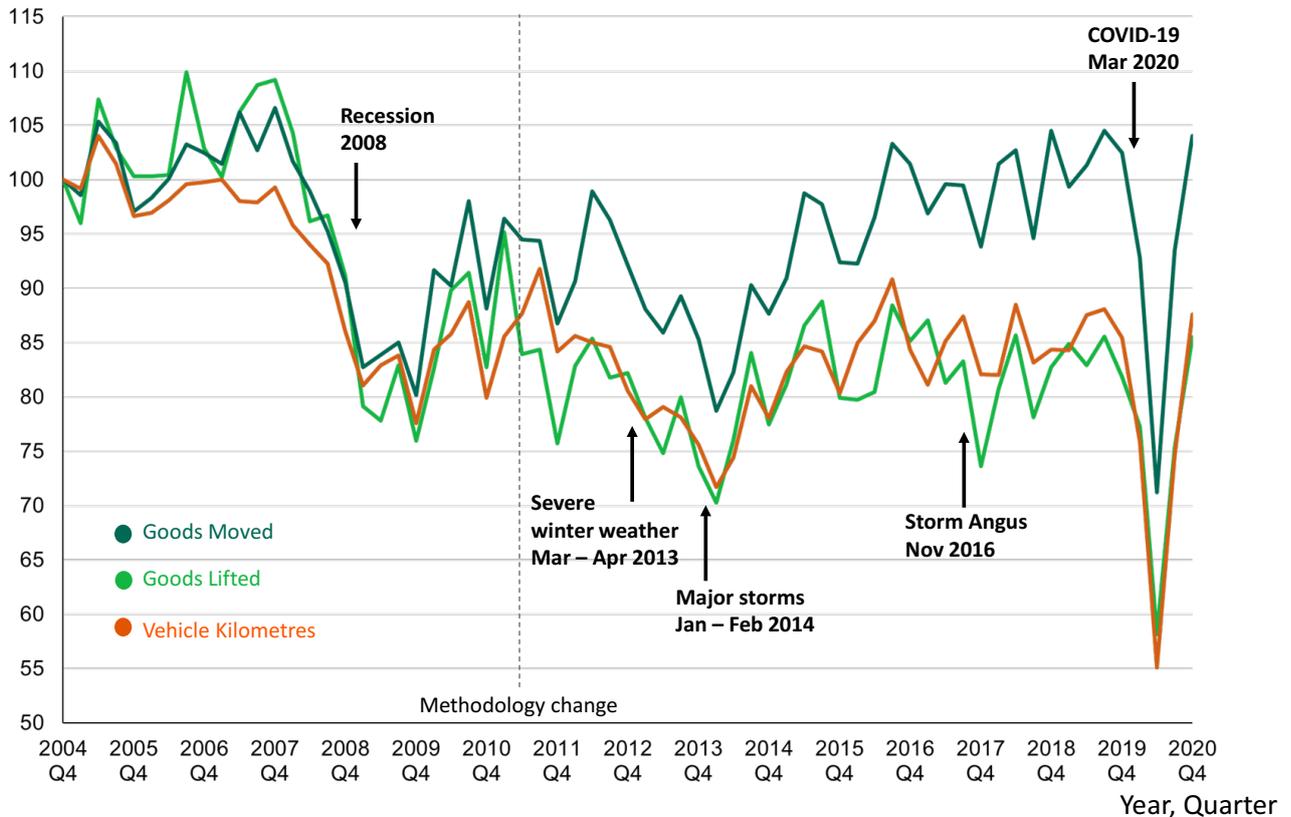
### Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on domestic road freight

Domestic road freight activity has fluctuated over the years, with volatility seen following extreme weather conditions and the 2008 recession. As the economy recovered, road freight activity gradually returned to expected levels. During 2020, a particularly large decline was seen as restrictions were put in place to limit the impact and transmission of COVID-19. Between 2019 and 2020 goods lifted decreased by 12%, compared to an 8% decline which was seen between 2007 and 2008 during the recession.

## Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on quarterly data trends

**Chart 2: Trend in goods moved, goods lifted and vehicle kilometres by GB-registered HGVs, 2004 Q4 to 2020 Q4, indexed to 2004 Q4 [Table RFS0101]**

Index: 2004 Q4 = 100



- ▶ During January - March 2020 the number of goods lifted was 331.8 million tonnes. This decreased to 249.6 million tonnes during April - June 2020, a 25% decrease, falling substantially lower than usual freight levels (more than two standard deviations below the 2015-2020 average, see chart 3 below). This decrease occurred during the period when restrictions were first implemented to limit the impact and transmission of COVID-19.
- ▶ Between April - June 2020 and July - September 2020 there were some signs of recovery, with the amount of goods lifted increasing closer towards usual levels (within one and two standard deviations below the 2015-20 average). This coincides with the easing of lockdown restrictions and aligns with trends seen in road traffic levels. Despite this recovery, the amount of goods lifted in July - September 2020 was still 12% lower than the same period in 2019.
- ▶ A further recovery was seen between October - December 2020, with the amount of goods lifted increasing above the level seen during October - December 2019. The amount of goods lifted increased to 367 million tonnes (13% increase), falling within the expected levels. This period included a second, 4-week lockdown, as well as the closure of the France-UK border that stopped all accompanied freight from the UK entering France for 48 hours. This period also preceded the end of the EU exit transition period.

**Chart 3: Goods lifted by HGVs in Great Britain, shown with expected variation from the average, 2015 Q4 to 2020 Q4**

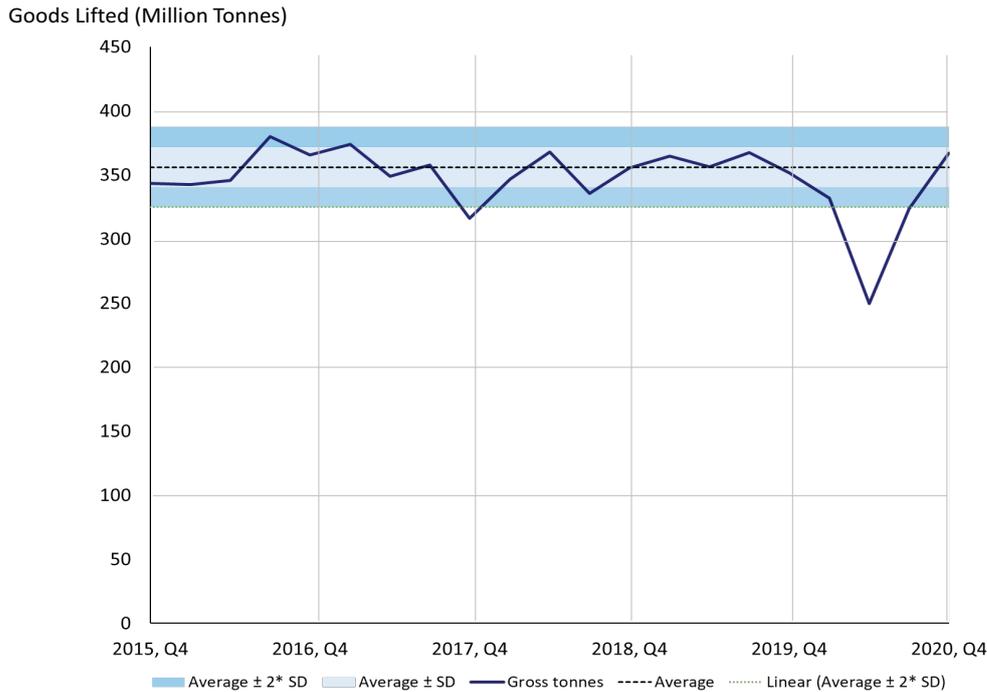


Chart 3 illustrates the average amount of goods lifted by HGVs in GB between 2015 and 2020, as well as the expected variance from this average. The number of goods lifted has been within two standard deviations of the mean for all quarters except for April - June (quarter 2) 2020. Wider variance was seen during of 2020 ( $\pm 2$  standard deviations), with road freight activity heavily impacted by COVID-19 and the lead up to the end of the Brexit transition period.

### Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on data collection

The statistics in this release are collected using the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Great Britain (CSRGT GB) which measures the UK activity of GB-registered heavy goods vehicles. This data collection process has remained in operation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by a response rate of 90% for 2020, in line with previous years. [\[Table RFS0128\]](#) For more information please see the [Road Freight Statistics methodology note](#).

### Additional sources of information regarding the impact of COVID-19

Road freight data in 2020 is consistent with the trends observed in the related statistical series shown below. For example, road traffic saw comparable decreases in freight activity during lockdown periods, followed by some recovery as restrictions eased. More information is available at these links.



[Maritime and shipping statistics](#)



[Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe](#)



[Road traffic statistics](#)



[Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)



[UK trade statistical bulletins](#)

## Economic profile of the road freight sector

In context - The year 2020 compared to 2019:



Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)



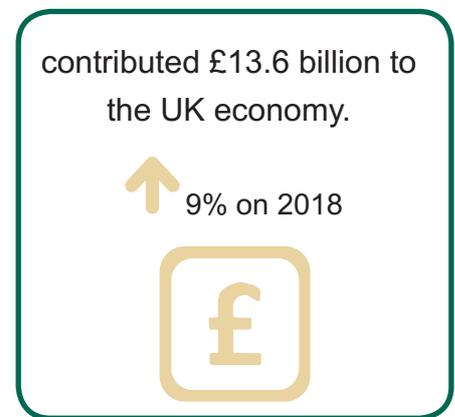
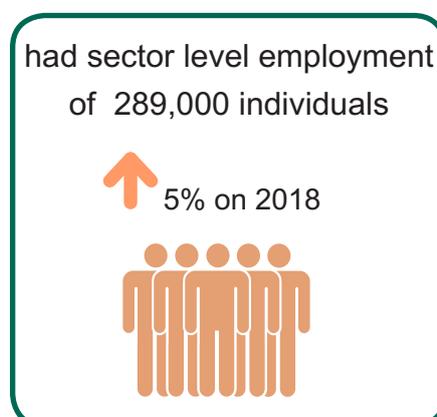
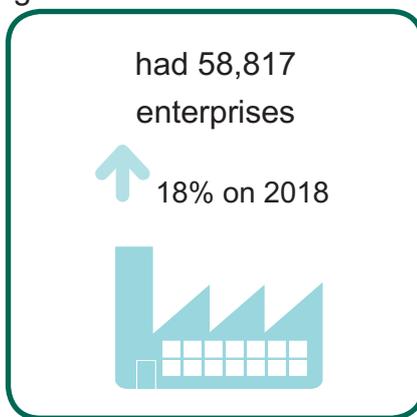
Source: [Department for Transport, Vehicle Licensing Statistics](#)



Source: [Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy](#)

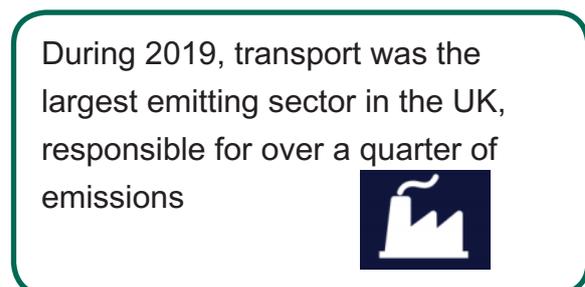
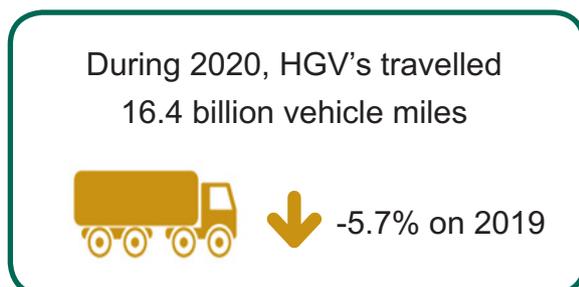
### Road Freight Enterprises in 2019

