



Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe: 2019

About this release

This statistical release summarises the number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe. It collects information from roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators and Eurotunnel, on the number of trips made by powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers, on all the ferry routes from Great Britain and Europe, plus the Channel Tunnel.

Domestic routes within the UK are excluded from the main findings, however information on routes to Northern Ireland is contained in a separate section, on [page 6](#) of this release.

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Road goods vehicles made 3.4 million trips travelling from Great Britain to Europe in 2019, a 3% decrease compared to the previous year. This comprised of:

2.3 million trips by powered vehicles



Compared to 2018

↓ 4%

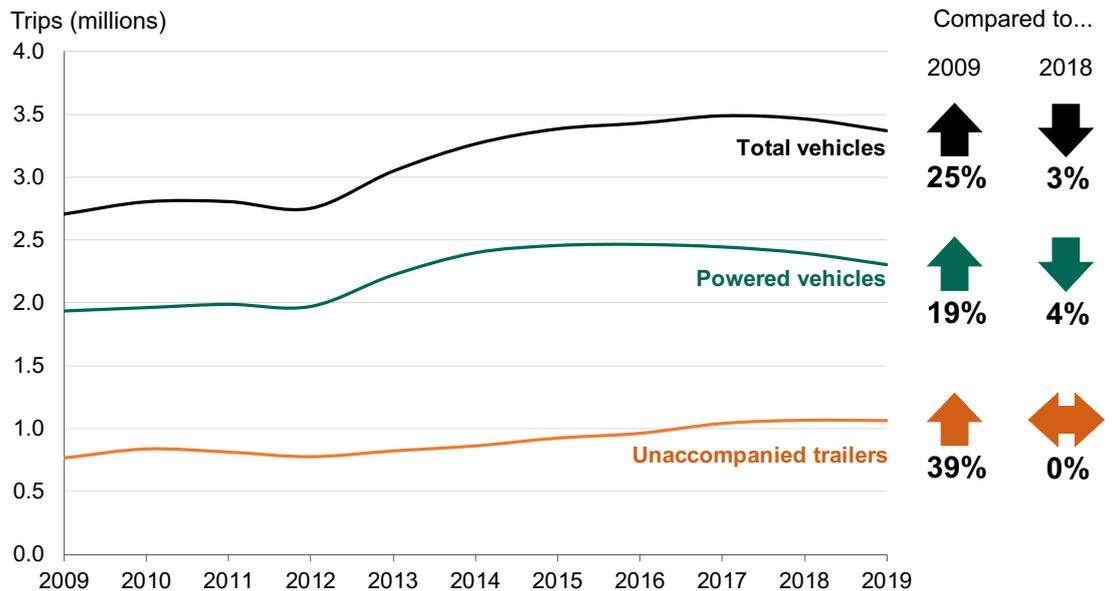
1.1 million trips by unaccompanied trailers



↔ 0%

Over the last 3 years, the number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been gradually falling from 3.5 million in 2017 to 3.4 million in 2019. The number of trips made by road goods vehicles that travelled from Great Britain to Europe in 2019 is 25% higher than 10 years earlier in 2009.

Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, 2009 to 2019 (Table [RORO0101](#))



Definitions



Powered vehicles (over 3.5 tonnes) includes: Rigid lorries, tractors & trailers (counted as one unit) and tractive units only.

