



Department for Transport

Domestic Road Freight Statistics, United Kingdom 2015

About this release

This statistical release summarises the latest road freight statistics from the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Great Britain (CSRGT GB). The survey measures the activity of **GB-registered** heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) operating **across the UK**.

This release also summarises a number of economic, environmental and safety statistics about HGVs and the road freight industry.

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Domestic road freight activity increases in 2015

Key results

HGVs in 2015 ...

Compared to 2014

1.65 billion tonnes



↑ 11 per cent

152 billion tonne kilometres



↑ 12 per cent

18.4 billion kilometres



↑ 9 per cent

- ▶ Between 2014 and 2015, the amount of **goods lifted** by GB-registered heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) operating in the UK increased by 11 per cent to 1.65 billion tonnes.
- ▶ Over the same period, the amount of **goods moved** increased by 12 per cent to 152 billion tonne kilometres and the distance travelled by HGVs in the UK increased by 9 per cent to 18.4 billion vehicle kilometres.

Definitions

Goods lifted: the weight of goods carried measured in tonnes.

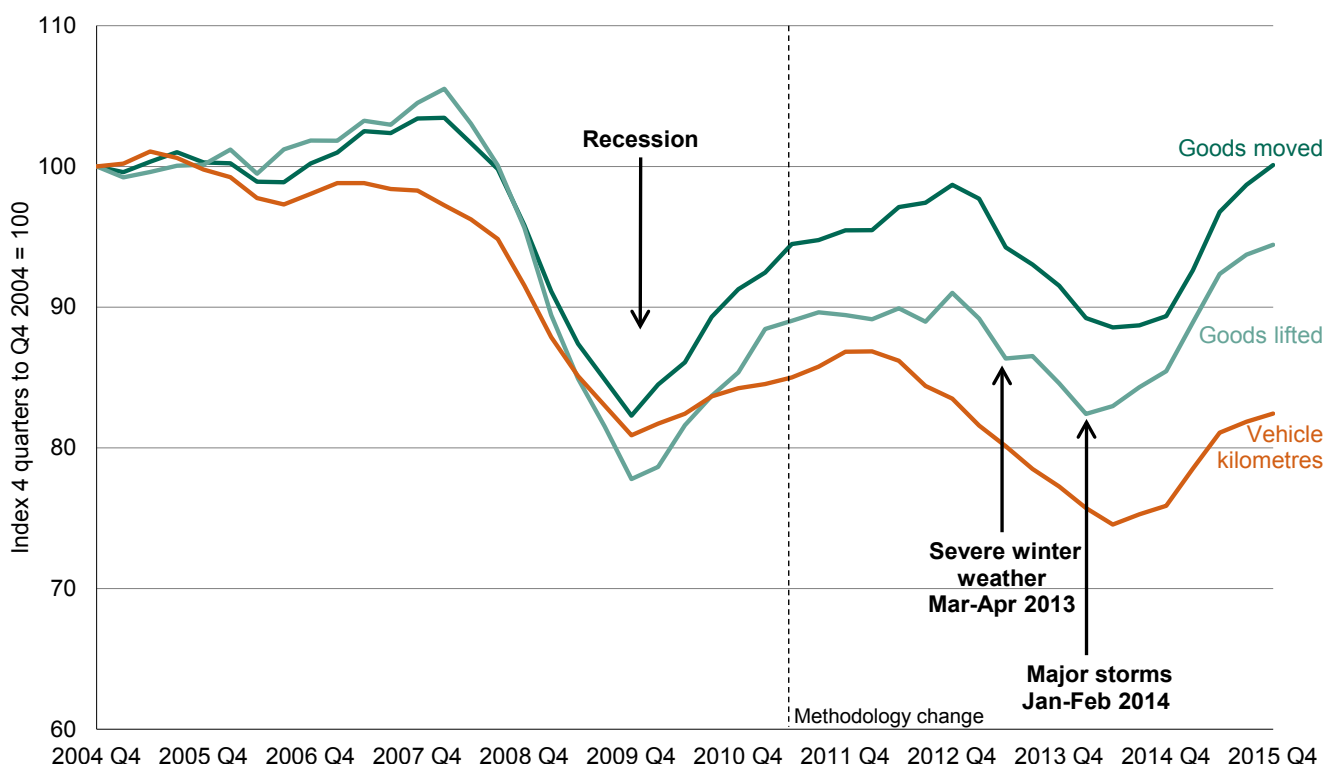
Goods moved: a measure of activity taking into account the weight of the load and distance through which it is hauled. It is equal to the weight of goods multiplied by distance and is measured in tonne kilometres.

Overall trends in domestic road freight

Between 2014 and 2015, the amount of **goods moved** by GB-registered heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) operating in the UK increased by 12 per cent to 152 billion tonne kilometres. This is 3 per cent lower than the historic peak of 157 billion tonne kilometres in 2007 before the UK economy went into recession, prior to the recession the level of **goods moved** had generally been increasing (**Chart 1**). The extreme UK weather seen in early 2013 and 2014 is likely to have contributed to dips in road freight activity.

Over the same period between 2014 and 2015, the amount of **goods lifted** increased by 11 per cent to 1.65 billion tonnes. This is still 10 per cent lower than the peak in 2007 of 1.82 billion tonnes. The distance travelled by HGVs in the UK increased by 9 per cent to 18.4 billion vehicle kilometres in 2015.

Chart 1: Freight measure indices: goods moved, goods lifted and vehicle kilometres by GB-registered HGVs, rolling 4 quarter totals to 2015 Q4 [[Table RFS0101](#)]



Note ...

