



Department for Transport

Sea Passenger Statistics 2017: Short Sea Routes (Provisional)

About this release

This statistical release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2017. This includes:

International short sea routes: These include all ferry routes within Europe.

Domestic short sea major routes: These include all routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

These do not include data on routes between Great Britain and Scottish islands, domestic river crossings and inter-island routes. These will be published in November 2018 along with statistics on cruises and long sea journeys.

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International short sea passenger numbers decreased 2% to 19.5 million in 2017.

International short sea passenger numbers in 2017 decreased to their lowest level since 1977, surpassing the previous low in 2012.

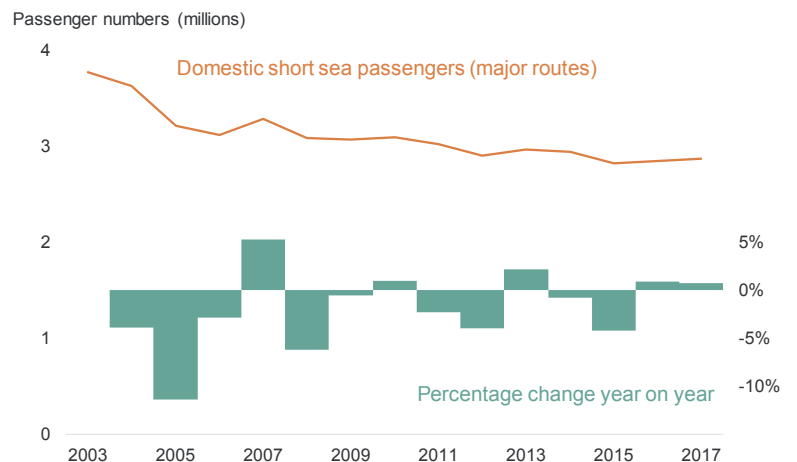
UK international sea passenger numbers and year on year change, 2003 - 2017 ([table SPAS0101](#))



Domestic short sea passenger numbers for major routes increased 1% to 2.9 million in 2017.

Passenger numbers on these routes have increased for the second consecutive year, but have decreased overall by 13% in the last ten years.

UK domestic short sea passenger numbers for major routes and year on year change, 2003 - 2017 ([table SPAS0201](#))



Breakdown of scheduled publications of sea passenger statistics in 2017.

Sea Passenger Statistics 2017: Short Sea Routes (Provisional)

This statistical release presents statistics on short sea passengers to and from the UK in 2017.

This includes:

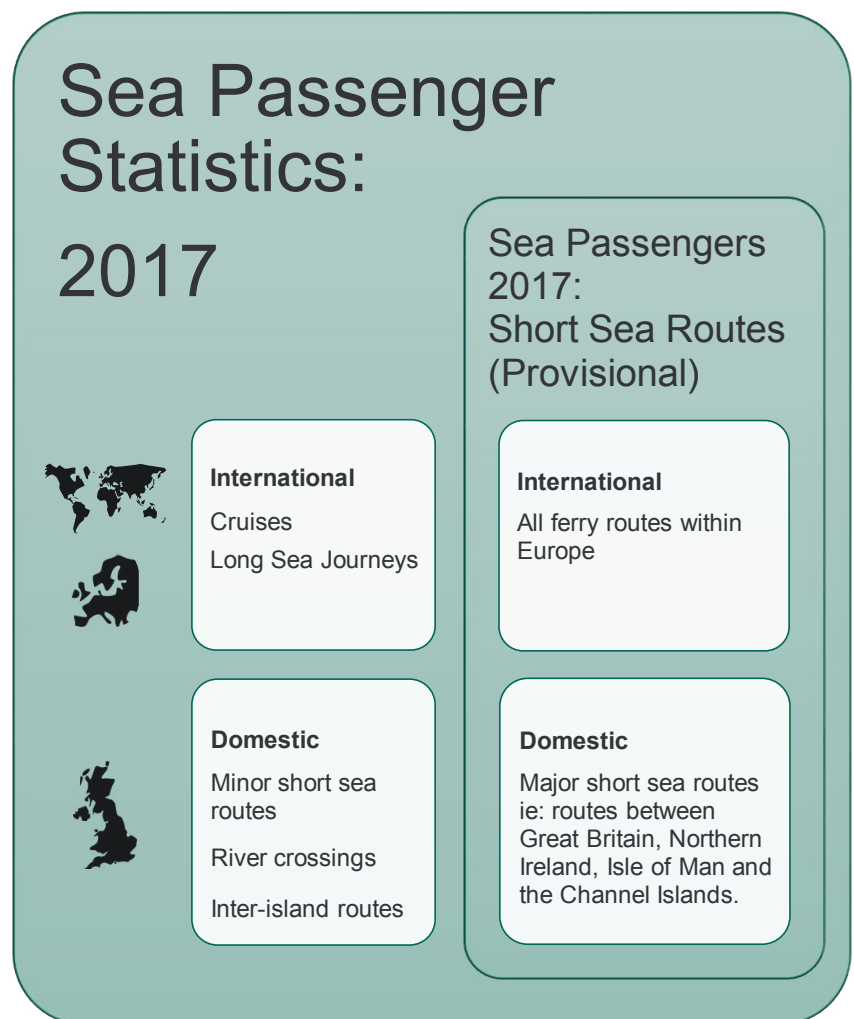
International short sea routes:

These include all ferry routes within Europe.

Domestic short sea major routes:

All ferry routes between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

Other domestic short sea routes, including routes between Great Britain and the Orkney and Shetland Islands, are not included in this release and will be published in November 2018.



Sea Passenger Statistics: 2017 (Publication date: November 2018)

This statistical release will present the complete statistics on all sea passengers to and from the UK in 2017. In addition to the **short sea passenger statistics** included in this publication, it will also include:

International routes: These include all passengers travelling for pleasure on **cruses** and **long sea journeys** to and from the UK.

Domestic routes: All other short sea passenger routes, including routes between Great Britain and the Orkney and Shetland Islands, **domestic river crossings** and **inter-island** routes. These will be added to the major short sea routes for a complete picture of domestic routes.

Passengers on International Short Sea Routes

In 2017 the number of international short sea passengers decreased by 2% to 19.5 million, compared to 20.0 million in 2016.

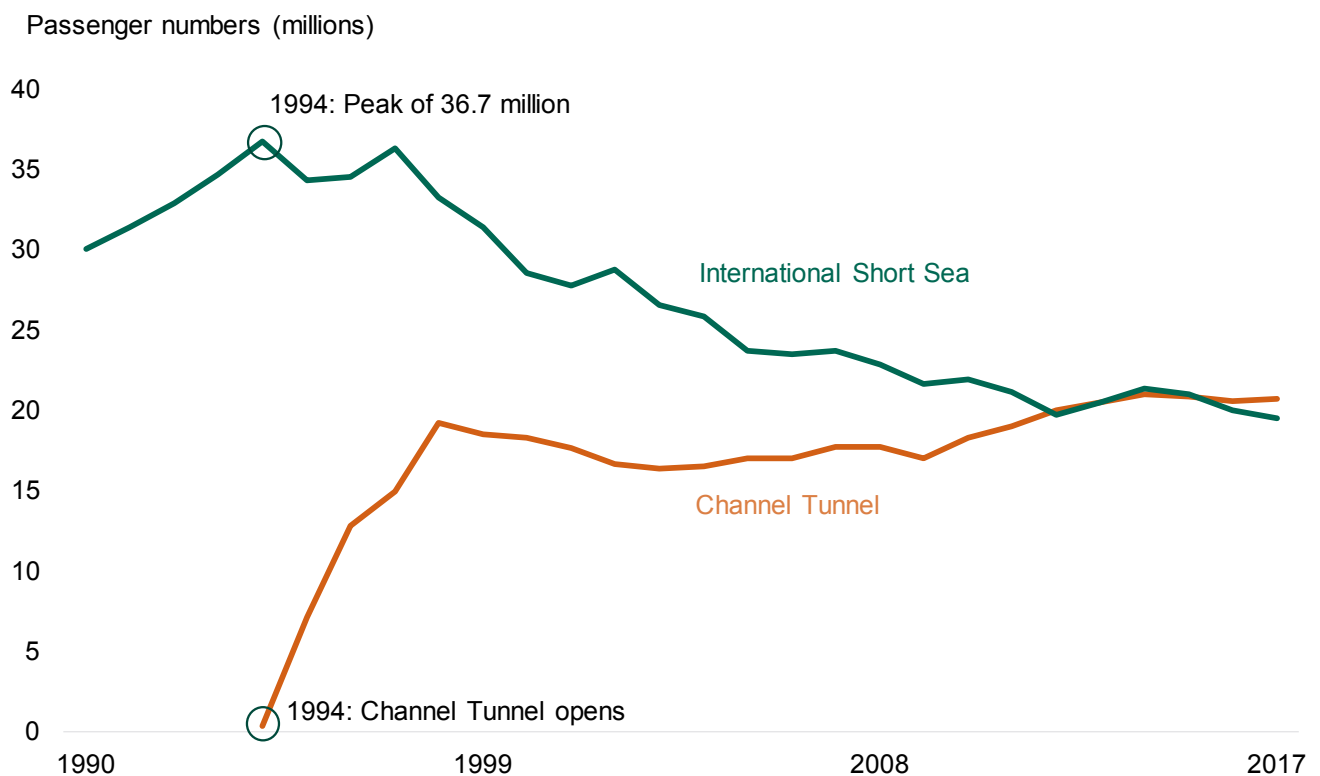
Since peaks in the 1990s the overall trend in international short sea passenger numbers has been generally downward. The decrease in 2017 is similar to those in recent years.