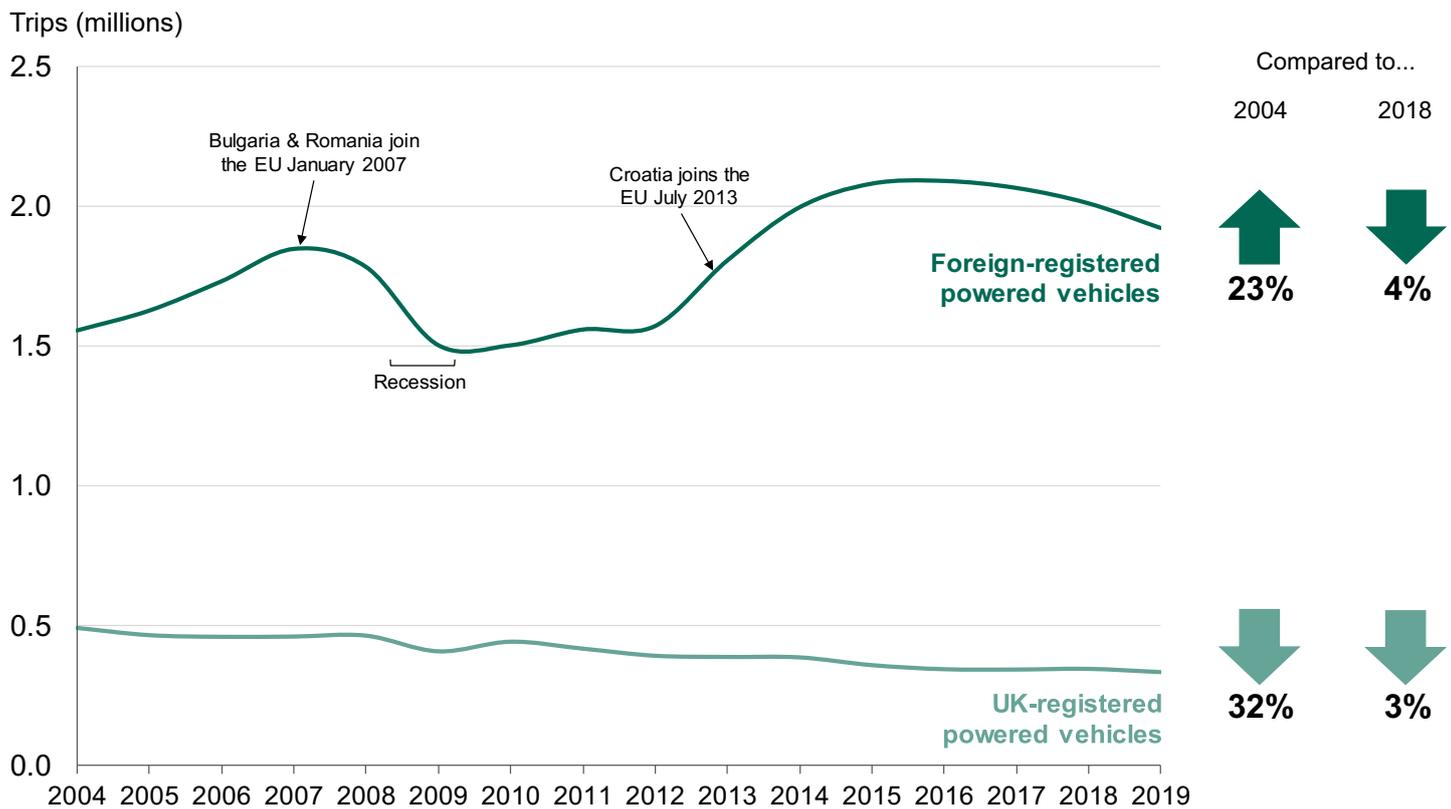


Unaccompanied trailers includes: tow-bar trailers and articulated semi trailers, not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit.

Overall trend in powered vehicle trips travelling to Europe

There have been more trips by powered **foreign-registered** vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe than **UK-registered** vehicles since 2004. In 2019, the number of trips made by foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (1.9 million¹) decreased by 4% compared to the previous year. While the number of trips made by UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (0.3 million¹) decreased by 3%.

Chart 1: Number of trips made by UK and foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, 2004 to 2019 (Table [RORO0601](#), [RORO0701](#))



Generally, the number of trips made by UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been in gradual decline since 2004, while the number of trips by foreign-registered powered vehicles has been steadily increasing up to 2015 (with the exception of the recession related falls seen between 2008 and 2013). From 2015 onwards the number of trips made by foreign registered powered vehicles began to fall reaching 1.9 million in 2019. This could be down to multiple factors, one of which may be due to the increase in the proportion of trips made by unaccompanied trailers over the same period (as seen on chart on [Page 1](#)).