Between 2011 quarter 1 and 2, a number of changes were made to how the road freight survey data were processed. Caution should therefore be used when making comparisons over periods denoted by dotted lines within the charts in this publication. See the [Road Freight Statistics methodology note](#) for more information.

The average length of haul (92 kilometres) for GB-registered HGVs in 2015 was similar to that in 2014 (91 kilometres). The average length of haul for articulated HGVs (124 kilometres in 2015) continues to be longer than that of rigid HGVs (49 kilometres) [[Table RFS0105](#)].

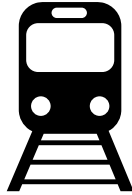
Definitions

Average length of haul: measured in kilometres is defined as tonne kilometres divided by tonnes lifted.

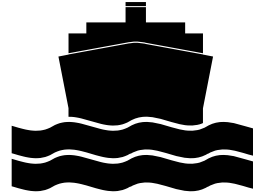
In 2014, road freight continued to be the main method of transporting freight across the UK ...



136 billion tonne kilometres by road



22 billion tonne kilometres by rail



27 billion tonne kilometres by water

Detailed statistics ...

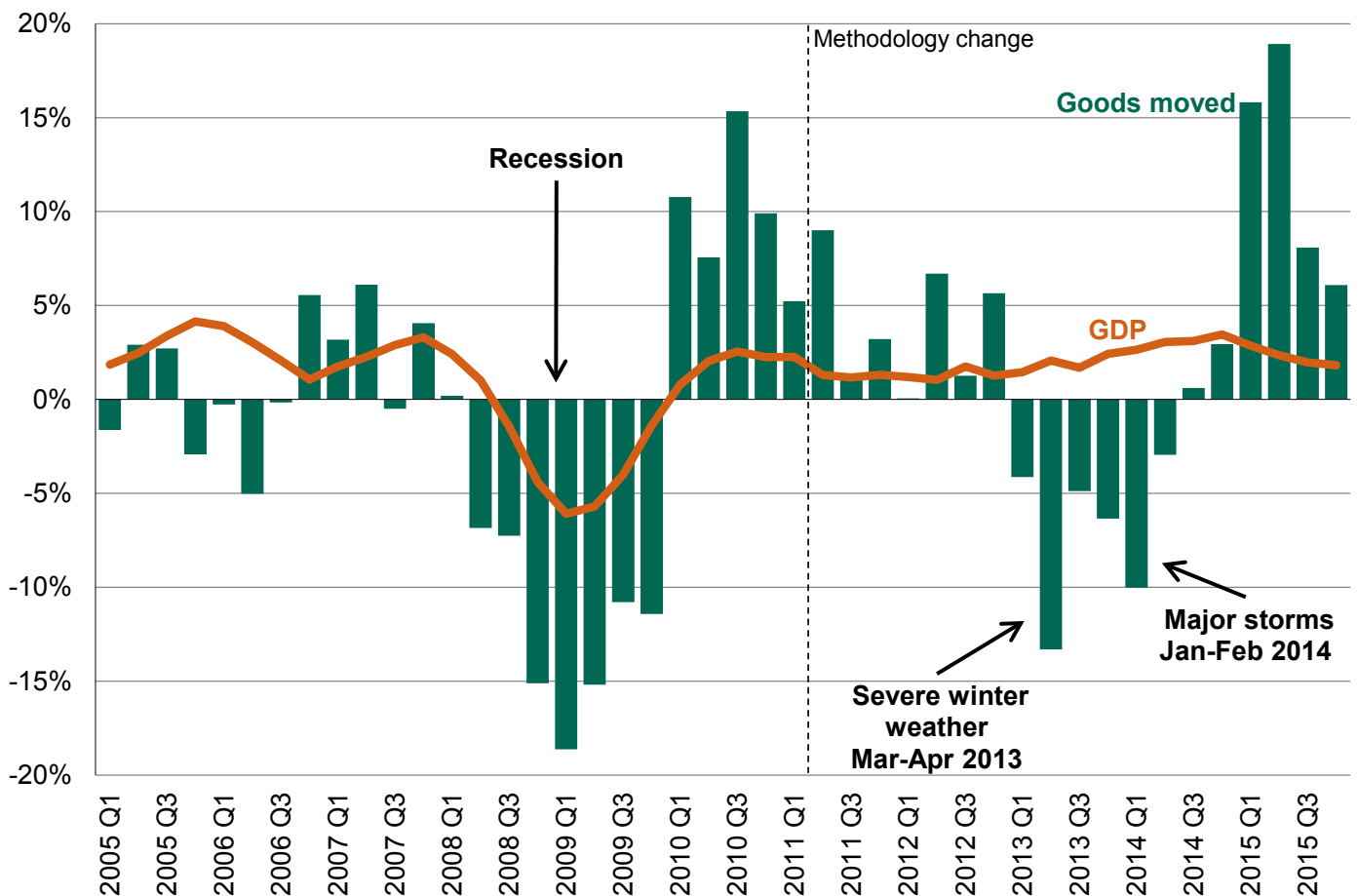
on freight transport by mode can be sourced from chapter 4 of [Transport Statistics Great Britain 2015](#)

... with almost three in every four tonne kilometres of **goods moved** by road than by rail or water [[Table TSGB0401](#)].

Road freight and economic activity

Growth in the amount of **goods moved** (tonne kilometres) by road has generally been in line with UK economic growth with deviation seen in some quarters. This deviation could be attributed to a number of factors including extreme UK weather (**Chart 2**) as well as issues at key freight interchanges e.g. disruption at Dover-Calais in 2015.

