



Port Freight Statistics: Provisional Annual 2012

This statistical release presents the provisional statistics on freight handled by UK sea ports in 2012. A full update will be published in September 2013.

Provisional summary quarterly statistics on freight handled by UK major ports are also updated quarterly.



Key findings	1
Annual statistics	2
Strengths and weaknesses of the data	5
Glossary	5
Background notes	6

FURTHER INFORMATION

Responsible statistician:
Margaret Talbot

Media Enquiries:
020 7944 3066

Public Enquiries:
Margaret Talbot
020 7944 4131
maritime.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

The key findings for 2012 are:-

Port Freight Traffic (tonnage)

- **Total freight traffic for all ports in the UK** decreased to 501.2 million tonnes, a 4 per cent decline compared to 2011.
- **Major UK ports** handled 489.8 million tonnes, a drop of 3 per cent in comparison to 2011.
- **Minor ports tonnage** decreased by 9 per cent compared to 2011, down to 11.4 million tonnes.
- **Northern Ireland** was the only country to see a slight year on year increase with tonnage rising to 23.5 million tonnes in 2012.
- **Grimsby & Immingham** remained the busiest port in the UK, in terms of tonnage, handling 60.1 million tonnes of freight which was an increase of 5 per cent compared with 2011.

Unitised Traffic through Major Ports

- **Units handled by UK major ports** fell for the second year running to 20.8 million units, a 3 per cent decrease since 2011.
- **Scotland** was the only country to have an increase in the number of units, increasing by 3 per cent to a total of 1.2 million units.
- **Dover** remained the busiest major port in terms of unitised traffic, handling 4.3 million units. Unitised traffic through Dover fell by 8 per cent in comparison to 2011, continuing the downward trend in number of units seen over the previous five years.

Section 1: Port Freight Traffic (tonnage)

1. All UK Ports

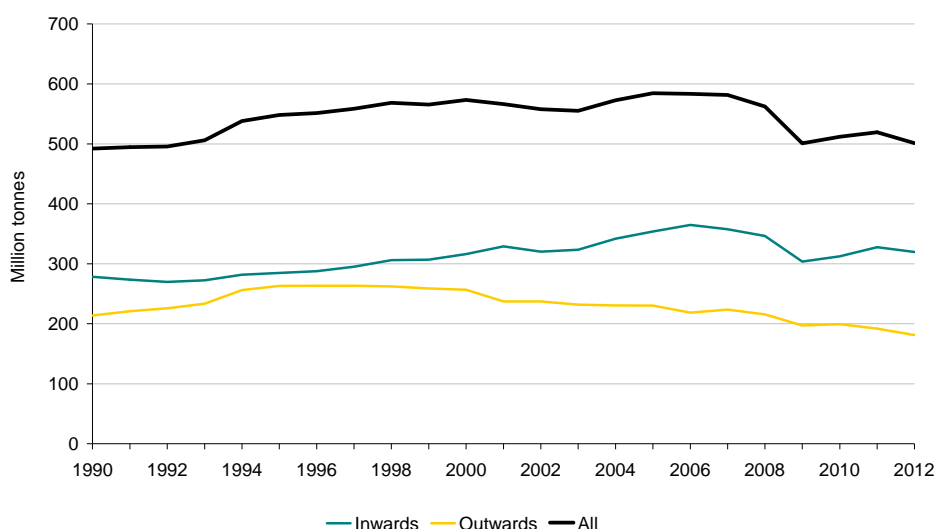
1.1 Summary

- In 2012, total freight traffic for all ports in the UK has **decreased to 501.2 million tonnes**, a 4 per cent decline compared to 2011. This decline follows two consecutive years of growth.
- Port Freight traffic started to fall in 2007 (the onset of the recession) through to 2009. This decline ended the general upwards trend seen since the 1980s (the start of the series). Despite slight growth in 2010 and 2011, tonnage through UK ports has fallen by 10 per cent over the last 10 years and is now at a similar level to that seen 20 years ago.

1.2 Inwards/ Outwards Tonnage

- **Inwards** UK port traffic **decreased to 319.8 million tonnes** in 2012, a 2 per cent decline compared to 2011. Inwards traffic has fallen by less than 1 per cent over the last ten years and, although continuing to decline, inward tonnage in 2012 is 5 per cent above the lowest level seen in 2009.
- Inwards UK port traffic accounts for 64 per cent of total tonnage at UK ports. This percentage contribution has been gradually increasing since the broadly equal split seen in the 1980s/1990s.
- **Outwards** UK port traffic in 2012 has **declined for a second consecutive year by 5 per cent** in comparison to 2011. Outwards tonnage in 2012 was 181.4 million tonnes, the lowest on record. This follows a long term downward trend in outwards traffic with levels having fallen by 24 per cent over the last ten years.