Latest estimates from the [Annual Business Survey](#) show that in 2019, prior to COVID-19, the road freight sector:



### Traffic and emissions in 2020

Latest estimates from [Road Traffic Statistics](#) and [UK Greenhouse Gas emissions statistics](#) show that:



### Empty running



During 2020 HGV's travelled a total of 4,942 million empty kilometers. This is a 14% decrease compared to 2019 when HGV's travelled 5,737 million empty kilometers.

### Definitions

**Empty running:** distance travelled (kilometers) when the HGV on a journey is carrying zero tonnes of freight.

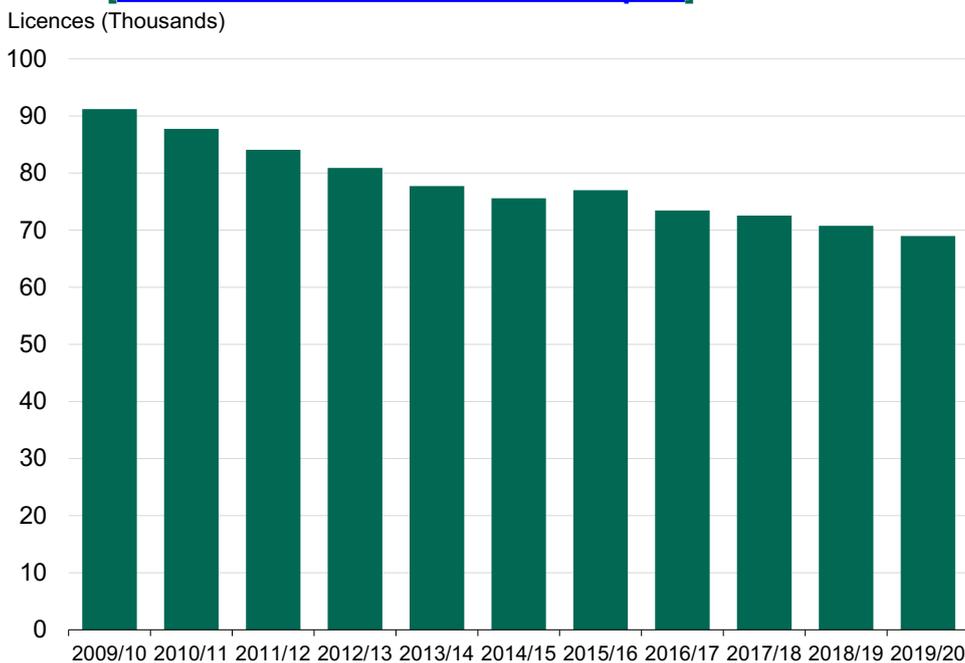
## Overview of the road freight sector

### Fleet size and operator licences

The latest [vehicle licensing statistics](#) show that at the end of 2020 there were around 485,900 HGVs licensed in Great Britain, of which around 395,400 were **taxed** as 'good vehicles' (remaining vehicles would be exempt from tax or taxed as private HGVs), a 3% decrease from 2019.

The number of goods vehicle operator licences in issue in Great Britain declined to under 100,000 in 2009/10 falling further to 69,000 in 2019/20. However, during this period the average size of an operators' fleet increased from 3.8 vehicles to 5.2 vehicles per licence, meaning fewer individual licences covering more vehicles.

**Chart 4: All goods vehicle operator licences in issue, Great Britain, 2009/10 to 2019/20** [[Traffic Commissioners' annual report](#)]



Percentage change compared to

2009/10 ↓ -24%  
2018/19 ↓ -3%

**Average fleet size increases**

↑ 37%

from 3.8 vehicles per licence in 2009/10 to 5.2 vehicles per licence in 2019/20.