Chart 2: Growth in goods moved and GDP, quarter on previous years same quarter



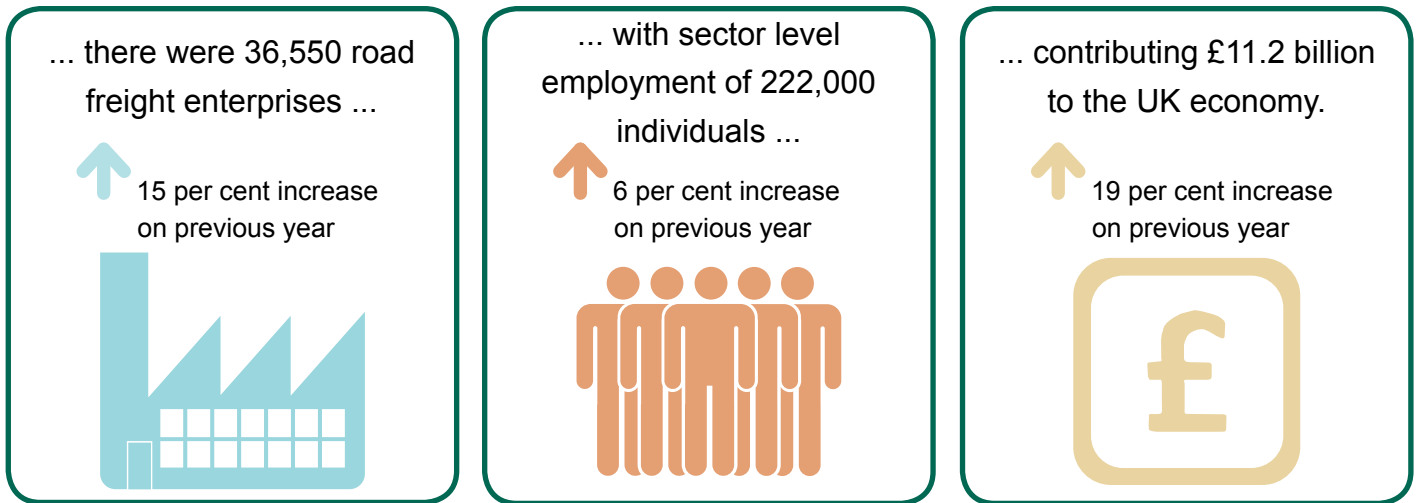
Further information ...

on UK weather and climate is available from the Met Office: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate>

Overview of the road freight sector

Road freight enterprises

The latest estimates from the [Annual Business Survey](#) show that in 2014 (data for 2015 due to be published in November 2016) within the road freight sector ...

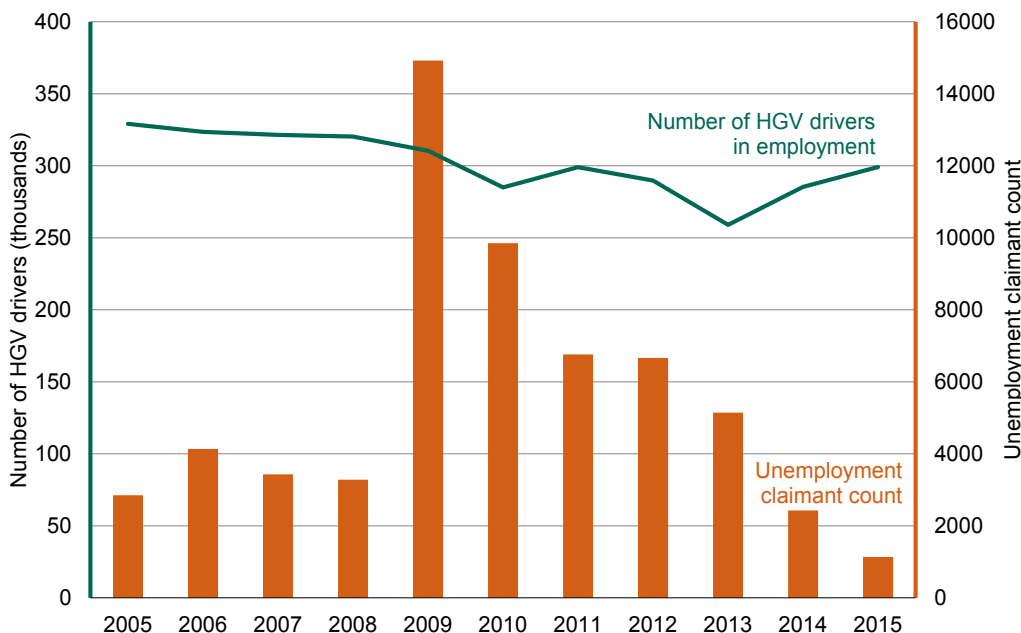


HGV driver numbers

The latest estimates (April to June) from the Labour Force Survey showed that the number of HGV drivers employed across all sectors such as manufacturing and retail has continued to grow since the 259,000 low in 2013 to 299,000 drivers in 2015. Prior to the recession there had been around 320,000 HGV drivers, in 2009 driver numbers started to decline (**Chart 3**).

The number of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance who stated that "HGV driver" was their usual occupation has continued to fall since 2009. In April 2015, 1,135 people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance stated that "HGV driver" was their usual occupation, this was 65 per cent lower than pre-recession levels.

Chart 3: Employment and unemployment of HGV drivers, United Kingdom, 1999-2015 [[Labour Force Survey, ONS](#) and [Nomis, ONS](#)]



Percentage change between 2014 and 2015

- ↑ 5 per cent increase in the number HGV drivers in employment
- ↓ 53 per cent decrease in number of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance who stated that HGV driver was their usual occupation

HGV driver working time

The provisions of the Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations 2005 state that HGV drivers weekly working time must not exceed an average of 48 hours. Estimates from the [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings](#) show that the average (median) number of total paid hours worked per week by HGV drivers, including overtime, has been 48 hours since the regulation came into effect in 2005. Prior to this the average was slightly higher at 50 hours per week.