The busiest route remains Dover-Calais, with 46% of international short sea passenger numbers in 2017. In 2017 traffic on this route decreased 1% to 9.0 million.

Conversely, the number of passengers travelling via the Channel Tunnel increased by 1% to 20.7 million. In 2017, passenger numbers on international short sea routes were lower than those through the Channel Tunnel for the second consecutive year, and the third time since the Tunnel opened.

International short sea passengers and Channel Tunnel passengers, 1990-2017

([table SPAS0301](#))



Statistics on Channel Tunnel and international short sea passengers can be found in web table [SPAS0301](#).

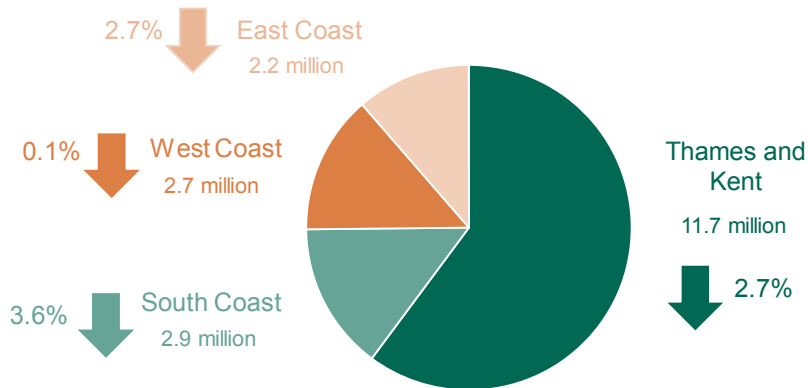
Port group activity

In 2017 passenger numbers through the Thames and Kent port group decreased by 3% compared with the previous year to 11.7 million passengers.

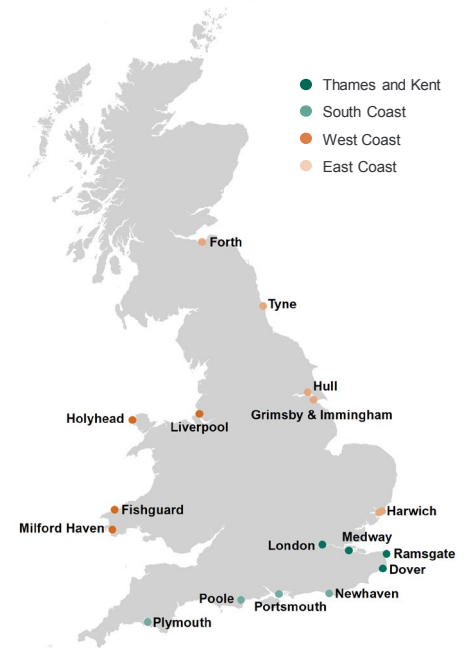
Thames and Kent accounted for 60% of total international short sea passenger numbers in 2017. This large proportion means trends in this group are often reflected in the total.

In the last 10 years, the number of passengers through each port group has decreased between 8% to 19%. The total number of international short sea passengers decreased 18% over this period.

