Department for Transport

Domestic Waterborne Freight: UK 2017

The total amount of goods moved for all domestic waterborne freight declined by 18% to 24.9 billion-tonne kilometres (bt-k) in 2017.

About this release

This publication provides information on freight traffic moved within the United Kingdom by water transport, known as 'Domestic Waterborne Freight'.The statistics are based on re-analysis of the domestic element of the Port Freight statistics which is published by the Department as a separate series combined with a survey of inland waterway operators.

Definitions

Inland waters

Traffic carried by barge or sea going vessels on the inland waterways network (rivers and canals).

Coastwise

Traffic carried around the coast from one UK port to another.

One-port

Traffic to and from offshore locations - such as oil rigs and sea dredging.

Goods moved

Freight traffic for this publication is measured in terms of "goods moved" (the tonnage of goods lifted multiplied by the distance travelled and expressed as tonnes-kilometres). Although, most of the tables supporting this release contain statistics on goods lifted in addition to goods moved.

The total amount of goods lifted for all domestic waterborne freight in 2017 declined by 5% to 97.1 million tonnes (mt).

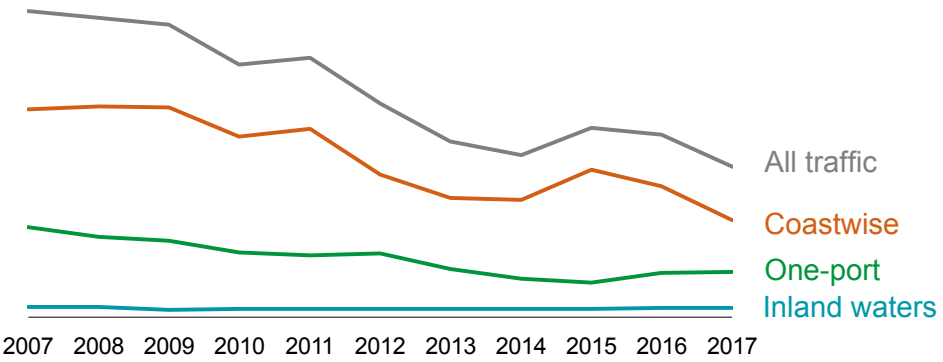
Domestic waterborne freight goods moved and lifted, 2016 to 2017 (PORT0701)

	Goods Moved (bt-k)			Goods lifted (mt)		
	2016	2017	Percentage change	2016	2017	Percentage change
Inland waters	1.6	1.6	▲ 2%	50.8	51.2	▲ 1%
Coastwise	21.7	16.2	▼ 26%	39.7	34.6	▼ 13%
One-port	7.4	7.5	▲ 2%	21.0	22.3	▲ 6%
Total	30.4	24.9	▼ 18%	102.0	97.1	▼ 5%

The total volume of goods moved has declined by 51% since 2007, largely driven by the decline of one-port and coastwise traffic. However, goods moved to and from one-port locations has increased by 29% since 2015.

Domestic waterborne freight goods moved, 2007 to 2017 (PORT0701)

Billion tonne-kilometres



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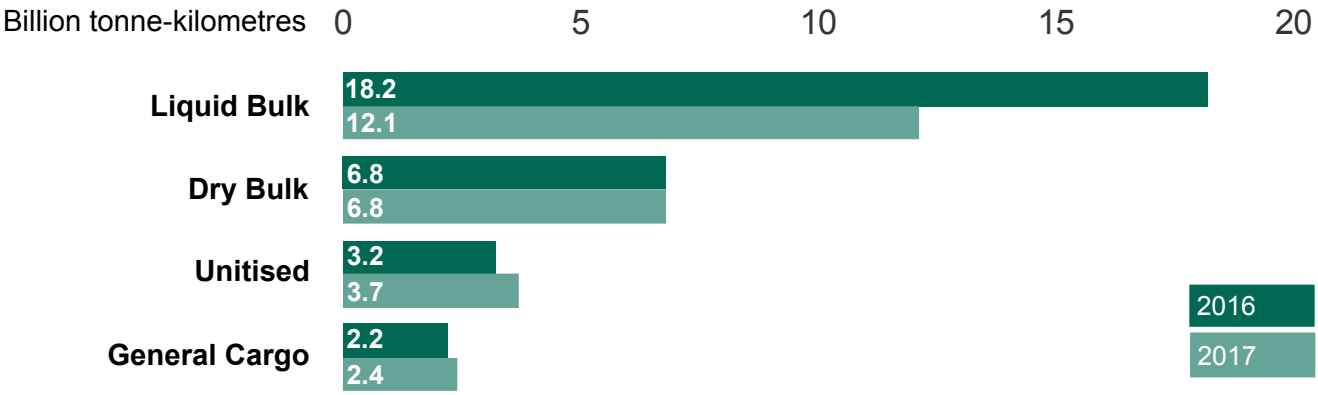
Goods moved by commodity