Fleet size and operator licences

The latest [vehicle licensing statistics](#) show that at the end of 2015 there were 483,400 heavy goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight licensed in Great Britain, of which 396,900 were taxed as 'goods vehicles' (the remaining vehicles would be HGVs exempt from tax and those taxed as private HGVs). Of those HGVs taxed as goods vehicles, 120,500 were articulated and 276,300 were rigid. Just under a quarter of rigid goods vehicles were licensed as box vans.

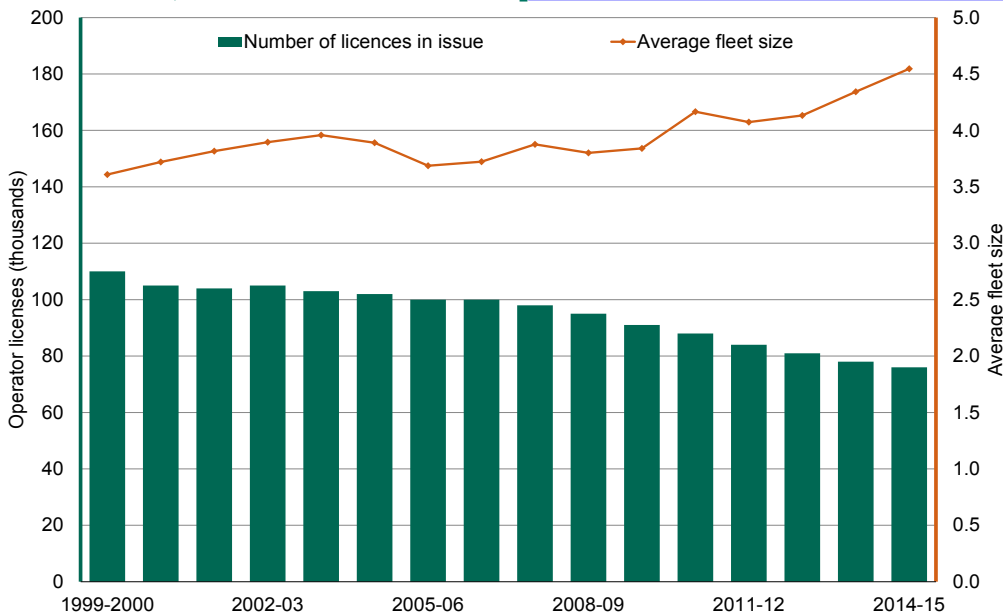
Definitions

Box van: a van with rigid sides and a "box" mounted to the chassis



The number of goods vehicle operator licences in issue in Great Britain declined from 110,000 in 1999-2000 to 76,000 in 2014-15. The average size of operators' fleets has increased from 3.6 vehicles in 1999-2000 to 4.5 vehicles in 2014-15. This means fewer licences are in issue but more vehicles are being specified under these licences (**Chart 4**). The same trends can be seen for licences allowing operators to moved goods internationally.

Chart 4: Goods vehicle operator licences in issue and average fleet size, Great Britain, 1999-2000 to 2014-15 [[Traffic Commissioners' annual report](#)]



Percentage change between 2013-14 and 2014-15

↑ 5 per cent increase average fleet size

↓ 3 per cent decrease in number of operator licences in issue

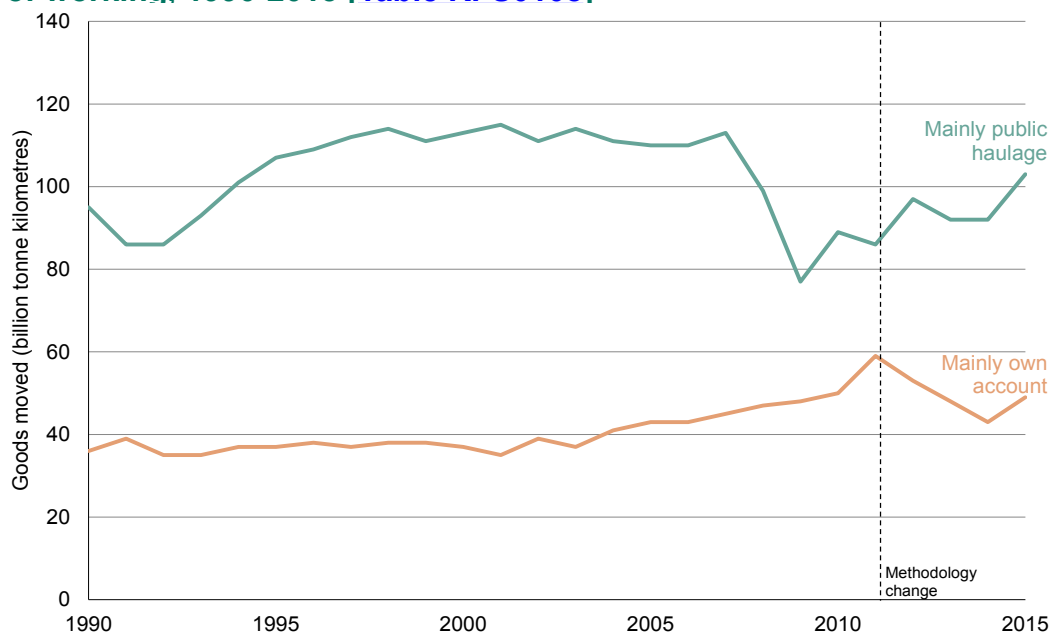
Mode of operation

Road freight activity can be split between own account operators and public haulage operators. Between 2014 and 2015, the amount of **goods moved** by public haulage operators and own account operators increased by 12 and 13 per cent respectively.