### HGV driver numbers

[Annual population survey](#) estimates show that there was around 278,700 HGV drivers employed across all sectors in 2020, 7% less than in 2019 where around 300,100 were employed.

### HGV driver working time and pay

In the Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations 2005 it is stated that HGV drivers must not exceed, in a weeks working, an average of 48 hours. The [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) illustrates that the average (median) number of total paid hours worked per week by HGV drivers, including working overtime, has been 48 hours since the regulation was introduced and came into effect in 2005. In 2020, the average (median) gross hourly pay for an HGV driver was £11.80, an increase from £11.68 in 2019.

### Gender split

In 2020...



...a large majority of HGV drivers in employment in the uk were male.

## Commodities

In 2020, the 5 most common categories of commodities, representing 66% of all goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs in the UK, were: [\[Table RFS0104\]](#)

Rank	Commodity	Goods lifted (million tonnes)	Proportion of all goods lifted	Compared to 2019
1	 Food products	239	19%	↓ -8%
2	 Groupage	173	14%	↓ -25%
3	 Metal ore and other mining and quarrying	166	13%	↑ 7%
4	 Waste related products	151	12%	↓ -17%
5	 Glass, cement and other non-metallic mineral products	111	9%	↓ -23%

### Definitions

**Commodity:** goods are classified into commodity divisions and grouped by the 'standard goods classification for transport statistics 2007'.

**Groupage:** when, for mixed consignments, no single commodity makes up 75% or more of the consignment weight.

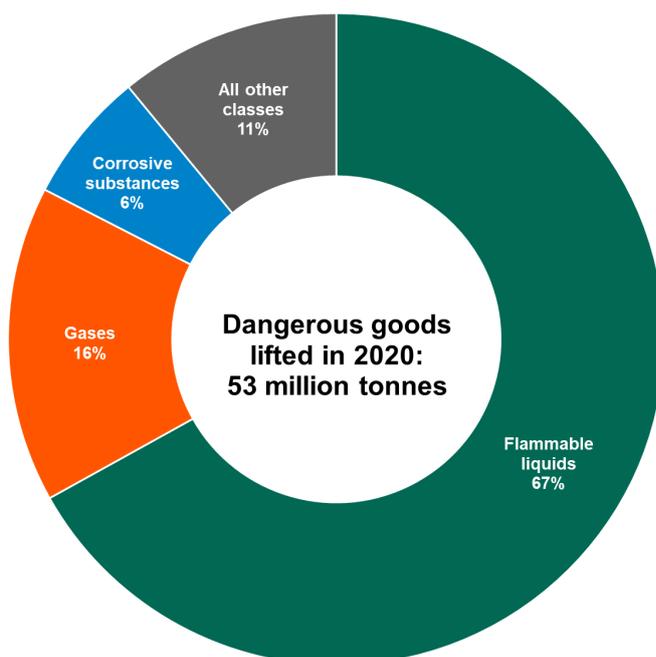
Percentages do not sum to 66% due to rounding

## Dangerous goods

In 2020, 4% of all goods lifted domestically were declared as dangerous goods, accounting for 53 million tonnes, decreasing from 56 million tonnes in 2019. Dangerous goods in 2020, were predominantly flammable liquids (36 million tonnes, 67%) e.g. alcoholic beverages, crude

### Chart 5: Dangerous goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs by dangerous goods class, 2020

[\[Table RFS0118\]](#)