Chart 1: UK port traffic by direction, 1990 - 2012



2. Freight Tonnage by Type of Port

2.1 Major Ports

- There were 52 major UK ports in 2012, handling 98 per cent of the total traffic. **Major UK ports handled 489.8 million tonnes**, a drop of 3 per cent in comparison to 2011.
- **Inwards** traffic through major UK ports **declined by 2 per cent** to 312.4 million tonnes and **outwards** traffic from major UK ports **declined by 5 per cent** to 177.4 million tonnes.

2.2 Minor Ports

- Port freight traffic (tonnage) through **minor ports in 2012 decreased by 9 per cent**, in comparison to 2011, down to 11.4 million tonnes. Tonnage levels have not decreased for all minor ports but the recession has had a negative impact on those minor ports which handle a larger volume of cargo. The total amount of tonnage in 2012 was 23 per cent lower than the peak in 2007 and 28 per cent lower than 2002.
- **Inward** traffic through minor ports **decreased by 6 per cent** to 7.4 million tonnes whilst **outwards** traffic from minor ports saw a more substantial **decline of 14 per cent** to 4 million tonnes.

3. Freight Tonnage by Country/Port

3.1 Tonnage by Country

- In 2012 there were 28 major and 34 minor active ports in **England**. These ports handled 346.8 million tonnages, accounting for 69 per cent of the total tonnage through UK ports in 2012.
- The amount of freight moved through **English ports decreased by 2 per cent** compared to 2011, continuing the downward trend seen since 2007. Total tonnage through English ports has fallen by 4 per cent over the last decade.
- In 2012 there were **Scotland** 17 major and 11 minor active Scottish ports. Scotland was the second largest contributor to freight traffic in 2012, handling 15 per cent of the total tonnage through UK ports at 76.1 million tonnes.
- Port freight traffic in Scotland has fallen for the fifth consecutive year, decreasing by 2 per cent compared to 2011 and have fallen by 38 per cent since 2002.
- In 2012 **Welsh** ports contributed 11 per cent of the total tonnage through the UK through its 13 active ports (7 major ports and 6 minor ports).
- Port freight traffic through Welsh ports saw the largest percentage decrease in 2012, falling by 17 per cent from 65.5 million tonnes in 2011 to 54.6 million tonnes in 2012. This was mainly due to the reduction in freight tonnage through Milford Haven, which fell by 22 per cent. Longer term, port freight traffic through Welsh ports has increased by 5 per cent over the last 10 years.
- **Northern Ireland** was the only country to see a slight year on year increase in 2012, with tonnage rising from 23.2million tonnes in 2011 to 23.5 million tonnes in 2012.

- Northern Ireland's port freight traffic has been increasing since 2009 with tonnage now 10 per cent higher than in 2002. In 2012, Northern Ireland had 5 major and 2 minor active ports which contributed 5 per cent of all UK port freight traffic.

3.2 Tonnage by Port

- In 2012, the top 10 busiest ports accounted for 68 per cent of all freight traffic. **Grimsby & Immingham** remained the busiest port in the UK in terms of tonnage, handling 60.1 million tonnes of freight which was an increase of 5 per cent compared with 2011. Inwards traffic contributed over three quarters of the tonnage at Grimsby & Immingham.
- The top 10 busiest ports remained relatively consistent from 2011 to 2012, with the top 6 busiest ports retaining their exact positions. However in 2012 **Clyde** handled 15.4 million tonnes of freight; an increase of 15 per cent in comparison to 2011; meaning Clyde replaced Aberdeen as the tenth busiest port.