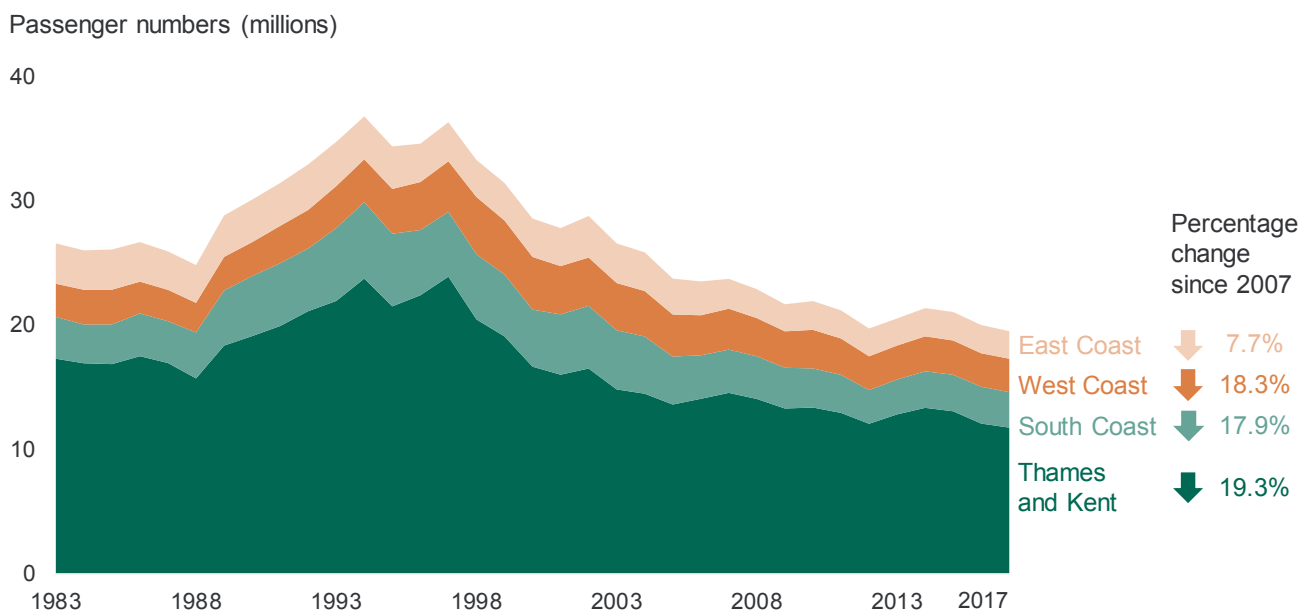
UK international short sea passengers by port group in 2017 and most recent year on year change ([table SPAS0101](#))



UK ports serving international short sea routes



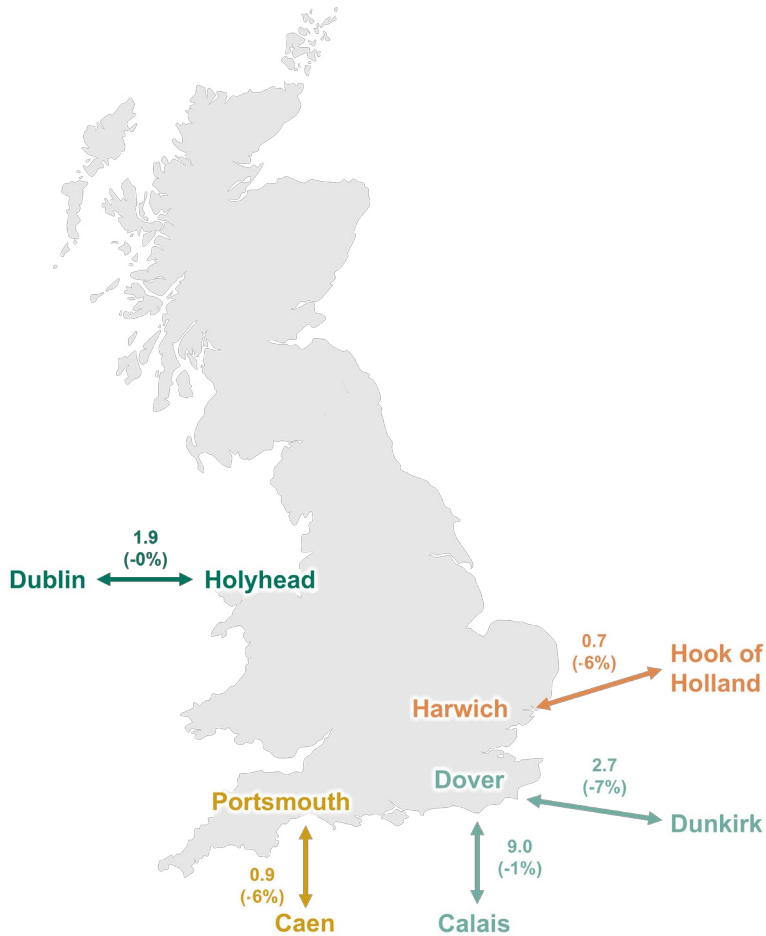
UK international short sea passengers by port group, 1983 - 2017 and 10 year change ([table SPAS0101](#))