### The 9 dangerous goods classes

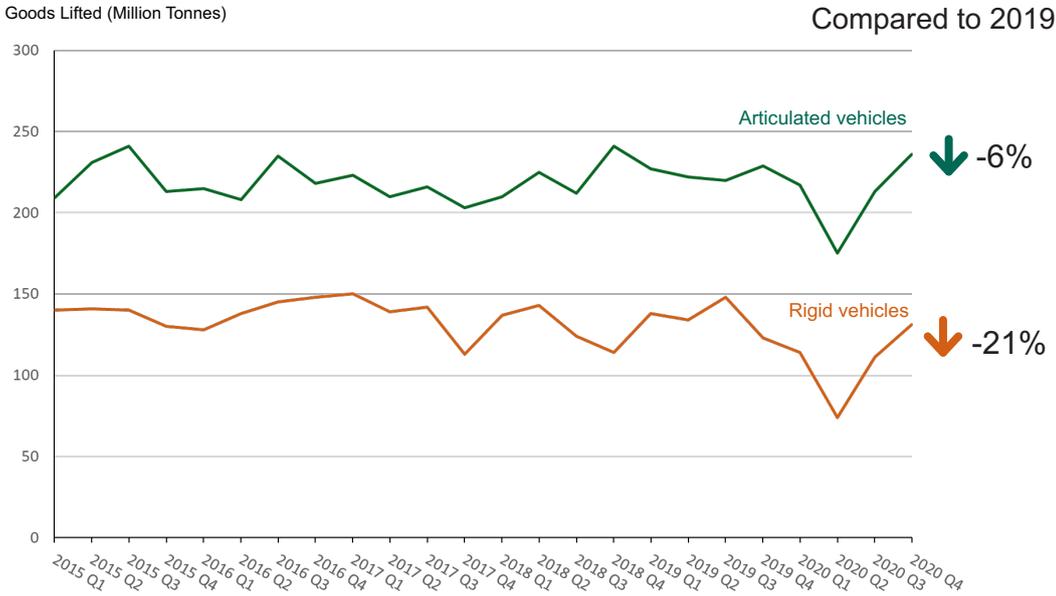
- Flammable liquids
- Gases
- Corrosive substances
- Flammable solids
- Oxidisers & organic peroxides
- Toxic & infectious substances
- Radioactive materials
- Explosives
- Miscellaneous substances

## Types of vehicles and mode of operation

### Types of vehicles

GB-registered HGVs range from a gross vehicle weight of 3.5 tonnes to 44 tonnes, with articulated vehicles - which tend to be longer, larger and heavier - carrying more freight compared to rigid HGVs. In 2020, articulated vehicles carried 66% of freight (841 million tonnes), whereas rigid vehicles only carried 34% of freight (421 million tonnes).

**Chart 6: Goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs, by type of vehicle, 2015 to 2020**



[\[Table RFS0109\]](#)

### Definitions

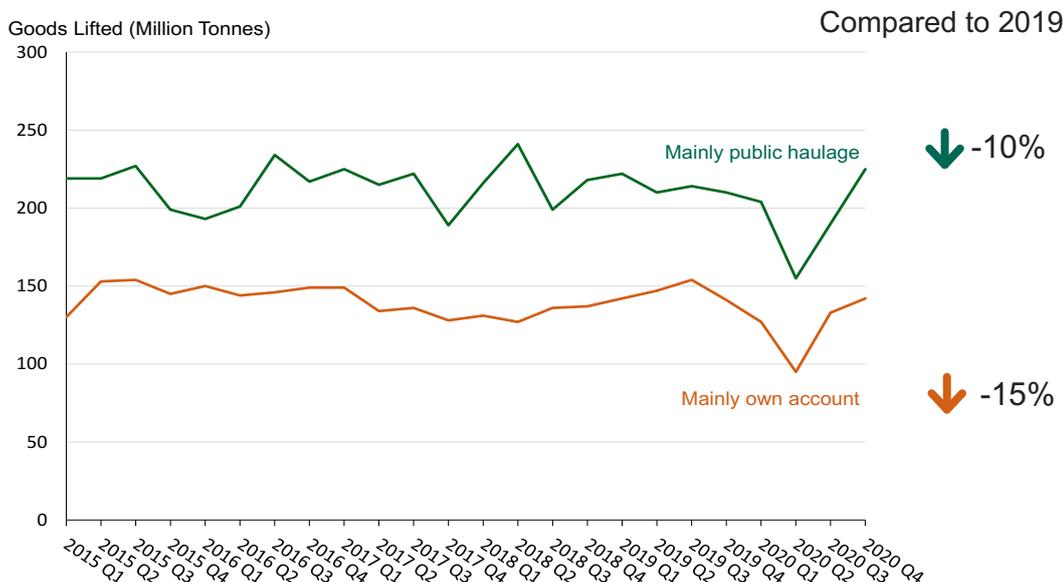
**Gross vehicle weight:** the total weight of the vehicle plus its carrying capacity (3.5 to 44t).