Of the total goods moved (24.9 bt-k), 49% were liquid bulk goods in 2017. The remainder of the traffic was made up by dry bulk (27%), unitised traffic (15%) and general cargo (10%). The share of goods moved attributed to liquid bulk products decreased considerably from 2016, when it accounted for 60% of total goods moved. The majority of liquid bulk (88%) came from crude petroleum and petroleum products, with 10.7 bt-k of crude petroleum and petroleum products moved in 2017 compared with 16.6 bt-k in 2016.

Domestic waterborne freight goods moved (bt-k) by cargo category, 2016 to 2017 (PORT0702)



Goods moved by inland waterway route

Inland waters traffic is carried by both barges and by seagoing vessels. Overall this accounts for a relatively small proportion of domestic waterborne freight traffic.

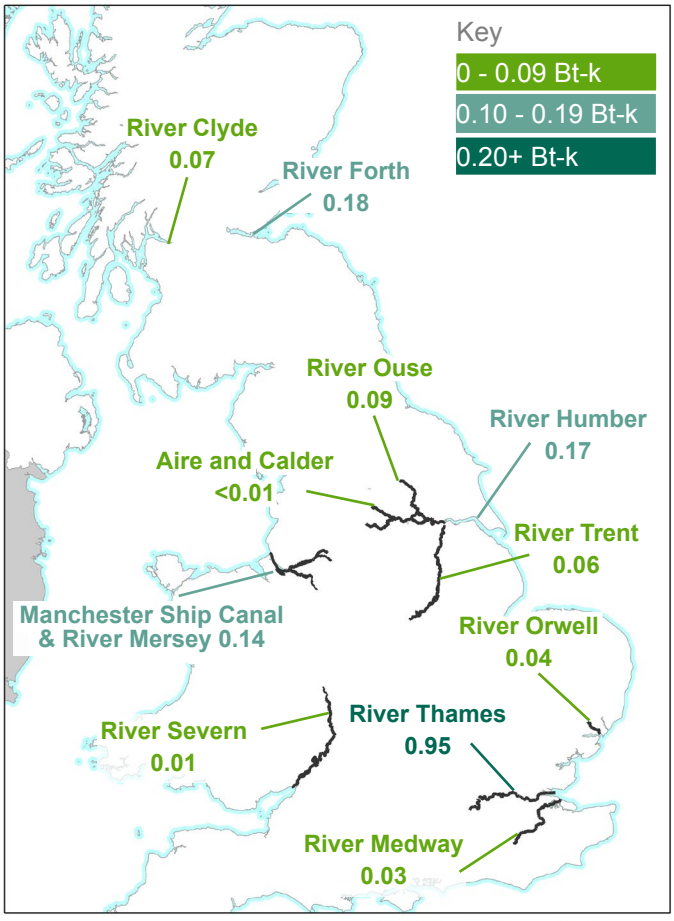
From 2016 to 2017, inland waters traffic increased by 2% to 1.6 bt-k.

Of the navigable waterways, the Thames handled the most domestic traffic in the UK, accounting for 58% of all goods moved in the UK.

In terms of goods lifted, the River Thames handled around 26.7 million tonnes of freight (over half of all total traffic on UK waterways).