The recession had a greater impact on public haulage operators who experienced a fall in **goods moved** in 2008 and 2009 compared to increases in **goods moved** by own account operators in the same years.

This could be down to businesses relying more on their own fleets to transport goods during the recession rather than using public haulage operators. However public haulage operators continue to have the greater share (68 per cent in 2015) of total **goods moved** than own account operators (**Chart 5**).

Chart 5: Goods moved by GB-registered HGVs, by mode of working, 1990-2015 [Table RFS0108]



Definitions

Own account operators: those who carry goods only in the course of their own trade or business.

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

Percentage change between 2014 and 2015

↑ 12 per cent increase in the amount of **goods moved** by public haulage operators

↑ 13 per cent increase in the amount of **goods moved** by own account operators

Road freight activity by commodity group

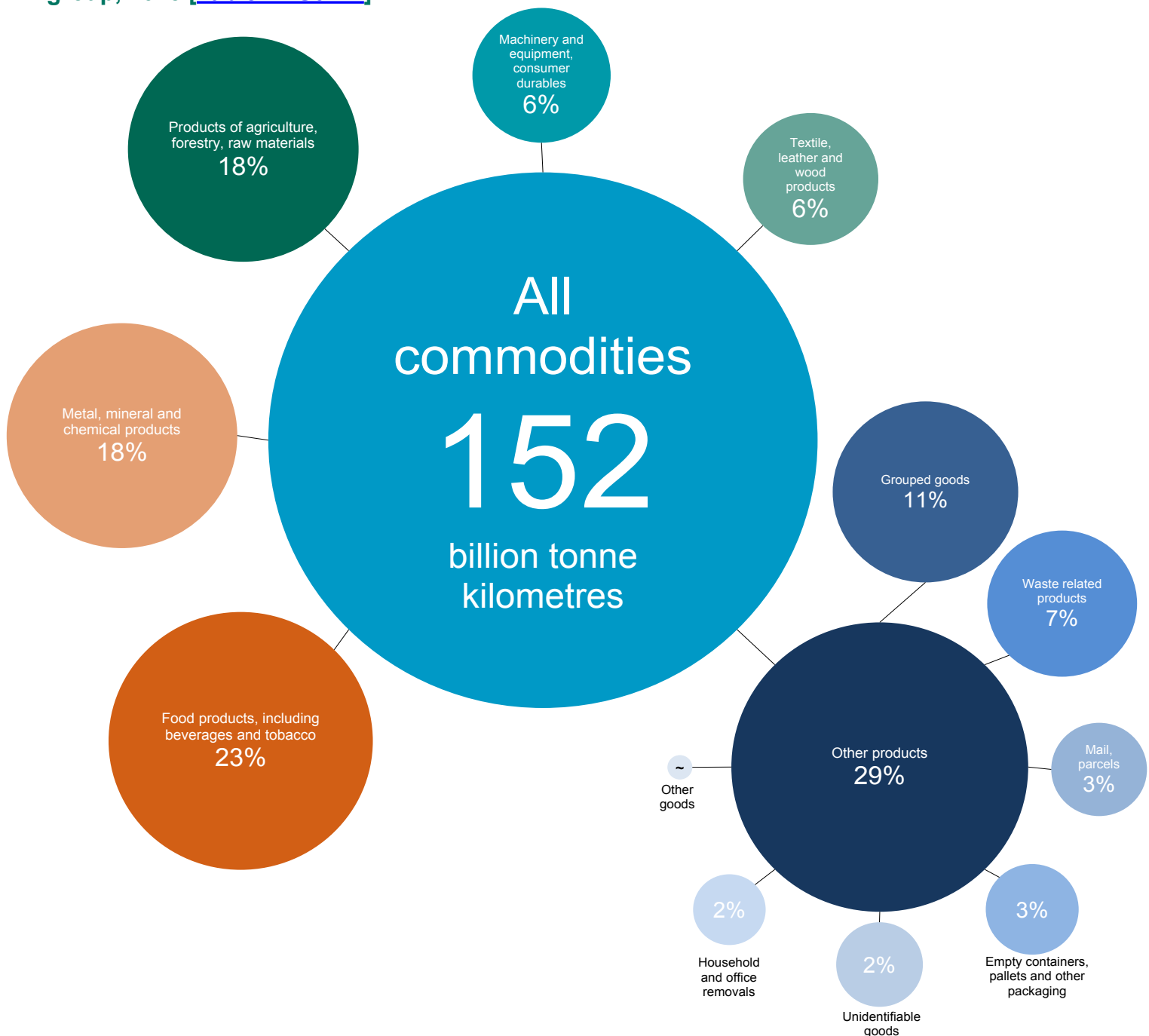
In 2015, the most common single category of commodity moved within the UK was “Food products” (23 per cent). This was followed by “Metal, mineral and chemical products” (18 per cent) and “Products of agriculture, forestry, raw materials” (18 per cent) (**Chart 6**).

Grouped goods (11 per cent) and waste related products (7 per cent) made up the majority of the “Other products” commodity category.

Definitions

Grouped goods (groupage): the consolidation of several different types of goods into a single load.