The fall in trips made by foreign registered powered vehicles in 2019 should be taken in context with the wider downward trend seen over the last 3 years. However, the lead up to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union combined with businesses and manufacturers bringing forward their international activity (as reported by the Office of National Statistics) are likely to have played a part in this latest fall in 2019.

Note:

¹ These figures will not sum to the total number of trips by powered vehicles (2.3 million) given in previous page due to a combination of rounding and the omission of unknown vehicles.

Country of vehicle registration

The proportion of trips made by powered vehicles that travelled from Great Britain to Europe that were registered to Western European countries such as the UK, Netherlands, Germany and France has fallen as Eastern European countries such as Poland and Romania having greatly increased their share since joining the European Union (EU).

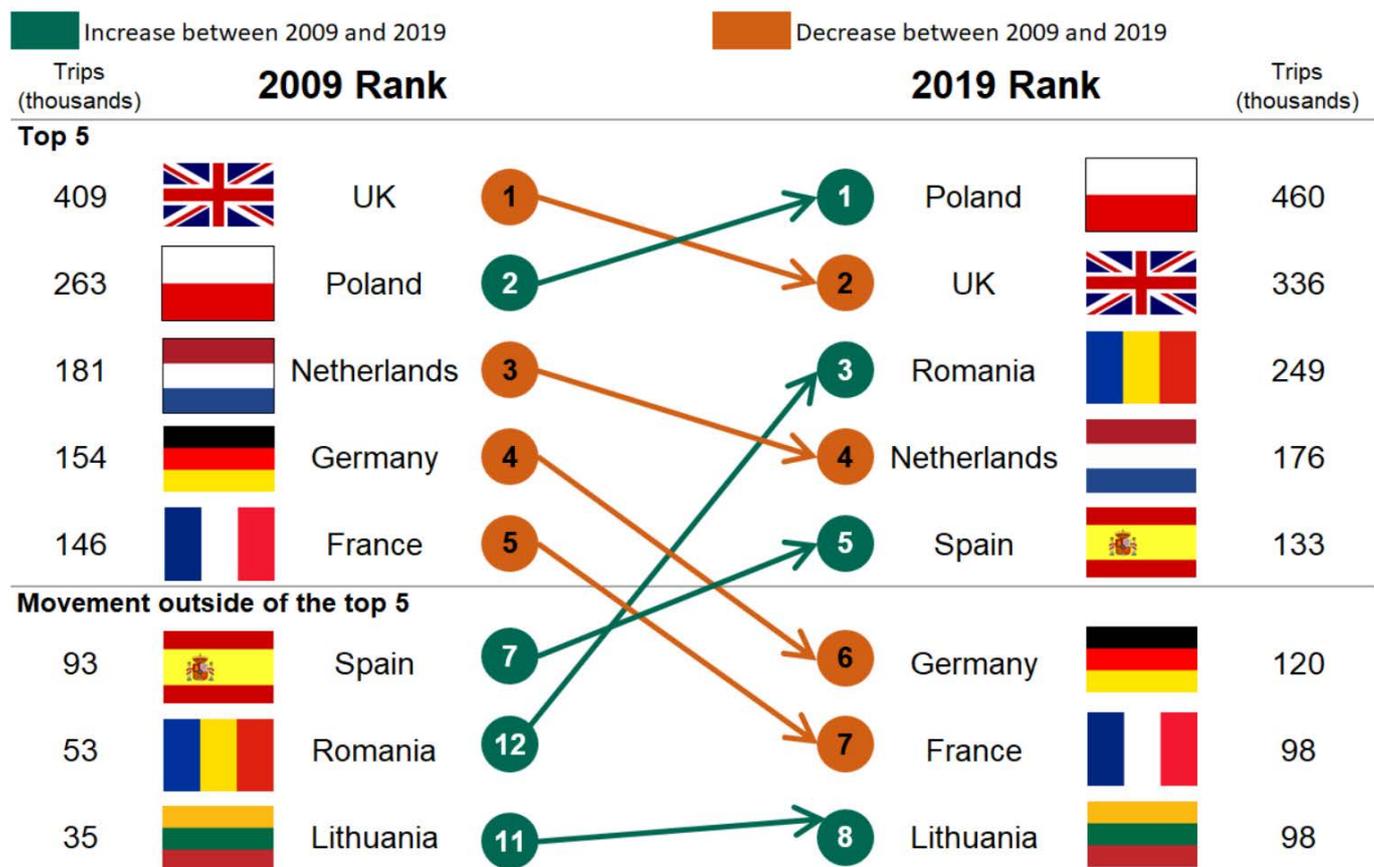
The volume of trips made by powered goods vehicles registered to Poland that travelled from Great Britain to Europe has increased from 3% when it first joined the EU in 2004 to 20% in 2019 - **the largest share of any country**.