### Mode of operation

Road freight activity can be split between own account operators and public haulage operators. Public haulage operators usually account for a higher proportion of activity than own account operators, with public haulage operators representing 61% (774 million tonnes) of all goods lifted in 2020.

**Chart 7: Goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs, by mode of working, 2015 to 2020** [\[Table RFS0114\]](#)



### Definitions

**Own account operators:** those who carry goods only for their own trade or business.

**Public haulage operators:** those who carry goods for other companies or individuals.

## Inter-modal road freight activity

The 1.27 billion tonnes of goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs in the UK in 2020, equated to 137 million HGV journeys, of which 3% (3.6 million journeys) involved at least one element of inter-modal activity. This equates to 62 million tonnes of freight (5%) using road and at least one other different mode of transport, of which:



**78%** of inter-modal journeys (49 million tonnes) began or ended at a shipping dock



**19%** (12 million tonnes) began or ended at a rail siding/terminal



**3%** (2 million tonnes) began or ended at an airport

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

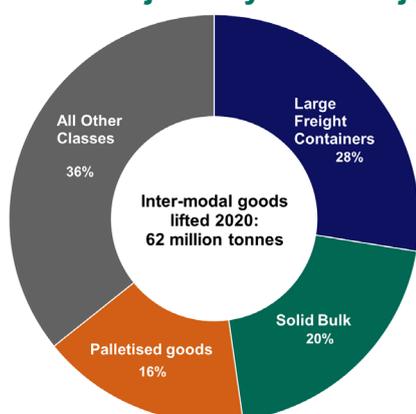
## Commodities

The three most common commodities transported on inter-modal trips in 2020 were:

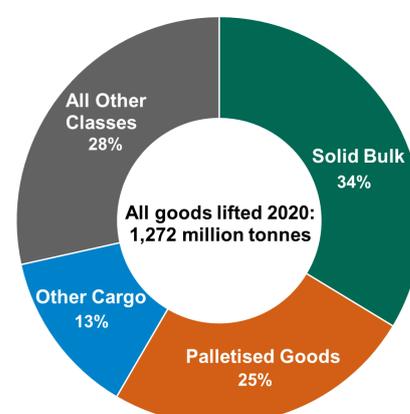
- ▶ Food products 11.5 million tonnes (19% of inter-modal tonnage)
- ▶ Groupage 8.4 million tonnes (14% of inter-modal tonnage)
- ▶ Waste related products 5.4 million tonnes (9% of inter-modal tonnage)

## Method of transportation

**Chart 8: Goods lifted by GB-registered HGVs, by method of transportation, inter-modal journeys and all journeys, 2020**



The receptacle or method used to transport goods differs for inter-modal goods compared to goods transported solely by HGVs, reflecting the requirements of transferring goods between modes of transport.



The most common method of transportation used to transfer goods between modes in inter-modal journeys is Palletised Goods (28%). Whereas, for all journeys the most common method of transportation is Solid Bulk (34%).

## Definitions

### Inter-modal:

There are multiple nuanced definitions of journeys involving freight movement across modes. Solely for the purpose of these statistics, these types of journeys and freight involved shall be referred to as "Inter-modal" freight.

### Journey:

goods transported from an origin to a destination by an HGV.

### Method of transportation

definitions can be found on page 9.