Chart 6: Goods moved by GB-registered HGVs, by commodity group, 2015 [[Table RFS0111](#)]

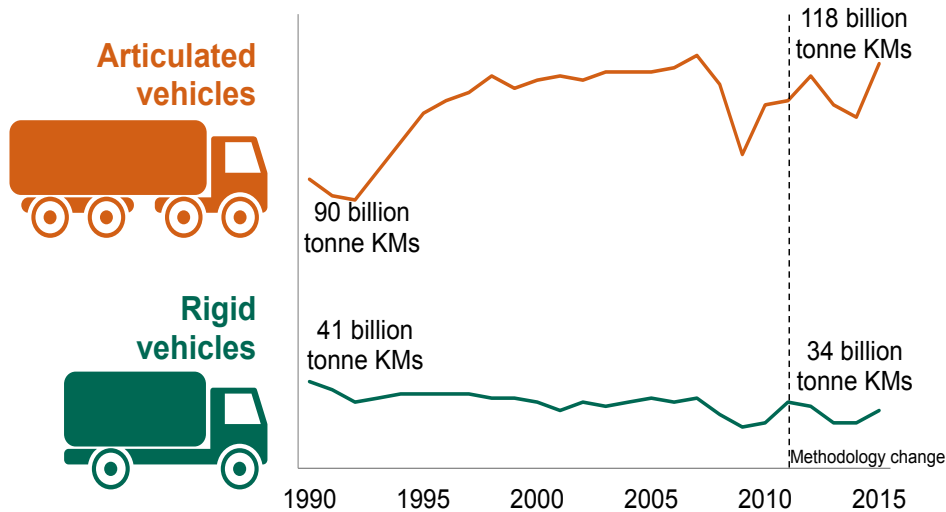


~ = less than 1%

Road freight activity by type of vehicle

Since 1990 there has been a change in the type of vehicle accounting for road freight activity; the amount of **goods moved** by rigid vehicles has decreased by 17 per cent compared to a 31 per cent increase for articulated vehicles (**Chart 7**). The percentage share of **goods moved** by rigid vehicles has declined from just under a third in 1990 to just under a quarter in 2015.

Chart 7: Goods moved by GB-registered HGVs, by type of vehicle, 1990-2015 [[Table RFS0107](#)]

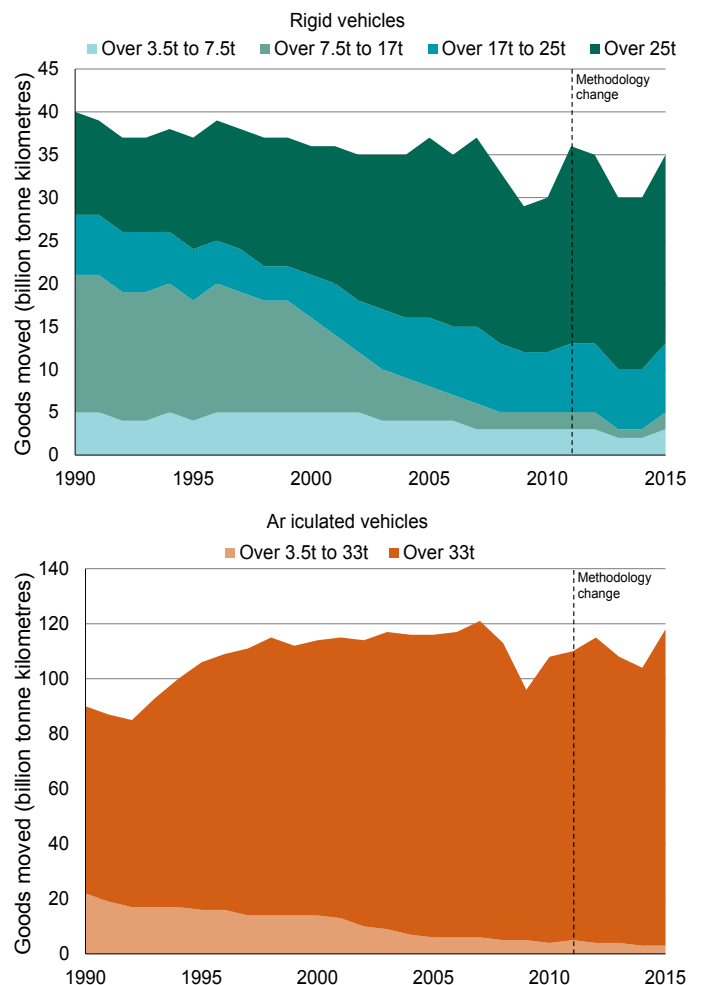


Since 1990, there has been a clear shift towards using larger vehicles when transporting goods. The amount of goods moved by **large, rigid HGVs** (over 25 tonnes) and **large, articulated HGVs** (over 33 tonnes) has increased by 83 and 69 per cent respectively between 1990 and 2015 (**Chart 8**). This is likely to be due to efforts to increase efficiencies and reduce costs.

In contrast the amount of goods moved by **small, rigid HGVs** (less than 17 tonnes) and **small articulated HGVs** (less than 33 tonnes) both declined by 76 and 86 per cent respectively.

The fall in freight activity by smaller HGVs may also be due to an increase in light van traffic owing to a rise in internet shopping deliveries. Compared with 2014, van traffic grew faster than any other vehicle type, rising 4.2% to reach a record high of 46.9 billion vehicle miles in 2015 (see **chart 9** overleaf), although not all of these vans would be carrying freight.