The **UK** was the most prevalent country of vehicle registration making trips to Europe ten years ago. However, it is now second with a 15% share (0.3 million) of all trips made by powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe.

Since **Romania** joined the EU in 2007, its share of trips made by powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has risen from 1% to 11% in 2019, making it the third largest country of vehicle registration.

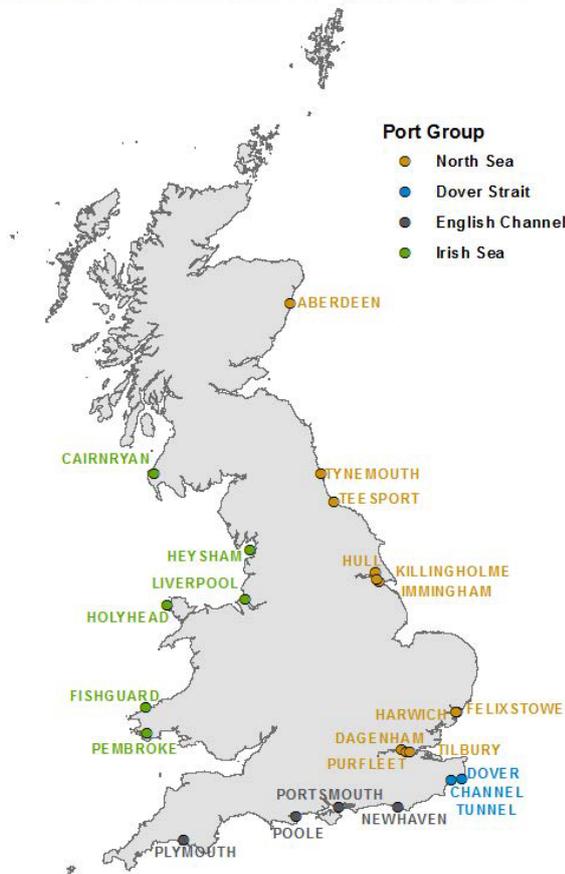
The volume of trips made by powered vehicles registered to the **Republic of Ireland** travelling to Europe decreased from 6% in 2008, to 4% in 2019.

Chart 2: Number of trips made by powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, by country of vehicle registration, 2009 to 2019 (Table [RORO0201](#))



Map: Ferry ports with recorded roll-on roll-off activity from Great Britain to Europe in 2019

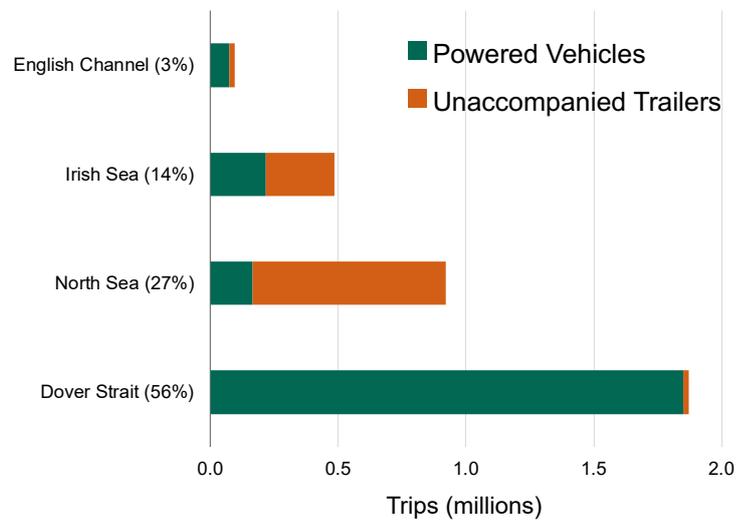
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Port Groups