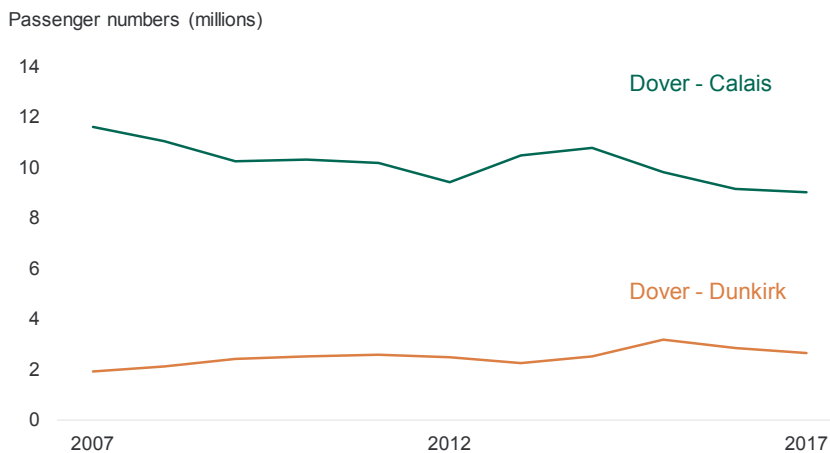
Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by port group can be found in web table [SPAS0101](#).

Top 5 international short sea routes

Top 5 international short sea routes by passenger number (millions) in 2017 and latest year on year change ([table SPAS0102](#))



UK international short sea passengers on Dover-Calais and Dover-Dunkirk routes, 2006 - 2017 ([table SPAS0102](#))



The top 5 international short sea routes accounted for 78% of all international short sea passengers in 2017.

Over the last decade Dover-Calais has consistently been the busiest route with between 46 and 51% of the annual international short sea passenger traffic. However, passenger numbers on this route in 2017 were 22% lower than a decade previous and 2017 saw a 1% decrease to 9.0 million passengers.

In 2017, Holyhead-Dublin passenger numbers remained level at 1.9 million, a 10 year increase of 37%.

Passengers on the second largest route, Dover-Dunkirk, decreased 7% to 2.7 million passengers in 2017.

In 2015, there was increased traffic on the Dover-Dunkirk route, 27% higher than the year before. The decrease in 2017, compared to 2016, may therefore in part reflect a return to pre-2015 levels.

Despite this, passenger numbers on the Dover-Dunkirk route have increased 38% over the last 10 years to 2017.

Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by route can be found in web table [SPAS0102](#). This table includes Channel Tunnel passengers for comparison.