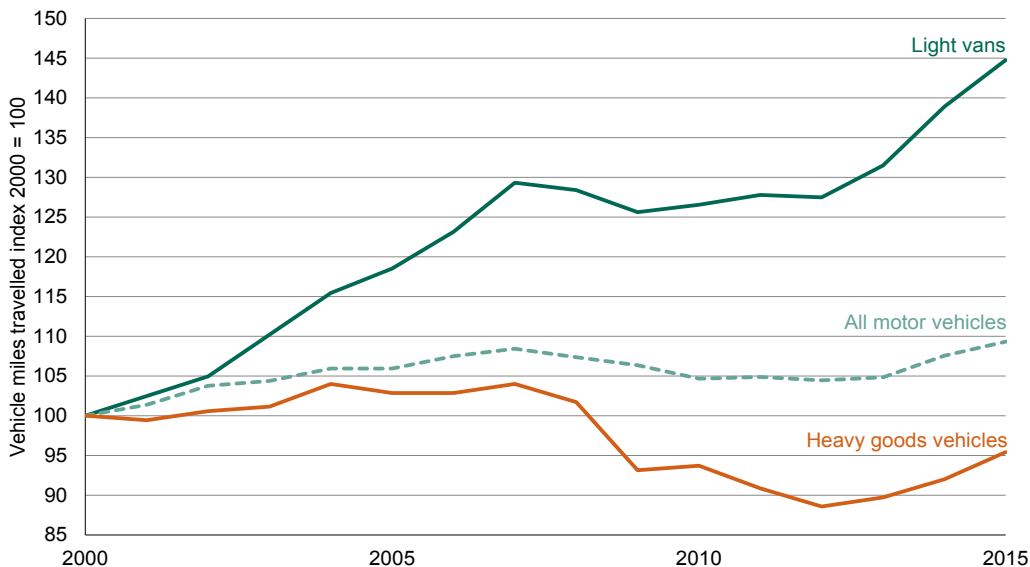
Chart 8: Goods moved by GB-registered HGVs, by type and weight of vehicle, 1990-2015 [[Table RFS0107](#)]



HGV and LGV traffic

The latest [Road Traffic Statistics](#) estimate HGV traffic to have increased by 3.7 per cent between 2014 and 2015 to 16.7 billion vehicle miles; the fastest year-on-year growth in HGV traffic since the 1980s. Despite rising each year between 2012 and 2015, HGV traffic in 2015 remained below the peak level of 18.2 billion vehicle miles seen in 2007 before the recession (**Chart 9**).

Chart 9: Road Traffic for HGVs and LGVs in Great Britain, 2000 to 2015 [[Table TRA0101](#)]



Percentage change between 2014 and 2015

↑ 4.2 per cent increase in light van traffic

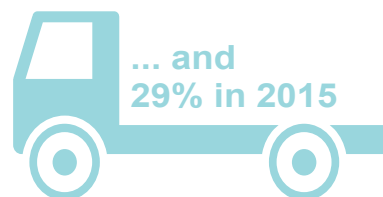
↑ 3.7 per cent increase in heavy goods vehicle traffic

HGV traffic has the highest proportion of foreign registered vehicles. In 2015, 4.8% of HGV traffic was estimated to be foreign registered, an increase of 1.5 percentage points compared to 2013, the largest increase of any vehicle type.

The Road Traffic Statistics estimates are different to those derived from the Department's road freight surveys mainly due to differing coverage; further information on the differences is available in the [methodology note on discrepancies between Road Freight and Road Traffic HGV traffic estimates](#).

Empty running

Empty running among heavy goods vehicles has been around 29 per cent of total vehicle distance since 2008, prior to this it was slightly lower at around 27 per cent [[Table RFS0117](#)].



Definitions

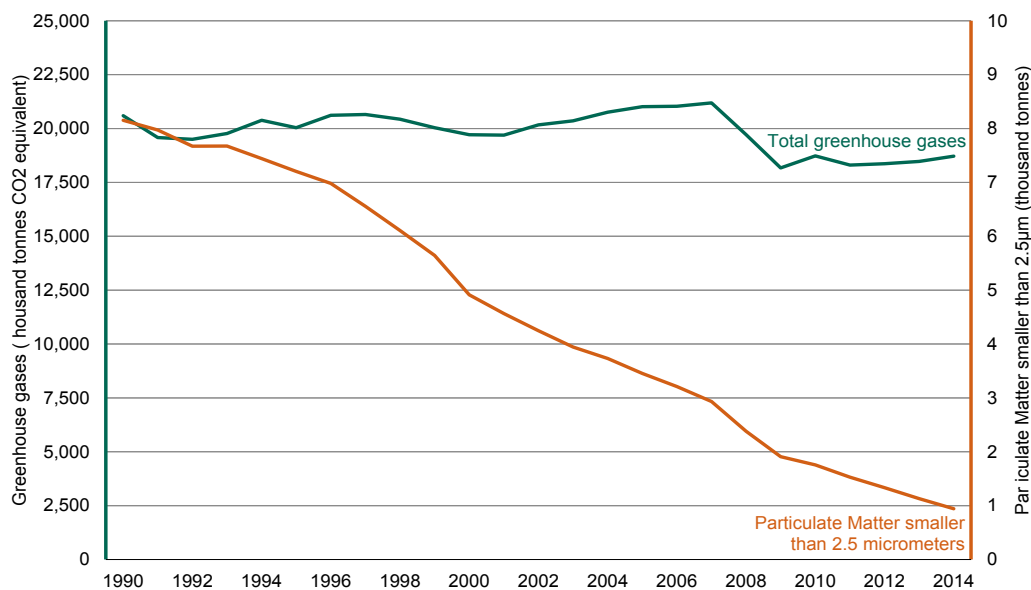
Empty running: defined as carrying zero tonnes for whole journey from origin to destination.