There are four port groups: **Dover Strait** (Ferry routes from Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate; along with road goods vehicles using the Channel Tunnel), **North Sea** (All ports on the east coast of Great Britain, north of and including the Thames estuary), **Irish Sea** (All ports on the west coast of Great Britain), and **English Channel** (All ports on the south coast of Great Britain, west of Folkestone).

Chart 3: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by port group and type, 2019 (Table RORO0301)



In 2019, more vehicles left Great Britain via the Dover Strait port group (56%) than all of the other port groups combined. The majority of trips by **powered vehicles** (80%) travelling to Europe were via the shorter routes on the Dover Strait port group, whereas the majority of **unaccompanied trailers** (71%) travelled via the longer North Sea port group routes. Detailed statistics can be found in Tables [RORO0301](#), [RORO0401](#) and [RORO0501](#).

Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe made 3.4 million trips in 2019, of which:

- ▶ 1.9 million trips (56%) were made via the Dover Strait, and almost all (99%) of these were by powered vehicles.
- ▶ 921 thousand trips (27%) were made via the North Sea. Of these, 82% (756 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.
- ▶ 484 thousand trips (14%) were made via the Irish Sea. Of these, 45% (217 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 55% (268 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.
- ▶ 96 thousand trips (3%) were made via the English Channel. Of these, 78% (74 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 22% (21 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.