Top 5 foreign countries of origin/destination

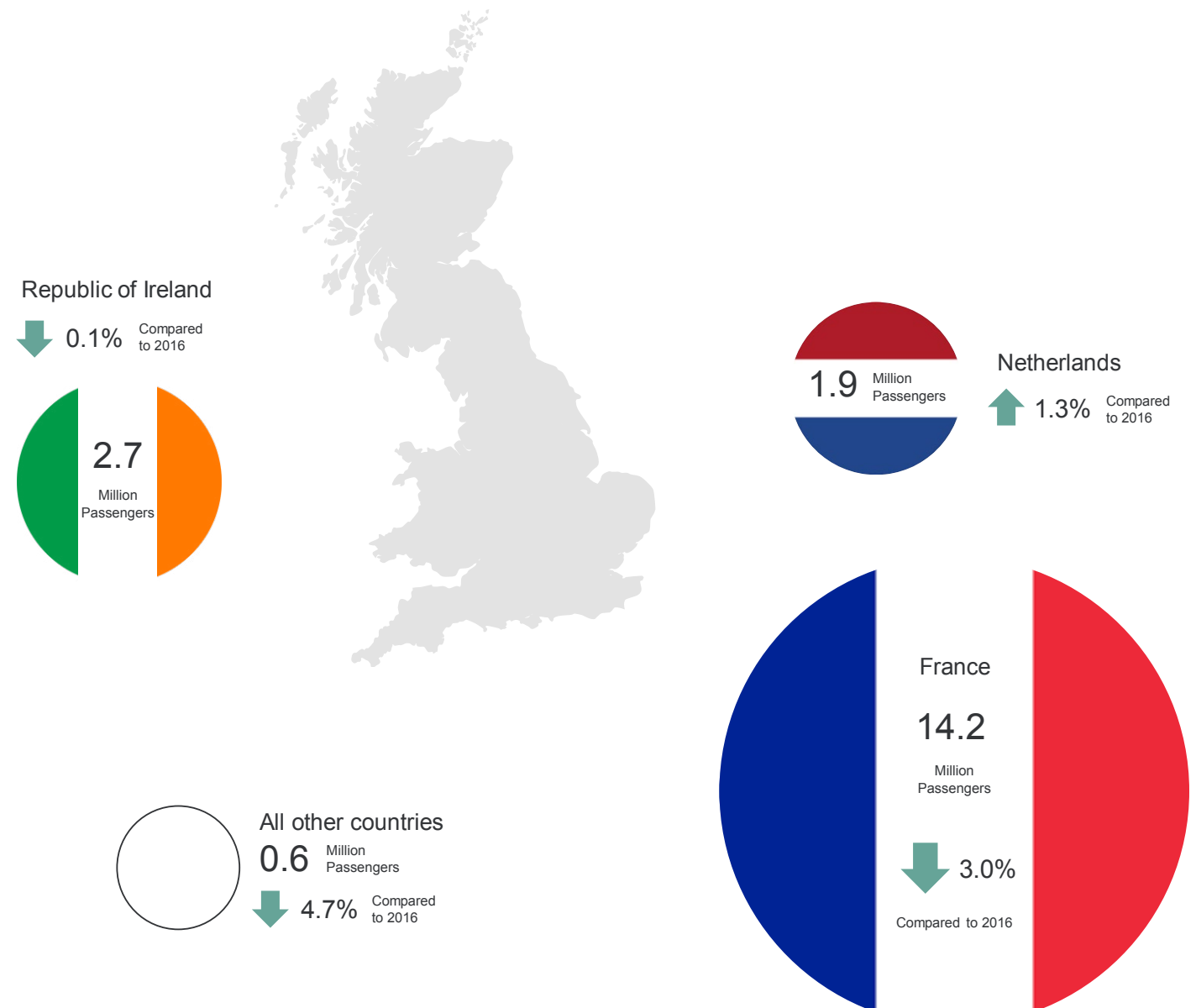
In 2017 passenger numbers on routes with France decreased 3.0% to 14.2 million. Routes with France have consistently made up the majority of international short sea passenger numbers, accounting for 73% of the total in 2017, as in the previous year.

The ranking of the top three countries has been consistent over the decade from 2007 to 2017.

Since 2007, passenger numbers with France and Ireland have decreased 18% while passenger numbers with the Netherlands increased by 17%.

UK international short sea passengers by country of origin/destination in 2017

([table SPAS0103](#))



Detailed statistics on international short sea passengers by country can be found in [SPAS0103](#).