## Definitions

### Methods of Transportation:

**Solid Bulk** – commodity transported unpacked in large quantities. It refers to material in granular form e.g. coal

**Liquid Bulk** – similar to solid bulk, however the material it refers to is of liquid form e.g. petroleum/crude oil

**Palletised Goods** – commodity transported in a pallet, to support goods giving stability to commodity during transportation e.g. beverages

**Large Freight Containers** – also known as shipping containers, commodity transported in a container with strength suitable to withstand shipment, storage and handling e.g. large reusable steel boxes (intermodal shipments), corrugated boxes

### Strengths and weaknesses of data

The figures in this release are mainly derived from the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Great Britain (CSRGT GB) which provides information on the activity of GB-registered HGVs operating across the UK only. As such, the statistics exclude HGVs registered in Northern Ireland, foreign-registered HGVs and vehicles with a gross vehicle weight of 3.5 tonnes or less (Light Goods Vehicles and Vans). Also excluded from CSRGT GB is the activity of HGVs registered in Great Britain when operating outside of the UK. For information on GB registered HGVs making international trips please see accompanying International road Haulage Survey [tables](#) and [publication](#).

The CSRGT GB is a continuous survey which collects a range of information on freight movements from a stratified sample of HGVs. Figures are weighted to be representative of the HGV population however, like any statistical source, there are limitations. For example, these figures are based on a sample of HGVs rather than a census of all HGVs, which means that the figures in this publication are estimates associated with potential sampling errors.

Guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics and further information can be found in the [Road Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#). Sample sizes that the statistics are based upon and sampling error estimates can be found within [Table RFS0129](#), broken down by type and weight of vehicle. The average annual sample size is 6,987 vehicles following the sample reduction in 2011.

Between 2011 and 2012, a number of changes were made to how the three Department for Transport road freight surveys were processed. Caution should therefore be used for statistics based on the three freight surveys when making comparisons over time. See the [Road Freight Statistics methodology note](#) for more information.

This release and its contents partly rely on the use of administrative data from DVLA and DVSA. DfT have assessed the impact of this on the quality of these statistics, a report on which can be found in the [Quality assurance of administrative data sources: Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency](#) and [Quality assurance of administrative data sources: Driver Vehicle Standards Agency](#).

## Users and uses of statistics

Road freight statistics are a key source of management information on the use of the country's infrastructure. Its main use occurs across various types of public and private bodies: local and central government, such as the Office for National Statistics and Highways England; local town and transport planning bodies; commercial organisations, such as haulage operators and transport consultants; and academics.

Users are mainly interested in information such as the origins and destinations of journeys, length of haul, empty running and the pattern of freight from abroad on UK roads. The statistics also support policies on freight, road safety and reducing congestion and pollution.

## Background notes

These statistics were [confirmed as National Statistics in December 2016](#). Accompanying data tables give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other road freight topics, including the international activity of UK-registered HGVs. These data tables are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>

This release also collates statistics from a number of published sources that are revised and updated throughout the year. The data for this release were extracted in June 2020, and users can refer to the links below for the most recent or revised data available for each of the sources used, and also caveats relating to these sources.

- ▶ United Kingdom National Accounts; Office for National Statistics: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa1-rd/united-kingdom-national-accounts/index.html>
- ▶ Fuel prices, Monthly and annual prices of road fuels and petroleum products; Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/oil-and-petroleum-products-monthly-statistics>
- ▶ Annual Business Survey; Office for National Statistics: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/nonfinancialbusinesseconomyukandregionalannualbusinesssurvey/2019finalresults>
- ▶ Employment of HGV drivers, Labour Force Survey; Office for National Statistics: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/standard-reports>
- ▶ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings; Office for National Statistics: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashe/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/index.html>
- ▶ Vehicle licensing statistics for HGVs; Department for Transport: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/veh05-licensed-heavy-goods-vehicles>
- ▶ Goods vehicle operator licences; Traffic Commissioners' annual reports: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-commissioners-annual-reports>

Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours



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