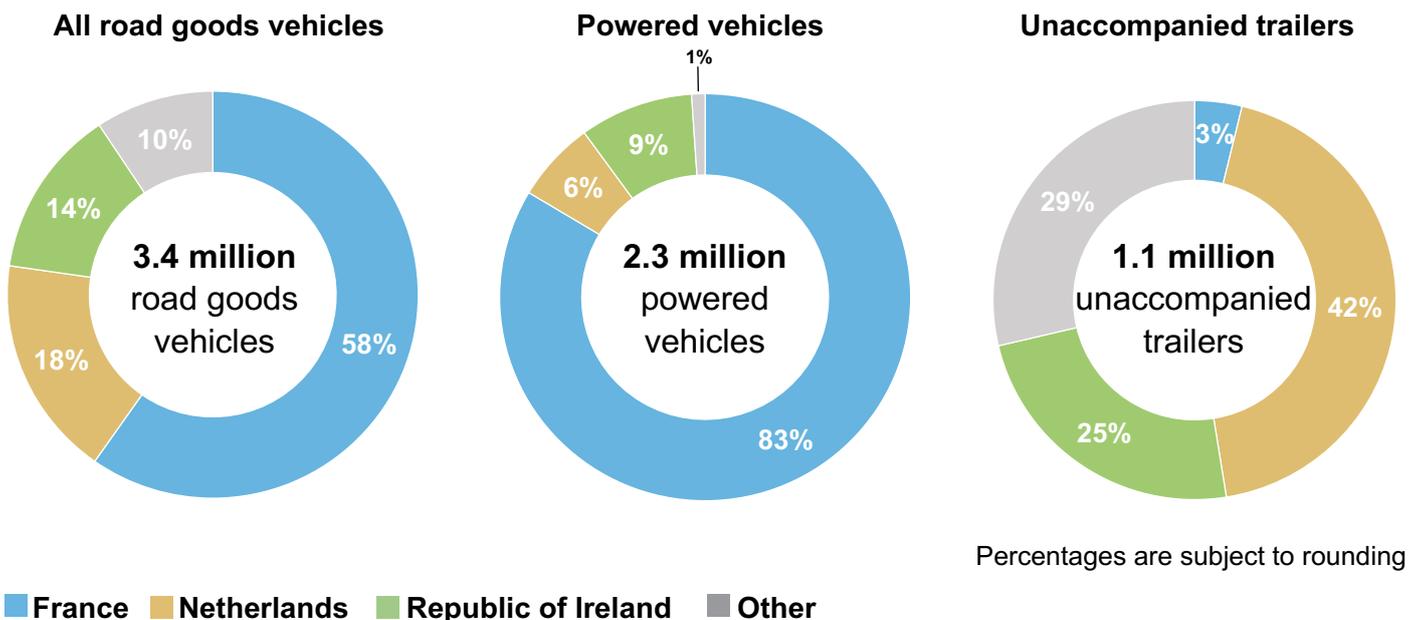
Country of disembarkation

Overall, while the majority of the 3.4 million trips made by all road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe disembarked in France (58%), there are large differences in the country of disembarkation between powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers.

Of the 2.3 million trips made by powered vehicles, 83% disembarked in France while only 6% disembarked in the Netherlands and 9% in the Republic of Ireland (these countries being the overall top 3 biggest nations of disembarkation). However of the 1.1 million trips made by unaccompanied trailers, the Netherlands was the biggest single country of trip disembarkation accounting for 42% of all trips while the Republic of Ireland accounted for 25% of trips and France accounted for just 3%.

The prevalence of powered vehicles (those accompanied by drivers to allow a continuous, faster journey) on the shorter Dover Strait routes (such as Dover to Calais) is a result of these routes being used to transport more urgent freight such as machine parts or perishable goods. Freight which is less time critical is often shipped on the longer and slower North Sea routes (such as Hull to Rotterdam), using unaccompanied trailers which are subject to stoppages in transition.

Chart 4: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by country of disembarkation, 2019 (Tables [RORO0301](#), [RORO0401](#), [RORO0501](#))



'Other' predominantly Belgium, along with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

Detailed statistics on road goods vehicles travelling to Europe by country of disembarkation and port group can be found [here](#).

Definition

Country of disembarkation is the country of the foreign port where the vehicle gets off from the roll-on roll-off ferry after having been carried by it.

Island of Ireland

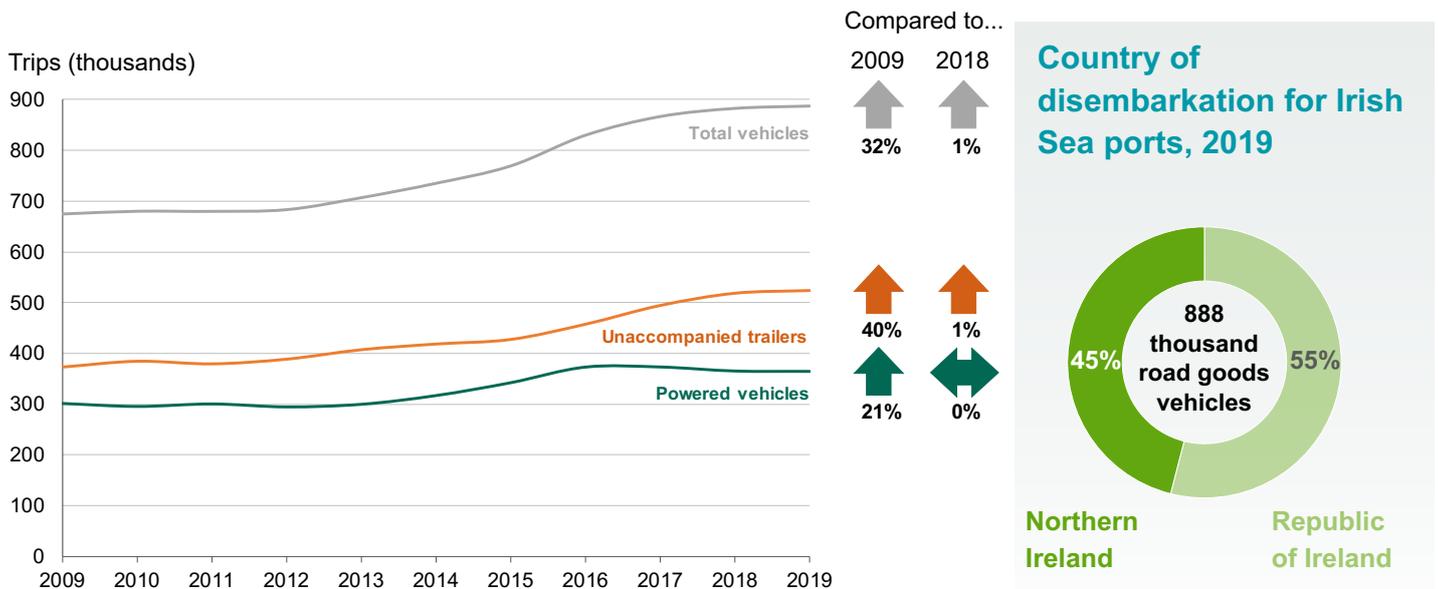
Vehicles travelling on domestic ferry routes from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are not included in the main part of this release; however this section includes statistics on those vehicles in order to give a complete picture of activity travelling from Great Britain to the **island of Ireland**, i.e. both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland combined. Detailed statistics can be found in Table [RORO1001](#).