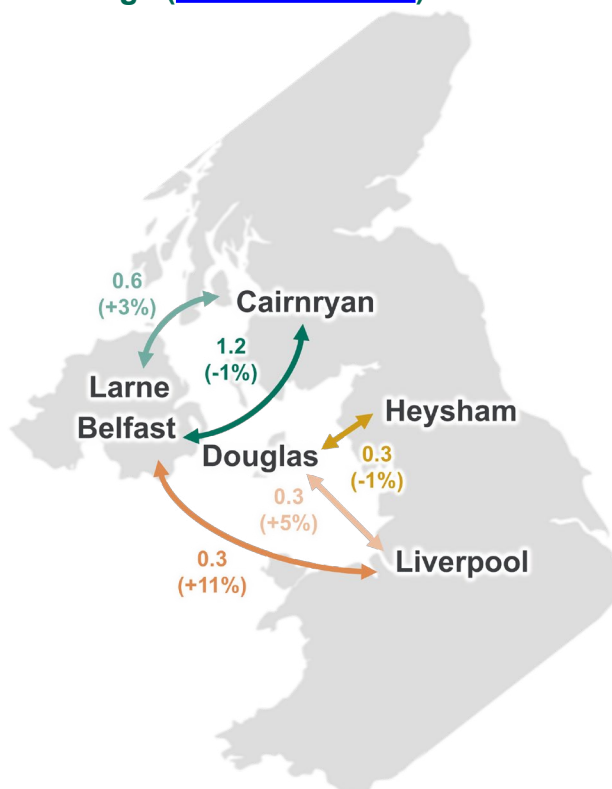
Passengers on Domestic Short Sea Routes

In 2017 the busiest domestic short sea route was Cairnryan-Belfast with 1.2 million passengers, a decrease of 1% on the year before. This route (previously Stranraer - Belfast before 2012) is consistently the busiest domestic short sea route.

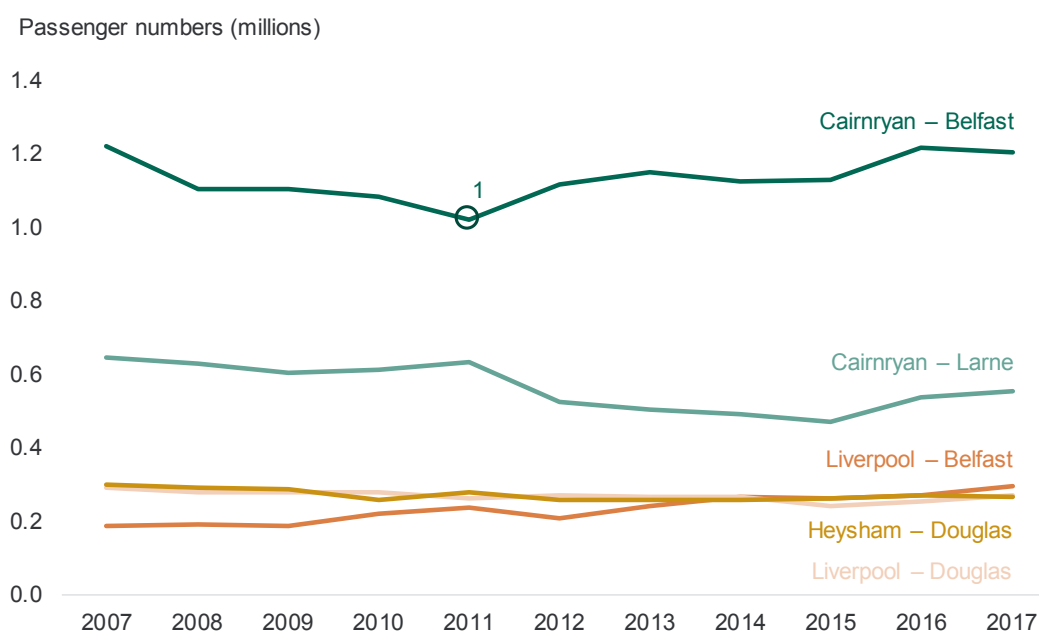
Compared with the year before, passenger numbers on the Cairnryan-Larne route in 2017 increased 3% to 0.6 million.

The Liverpool - Belfast route showed the largest change for the major routes with an 11% increase from 2016 to 0.3 million passengers.

Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes in 2017 by passenger number (millions) and latest year on year change ([table SPAS0201](#))



Top 5 busiest UK domestic sea crossing routes, 2006 - 2017 ([table SPAS0201](#))



¹Passengers on the Cairnryan-Belfast route travelled from Stranraer to Belfast before 2012.

Detailed statistics on domestic sea passengers can be found in web tables [SPAS0201](#) and [SPAS0202](#).