Figure 1: Top 10 busiest ports in 2012

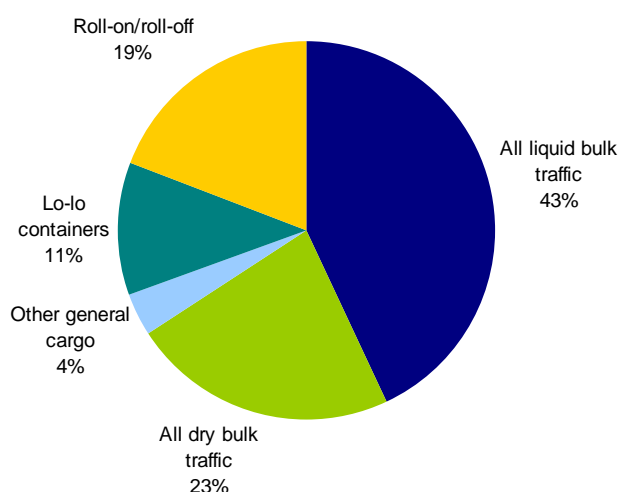
Million tonnes		
Port	2012 ^P	2011
Grimsby & Immingham	60.1	57.2
London	43.7	48.8
Milford Haven	39.8	48.7
Southampton	38.1	37.9
Tees and Hartlepool	34.0	35.2
Liverpool	32.9	32.7
Felixstowe	26.3	26.8
Forth	25.3	27.9
Dover	22.9	24.3
Clyde incl. Ardrossan	15.4	13.4

4. Freight Tonnage by Cargo Type (Major Ports)

4.1 Trend by Cargo Type

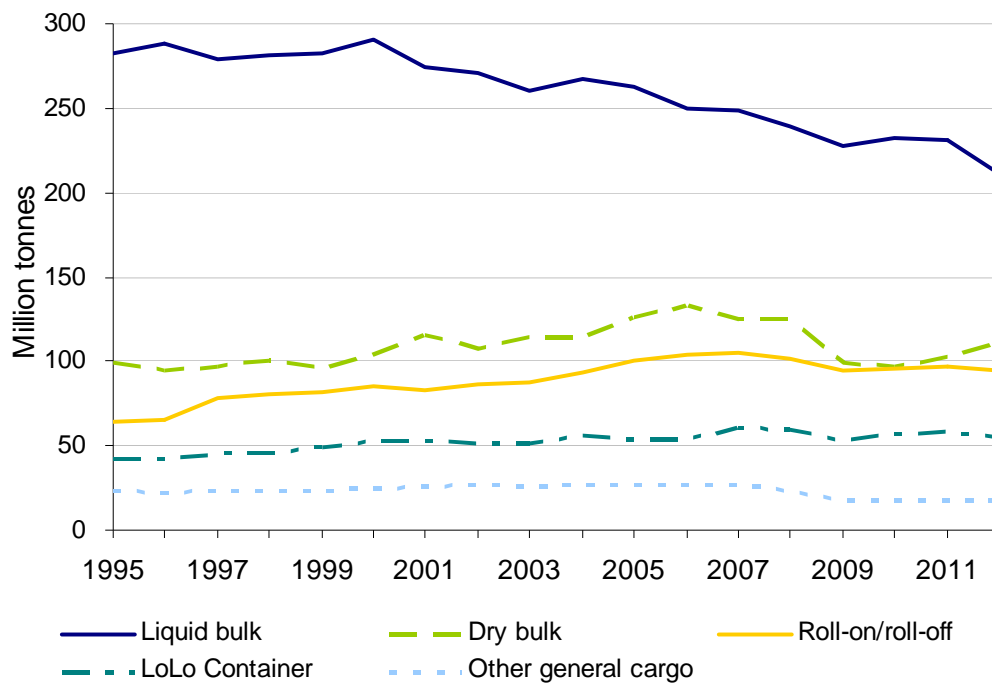
- Over the last decade the distribution of cargo being handled by UK major ports has remained fairly consistent. In 2012 **liquid bulk** accounted for 43 per cent of all freight traffic through UK major ports. **Dry bulk** accounted for 23 per cent, 19 per cent was from **Roll-on/Roll-off** (ro-ro) traffic, 11 per cent from **Lift-on/Lift-off** (lo-lo) containers and the remaining 4 per cent was general cargo.

Chart 2: UK major port traffic by cargo type



- The amount of **liquid bulk tonnage** has been steadily declining since 2000. Liquid bulk tonnage in 2012 fell by 9 per cent compared to 2011, continuing this trend. This was largely due to the decline in freight handled by **Milford Haven** (the leading port handling liquid bulk) which had a 19 per cent decrease in liquid bulk tonnage between 2011 and 2012.
- Dry bulk traffic** was the only cargo type to increase in tonnage between 2011 and 2012, rising by 8 per cent. Other general cargo remained steady in comparison to 2011, whereas ro-ro containers and lo-lo containers both declined by 3 per cent and 5 per cent respectively.