Overall trends

In 2019, a total of 888 thousand trips were made by road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, a 1% increase compared to the previous year, of which there were:

- ▶ 364 thousand (41%) trips by **powered vehicles**, unchanged compared to 2018. Of these, 217 thousand (59%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 148 thousand (41%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.
- ▶ 524 thousand (59%) trips by **unaccompanied trailers**, a 1% increase compared to 2018. Of these, 268 thousand (51%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 256 thousand (49%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.

Chart 5: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, 2009 to 2019 (Table [RORO1001](#))



Country of vehicle registration

In 2019, trips made by powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland were predominantly either UK or Irish-registered (78% in total). However, there are differences in the proportion of trips made by UK and Irish-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland:

- ▶ 148 thousand trips made by powered vehicles disembarked in Northern Ireland, of which 90% were UK-registered and 7% were Irish registered.
- ▶ 217 thousand trips made by powered vehicles disembarked in the Republic of Ireland, of which 39% were UK-registered and 25% were Irish registered.

Note: Remaining proportion of trips made by powered vehicles disembarking in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland were registered elsewhere or unknown

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

The figures in this release are derived from quarterly returns provided by the roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators, who are requested to provide the number of trips made by powered vehicles by country of vehicle registration and unaccompanied trailers carried on each ferry route from Great Britain to Europe. Equivalent information for the number of powered vehicles travelling through the Channel Tunnel are provided by Eurotunnel.

Figures for outward traffic only are presented here; up to 1978 inward traffic was also recorded, but as it was similar to outward traffic, the data requirement was discontinued to save respondent effort. Ferry routes to countries outside Europe, such as Morocco, are not included here. A list of active routes recorded since 2004 can be found in Table [RORO0901](#).

Since a data quality review in early 2008, survey returns have been supplied by all roll-on roll-off ferry operators, which has resulted in more complete reporting of the country of vehicle registration. However, while information on the country of registration for powered vehicles is derived by some operators from the vehicle registration mark, others estimate the nationality from the manifest or waybill, or in some cases, use the country of booking as a proxy for the country of registration. This means there may be discrepancies in the reported nationality of powered heavy goods vehicles and their actual nationality of registration. Users should exercise caution if using country of vehicle registration for analysis.

Further information about the statistics and methodology in this report can be found in the [Roll-on Roll-off International Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

Background notes

Accompanying data tables which give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>.

Further information such as definitions and background on the statistics can be found in the [Roll-on Roll-off International Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

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/roll-on-roll-off-international-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>.

Going forward, the Department for Transport is proposing to change the format of the road goods vehicles travelling to Europe statistics releases. Currently, the series is comprised of four summary quarterly releases, including tables. We are proposing to change the format of the first three quarterly releases to being table only with the inclusion of an annual summary publication and tables. We would be keen to receive your views on this proposed change and you are invited to send these to us at roro.stats@dft.gov.uk



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