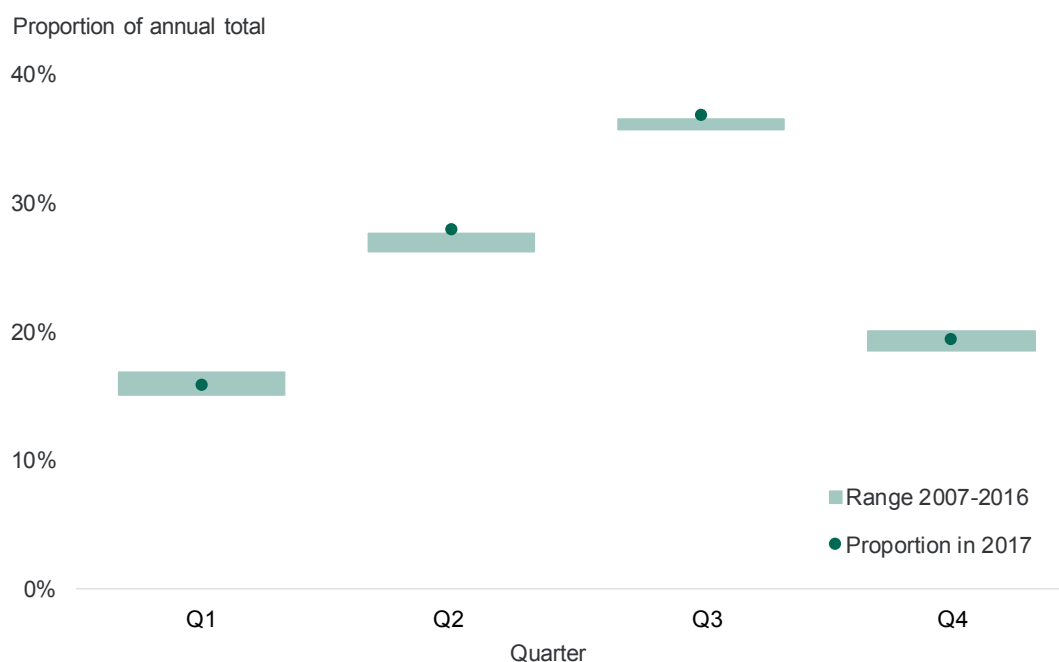
Seasonal Variation on Short Sea Routes

International short sea journeys tend to be highly seasonal due to factors such as holiday making and weather patterns.

In 2017, the third quarter (July - September) accounted for 37% of the total international short sea passenger numbers while the first quarter only accounted for 16%.

Although the exact proportion fluctuates between different years, in general the quarterly distribution remains relatively similar, with the highest passenger numbers in the third quarter and the lowest in the first.

Quarterly proportion of international annual short sea passenger total in 2017 against the range of proportions over 2007-2016 ([table SPAS0105](#))



As with international short sea traffic, passenger numbers on domestic short sea routes vary over the course of the year with the highest passenger numbers in the third quarter and the lowest in the first. Many ferry operators work to a different winter timetable due to the small number of passengers travelling.

Of the five busiest routes in 2017, Liverpool-Douglas has the largest proportional difference between busy and quiet quarters with 50% of passengers travelling in the third quarter and only 0.2% in the first quarter.

The greatest difference in terms of passenger numbers is Cairnryan-Belfast, with 268 thousand more passengers in the third quarter than in the first.

Detailed statistics for international sea passengers by quarter can be found in [SPAS0105](#). Quarterly domestic sea passenger statistics can be found in [SPAS0202](#).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Data

- ▶ The data for international and domestic short-sea passengers is collected from ferry operators and is validated on a monthly basis. At the end of the reference year the annual data is then validated for a final time for this publication.
- ▶ Validation processes focus on comparing reference periods with the same period in the previous year, to allow for seasonal differences. Anomalies are followed up with the operators.
- ▶ Passengers are counted in both directions. It is not possible to distinguish passengers travelling by foot from those in vehicles or those travelling as the driver of a goods vehicle.
- ▶ Data collection is limited to vessels over 100 gross tonnes and so does not include services operated by small boats.
- ▶ International figures include passengers on routes beginning or ending in Great Britain or Northern Ireland. Routes with foreign countries beginning or ending in the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man are not included.
- ▶ Some passengers travel between Great Britain and St Malo in France by going to the Channel Islands on one vessel and then transferring to another. Prior to 2016, where these passengers could be distinguished from other traffic they were subtracted from the domestic route with the Channel Islands and added to the direct international route between Great Britain and France. From 2016 onward these passenger numbers are attributed to the domestic route with the Channel Islands rather than the direct international route. The main routes affected are Poole-St Malo and Weymouth-St Malo. In recent years these routes accounted for less than 0.1 per cent of the total international short sea traffic.

Background Notes

- ▶ The web tables for sea passenger statistics can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/maritime-and-shipping-statistics#data-tables-associated-with-this-series>
- ▶ Full guidance on the methods used in the publication of these releases, and the quality of the data, can be found in the Technical Note at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maritime-and-shipping-statistics-guidance>
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-maritime-and-shipping-series>
- ▶ Provisional summary totals for international sea passenger traffic are released monthly via the DfT website at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/spas01-uk-international-sea-passengers#table-spas0107>



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