Chart 3: UK major port traffic by cargo type from 1990 – 2012



Detailed statistics (tables) on freight traffic (tonnage) can be found in the web tables, [port0101](#), [port0102](#) & [port0115](#).

Section 2: Unitised Traffic through Major Ports

Unitised traffic (lifted or rolled onto a ship inside a container or vehicle from which it is not unpacked) is measured in terms of the number of units, as well as the weight of the goods they contain. Unitised traffic has been collected since 2000.

1. All Major UK Ports

1.1 Summary

- The total number of **units handled by UK major ports** in 2012 fell for the second year running to 20.8 million units, a 3 per cent decrease since 2011.
- Unitised traffic had been steadily increasing up until 2007. However between 2008 and 2009 the number of units handled by UK major ports fell by 10 per cent, leaving a similar level in 2009 as in 2001. The number of units handled by UK major ports in 2012 are similar to that reported in 2009 and 2001.

1.2 Inwards/Outwards Unitised Traffic

- Both inwards and outwards unitised traffic through UK major ports has fallen for the second consecutive year. **Inward unitised traffic** in 2012 accounted for a total of 10.7 million units, a decline of 3 per cent and **outwards unitised traffic** in 2012 accounted for a total of 10.1 million units, a decline of 2 per cent.
- Longer term, inwards traffic has fallen by a greater amount over the last 10 years, declining by 6 per cent compared to 2 per cent for outwards traffic.

2. Unitised Traffic through Major Ports by Country/Port

2.1 Unitised Traffic through Major Ports by Country

- Major ports in **England** handled the majority of unitised traffic (82 per cent). Unitised traffic through English ports declined for the second year in a row falling by 3 per cent when compared to 2011, to 17.2 million units in 2012.
- Major ports in **Northern Ireland** were the second busiest in terms of unitised traffic, handling 7 per cent of the total traffic and a total of 1.4 million units in 2012. Unitised traffic through Northern Irish ports has declined for the fifth consecutive year, falling by 7 per cent over the last decade.
- **Scotland** was the only country to have an increase in the number of units handled through major ports in 2012 compared to 2011. Unitised traffic through Scottish major ports increased by 3 per cent to a total of 1.2 million units. The Scottish port with the largest volume of unitised traffic changed in 2012. Previously Cairnryan had been the primary handler of units whereas in 2012 Stranraer took this position. Unitised traffic through Scottish major ports has been increasing over the last decade and in 2012 total units were 15 per cent higher than in 2002.
- **Welsh** major ports saw the greatest decline in unitised traffic between 2011 and 2012 falling by

6 per cent. Holyhead is the busiest Welsh port for unitised traffic and handled 3 per cent fewer units in 2012 than in 2011.

2.2 Unitised Traffic by Port

- In 2012 **Dover** remained the busiest major port in terms of unitised traffic, handling 4.3 million units. Unitised traffic through Dover fell by 8 per cent in comparison to 2011, continuing the downward trend in number of units seen over the previous five years.
- **Felixstowe** was the second busiest major port in terms of all unitised traffic. Felixstowe handled 2.2 million units, a 2 per cent increase compared to 2011.

3. Unitised Freight Traffic through Major Ports by Main Cargo Type

3.1 Summary

- **Unitised Freight traffic** (Lo-Lo containers and ro-ro units which are designed to carry freight) decreased by 2 per cent in 2012 to 11.6 million units. The weight of the freight units through major ports saw a greater decline of 4 per cent.
- The number of main freight units is split evenly between inwards and outwards traffic (5.8 million units were handled by major ports in each direction). However inwards tonnage is 23.2 million tonnes heavier than the unitised traffic travelling out the UK major ports. This is primarily due to lo-lo container traffic which has a difference of 8 million tonnes between inward and outward traffic.
- **Lo-Lo containers** accounted for 41 per cent of the 11.6 million main freight units through UK major ports. In 2012 the number of lo-lo containers decreased by 2 per cent compared with 2011 to 4.8 million and the weight of lo-lo container traffic decreased by 5 per cent.
- There were 6.8 million **ro-ro main freight units** (Road good vehicles, unaccompanied trailers and shipborne port to port trailer) through UK major ports in 2012, a slight decrease from the 6.9 million handled in 2011.
- The main category of ro-ro main freight units **was Road goods vehicles** which fell by 1 per cent compared to 2011 to 3.5 million units.
- Between 2011 and 2012 the number of **unaccompanied trailers** remained constant at 2.7 million units but the weight of unaccompanied units fell by 2 per cent.
- There were 676 thousand **shipborne port-to-port trailers** in 2012, weighing 9.9 million tonnes. The number of shipborne port-to-port trailers through UK major ports declined by 7 per cent since 2011 and the weight decreased by 12 per cent.
- The number of **trade motor vehicles** handled at major ports increased for the third consecutive year to 3.5 million vehicles, a 3 per cent annual rise.