HGV emissions

The latest UK emissions data from the [National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory \(NAEI\)](#), DECC/DEFRA, estimate Greenhouse gas emissions from HGVs to have increased by 1 per cent to 18.7 million tonnes CO₂ equivalent between 2013 and 2014, the latest data available (**Chart 10**).

HGVs contributed just under 1 thousand tonnes of Particulate Matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers in 2014, this was a decrease of 17 per cent from 2013 and continues the downward trend in particulate emissions.

Chart 10: Greenhouse gases and Particulate Matter emissions from HGVs, United Kingdom, 1990-2014 [[NAEI](#)]



Definitions

Particulate Matter: is a complex mixture of small particles and liquid droplets. Their size is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems. Fine particles (2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller) can form from gases emitted from vehicles.

Percentage change between 2013 and 2014



1 per cent increase in greenhouse gas emissions



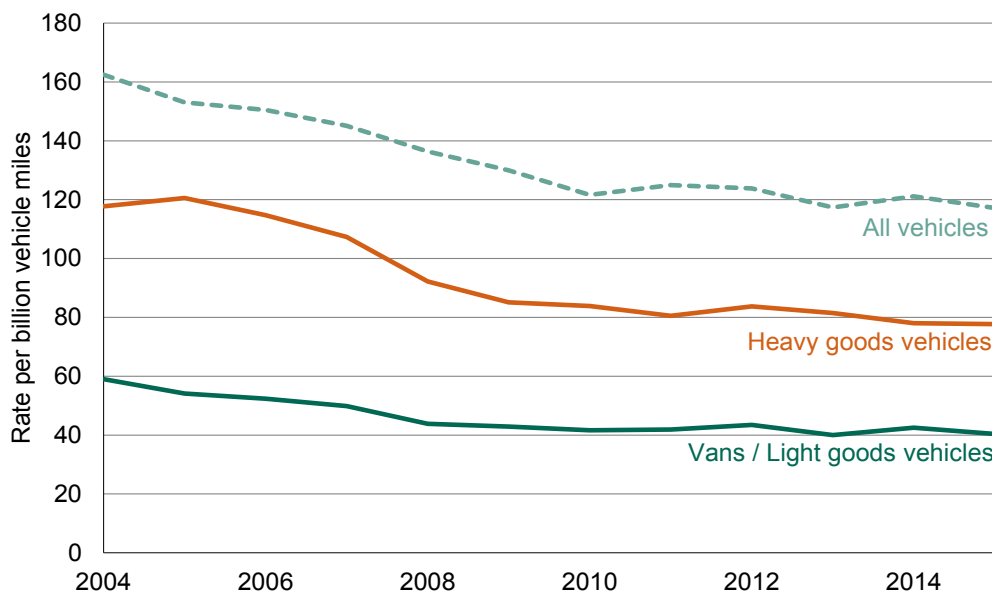
17 per cent decrease in Particulate Matter emissions smaller than 2.5 micrometers

Road accidents involving HGVs

The latest [Road Accidents and Safety Statistics](#) show that in 2015, there were 6,037 accidents involving at least one HGV in Great Britain, and 8,344 casualties. Of those casualties, 284 were fatalities.

There were around 78 fatal or serious accidents involving HGVs per billion vehicle miles in 2015. This figure was lower than the rate for all vehicles (117 fatal or serious accidents per billion vehicle miles) and has decreased from 118 per billion vehicle miles in 2004 (**Chart 11**).

Chart 11: Involvement rates in reported road accidents, by vehicle type 2004-2015 [[Table RAS20001](#)]



Percentage change between 2014 and 2015

- ➔ No change in accident involvement rate for HGVs
- ⬇ 5 per cent decrease in accident involvement rate for LGVs

Users and uses of statistics

Road freight statistics are a key source of management information on the use of the country's infrastructure. Main use occurs across various types of public and private bodies: the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat); 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 length of haul, empty running, the pattern of freight from abroad on UK roads. The statistics also support policies on freight, road safety and on reducing congestion and pollution.

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 UK activity of HGVs registered in Great Britain only so will exclude HGVs registered in Northern Ireland, foreign-registered vehicles and vehicles 3.5 tonnes or less gross vehicle weight (Light Goods Vehicles). Also excluded from CSRGT GB are HGVs registered in Great Britain operating outside of the UK.

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, as a sample survey resulting figures are estimates with associated sampling error.

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 estimates are based on can be found within [Table RFS0143](#) broken down by vehicle type and size.

Between 2011 and 2012, a number of changes were made to how the three DfT 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.

Background notes

The 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 July 2016, and users can refer to the links overleaf for the most recent or revised data available for each of the sources used, and also caveats relating to the sources.

- ▶ United Kingdom National Accounts, Office for National Statistics (ONS): <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa1-rd/united-kingdom-national-accounts/index.html>
- ▶ Annual Business Survey, ONS: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/abs/annual-business-survey/index.html>
- ▶ Employment of HGV drivers, Labour Force Survey (LFS), ONS: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-force-survey-employment-status-by-occupation/index.html>
- ▶ Unemployment of HGV drivers, Claimant count data, ONS: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>
- ▶ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), ONS: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashe/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/index.html>
- ▶ Goods vehicle operator licences, Traffic Commissioners' annual reports: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-commissioners-annual-reports>
- ▶ Vehicle licensing statistics for HGVs, Department for Transport (DfT): <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/veh05-licensed-heavy-goods-vehicles>
- ▶ Road traffic statistics, Department for Transport (DfT): <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-traffic-statistics>

- ▶ National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory, Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) and Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA): <http://naei.defra.gov.uk/>
- ▶ Road accidents and safety statistics, Department for Transport: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics>

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/publications/road-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>.

Acknowledgements

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