For more details on the figures above, refer to the web table PORT0704 and PORT0705.

Major inland waterway routes, goods moved, 2017 (PORT0705)



Recent and proposed changes

DfT continuously review these statistics to ensure they balance the needs of others against the resources needed to compile them. We consulted on changes to the Domestic Waterborne Freight (DWF) statistics in 2017 and to the related Port Freight statistics in June 2018. A document outlining the changes to the annual Port Freight statistics can be viewed here: User feedback response.

The following changes relating to the DWF statistics have been made:

- The annual DWF statistical release is now published alongside the annual Port Freight statistical release, around eight months after the end of the year to which the data relate (compared to 11 months previously).
- The accompanying data tables have been renamed to be consistent with the Port Freight tables, although no other changes have been made to the tables. Please refer to the table index for more information.
- Tables in the Port Freight statistics covering domestic freight moved by sea will now be included in the DWF series (for example, table PORT0706). As in the DWF statistics, this table covers domestic freight, although the coverage and methodology used differ slightly (as noted below).

From 2019 onwards, we plan to include the annual DWF release as a chapter within the annual Port Freight statistics. There would be no separate DWF release.

We always appreciate any feedback and contributions to the development of our statistical series. If you have any comments or questions regarding this change or any other aspect of the DWF statistics, please contact us at: maritime.stats@dft.gov.uk.

Background notes

Port Freight statistics include all traffic that either arrives at or leaves UK sea ports. Details are given by weight and number of units loaded and unloaded. The statistics are based on returns from ports and shipping agents. For more information on these statistics, see our most recent Port Freight statistics.

The statistics in this publication cover freight moved by water in the UK. They are based on re-analysis of the domestic element of the Port Freight statistics, combined with a survey of inland waterway operators. Both coastwise and one port traffic will contribute towards the Port Freight statistics as can be seen in table PORT0302. However, inland waters traffic does not appear in the Port Freight statistics where it takes place solely on the inland waterway network. Furthermore, international freight - carried by sea to or from the UK - will appear in the Port Freight statistics but it will only count towards these statistics if it crosses into inland waterways. Further details of these calculations are given in the notes and definitions for this publication.

This publication also provides figures in terms of goods moved whereas the Port Freight statistics make no estimate of how far the freight goods may have travelled. However, many of the tables that support this release also contain figures on goods lifted. The format of the publications differs too. In particular, Port Freight statistics gives greater detail of the cargo carried as well as data for specific ports.

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

Most of the data for this release comes from DfT Port Freight statistics. This is a robust data source, for more information see Port Freight Statistics.

The Port Freight statistics data does not always state a specific port or wharf; it instead references the statistical port which is made up of several smaller ports or wharves (e.g. Tilbury is a component of the statistical port London). In order to make the inland tonne-kilometres more accurate, the specific port is sometimes estimated using data the Department already records on ship arrivals and knowledge of the cargo type handled at certain ports. However, these estimates will not have a major impact on the data, even if the port has been wrongly estimated. This is because all of the component ports are close to the geographical location of the statistical port.

Some details of traffic coming from, or going to, minor ports are estimated. However, the total amount of traffic by cargo type is known for these ports. Therefore, the estimation is done in a way that is consistent with the totals and has little overall effect on the statistics. From 2000 onwards, more accurate recording of the routeing of crude oil shipments has resulted in differences in one-port and coastwise traffic compared with earlier years. Please see the notes and definitions for further information.

Some of the data for internal inland waters traffic is sourced from an additional survey of barge operators. As far as is known, this is comprehensive and efforts have been take to ensure that no double counting takes place between this and the data already collected from the Port Freight statistics. However, there is still a possibility that such traffic is not fully reported or is being doubled counted.

Links to other information

This release is a summary of a larger set of data tables, charts and documentation on domestic waterborne freight statistics available from the Department for Transport web site: Domestic Waterborne Freight series.

Other documents which form part of this release include a technical note describing the data sources, methods, definitions and data issues in more detail:
Domestic Waterborne Freight: notes and definitions.

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

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