3.2 Unitised Traffic by Main Goods Cargo Type and Port (Major Port)

- The ten busiest container ports handled 95 per cent of all lo-lo containers in 2012.
- Felixstowe, Southampton and London retained their position as the top three busiest container ports.
- **Felixstowe** handled 43 per cent of the 4.8 million lo-lo units in 2012 . Lo-lo units through Felixstowe increased by 3 per cent compared to 2011 to 2 million units.

Figure 2: Top 10 busiest container ports in 2012 compared with 2011

Thousand containers		
Port	2012 ^P	2011
Felixstowe	2,044	1,980
Southampton	886	965
London	390	429
Liverpool	385	404
Medway	175	240
Forth	155	145
Tees & Hartlepool	146	152
Hull	132	116
Belfast	124	128
Grimsby & Immingham	91	68

- The majority (55 per cent) of **road goods vehicles** that travelled through UK major ports in 2012 went through **Dover**. In 2012 there were 1.9 million road goods vehicles through Dover accounting for 44 per cent of Dover's unitised traffic though numbers fell by 4 per cent compared to 2011.
- **Grimsby and Immingham** handled the most **unaccompanied trailers** in 2012 (491 thousand) and **London** was the busiest port in terms of **shipborne port-to-port trailers**, handling 275 thousand (40 per cent of the total).

Detailed statistics (tables) on unitised traffic can be found in the web tables, [port0201](#), [port0202](#) & [port0210](#).

3. Strengths and weaknesses of the data

- The port freight statistics relate to traffic to and from ports in United Kingdom, unless otherwise stated, and do not cover ports in the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands.
- Provisional annual results are published approximately 6 months after the end of the calendar year to which they relate. These statistics are based on the MSD2X and MSD5 returns provided at the end of the year by each major port and minor port respectively. A split into broad cargo type is available for each major port. Some additional quality checks will have been possible, compared with the earlier quarterly data. However, full checks of MSD2/2X data against MSD1 data from shipping agents, and grossing of the final data will not have been completed, so the data remain provisional at this stage. Furthermore, past experience is that the figures for the vast majority of ports do not change between the publication of provisional and final annual results.
- Final detailed results are published about 9 months after the year end. At this stage a full reconciliation of port and shipping agent data will have been carried out, and the grossing procedures described above completed and checked. The detailed results are based on this grossed data. At this stage the full range of analyses, including those by route and vessel type are available.
- Due to quality assurance procedures continuing since the quarterly publication the figures may not be an exact match to those published in “UK Port Freight Statistics: January to March 2013 (Quarter 1)”.

4. Glossary

- Major ports: Ports handling over one million tonnes per year, and a small number of other key ports, together accounting for over 98 per cent of UK port traffic.
- Tonnage: The weight of goods transported, including crates and other packaging, but excluding the unloaded weight of shipping containers, road goods vehicles, trailers and other items of transport equipment where these are used.
- Units: Includes all roll-on roll-off units whether carrying freight or not (road goods vehicles, unaccompanied trailers, shipborne port-to-port trailers, passenger vehicles, trade vehicles, and other ro-ro units), as well as lift-on lift-off containers. In most published port statistics freight carrying roll-on roll-off units are reported separately, however, this detail is not available at the time of the quarterly statistics publication, in which combined totals are given.

5. Background notes

- The web tables and charts give further detail of the key results presented in this statistical release. They are available here: [Ports statistics - Department for Transport - Inside Government - GOV.UK](#)
- Full guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics can be found here: [Transport Statistics notes and guidance: Ports - Detailed guidance - GOV.UK](#)
- National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs. [Code of Practice](#)
- Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/68882/pre-release-access-for-port-freight-statistics-annual-and-quarterly_releases.pdf
- The next update in this series will be published in September 2013. It will contain provisional quarterly figures for Q2 2013.
- Annual statistics on freight handled by UK sea ports are updated twice a year; provisional in June and detailed final figures in September. The final 2011 figures can be found here: [Port freight statistics: 2011 final figures - Publications - Inside Government - GOV.UK](#)