



Department
for Transport

UK Port Freight Statistics: 2019

About this release

The importance of shipping and trade to the economy of the UK, an island nation, has resulted in the establishment of a large number of ports around the coast, which are very diverse in terms of size and type of cargo handled.

This statistical release provides information on trends and patterns in the handling of freight traffic at UK sea ports, in terms of cargo as well as the route taken.

The data collected for this release does not allow for an assessment of the impact around the uncertainty of the date of when the UK will leave the EU.

In this publication

Things you need to know [p2](#)

UK major ports summary [p4](#)

Freight by cargo type [p7](#)

- Liquid Bulk [p7](#)
- Dry Bulk [p8](#)
- Lo-Lo (containers) [p9](#)
- Ro-Ro [p10](#)

Freight by direction and route [p11](#)

- Short sea [p13](#)
- Deep sea [p14](#)
- Domestic traffic [p15](#)

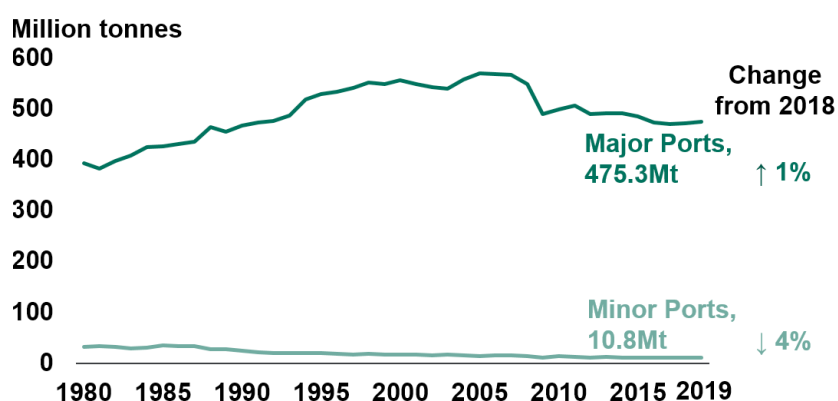
Background notes [p18](#)

Tonnage handled by UK ports increased by 1% in 2019 compared to the previous year

All ports
handled:

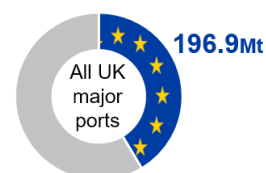
486.1
Million tonnes

23.5
Million units



The EU remained the largest trade partner

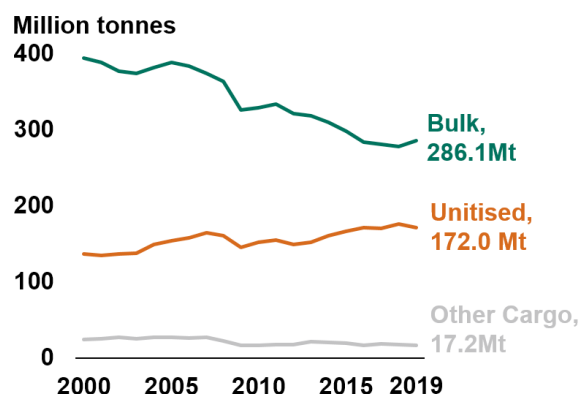
More goods were moved between UK major ports and the EU than any other region in 2019, accounting for 41% (196.9 million tonnes) of total major port traffic.



Bulk traffic's first increase since 2011

Bulk goods make up the majority of traffic at UK major ports, accounting for 60% of traffic in 2019. Following 7 years of decline, mostly driven by changes in fuels such as coal and crude oil, 2019's increase was mainly driven by a rise in liquefied gas and other dry bulk (including biomass).

Unitised traffic, mainly consisting of containers and vehicles, fell for the second consecutive year, driven by a decline in passenger and trade vehicles.



1. Things You Need to Know

This release provides information on trends and patterns in the handling of freight traffic at UK sea ports. Ports are essential to the UK economy, with around 95% of all import and export tonnage being transported by sea in terms.

Uses and users of these statistics

These statistics are used for several purposes, such as:

- informing policy development and assess the impact of proposed legislative changes.
- providing baseline information and/or calibration data for forecasts and transport models, such as the [port freight traffic forecasts](#).
- informing policy in the maritime industry representative bodies and individual businesses to make their case to Government and internationally, such as the latest [Freight Transport Association's Logistics Report](#).
- supplying UK figures to [Eurostat](#) as part of the Maritime Statistics Directive, for comparison against other member states.
- providing data for market analysis by transport consultants and businesses outside Government.

Users

Users of the data include central government, the devolved administrations and local government, the maritime industry, transport consultants and academics, and international organisations.

Port freight data has recently been used in the following documents:

- [Maritime 2050](#): the government's vision for the future of the British maritime sector.
- [Port connectivity study](#): assessed the current ability of inland rail and road networks to move freight to and from ports, identifying issues and proposing recommendations for improvement.
- [Future of Freight](#): the National Infrastructure Commission's review of existing infrastructure and recommendations of ways to transform how freight moves to and around the UK.

Data and definitions

Port freight statistics are based on a combination of data reported to the DfT by port authorities and shipping lines, or their agents.

Ports are split into major and minor ports. Major ports (51) are strategically important and/or handle at least 1 million tonnes of cargo annually. The majority of this publication covers major port data, as more detail is collected from these ports, such as cargo category and type.

Cargo categorisation

Cargo is categorised based on the means by which goods are loaded onto or off the vessel. See page 7 onwards for further information and analysis of cargo categories.

Unitised traffic: only lift-on/lift-off (Lo-Lo) and roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) freight services can be expressed in terms of units, which relates to how the cargo was contained. For example, a container, a trailer, or a passenger car is assigned a value of 1 unit. Apart from passenger vehicles, all unitised traffic can be expressed in terms of tonnage as well.

All other categories (liquid bulk, dry bulk and other general cargo) are only expressed in tonnage.

Bulk cargo tends to be unpackaged and transported in large quantities, either in liquid or granular form, as a mass of solids. Examples include crude oil, coal, gravel, etc. This is typically dropped or poured into a hold, and is unloaded via suctions, screw or grabber.

Direction of travel

Inwards and outwards traffic refers to the direction of travel at UK ports, and includes both domestic (for example, traffic between Liverpool and Belfast) and international traffic.

These statistics cover freight handled at UK major ports. The port of loading or unloading is also recorded - this may not be the port of ultimate origin or destination. For example, if a ship carrying cargo from Asia unloads/loads the cargo at a European port which is then put on another ship to the UK, our statistics will state the port of load as the European port, rather than the port in Asia. This is known as **transshipment**.

Imports and exports only relate to international traffic and is explored in more detail on page 11.

Ship types and arrivals

For the purposes of these statistics, cargo is categorised depending upon how it is transported on the ship. Information is available on the ship type and the number of times ships arrived at UK ports (see [PORT06](#) tables and page 6). This part of the publication is considered to be outside the scope of National Statistics.

Related data sources

[HMRC](#) publishes **tonnage and value** to a much more **granular commodity** level for goods moved between the UK and countries outside the EU by sea. Comparisons between port freight and these sources, specifically for certain cargo categories, are explored further in our [Notes and Definitions](#).

The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy publish the [Digest of UK Energy Statistics \(DUKES\)](#) which covers the production and consumption of fuels and energy in the UK.

Information on freight moved by different modes, including a breakdown of domestic freight is available in **Transport Statistics Great Britain** [chapter 4](#).

[Eurostat](#) publish comparative port freight data for other **European Union** countries, enabling UK ports to be compared to those in other EU countries.

Dashboard and tables

Detailed Port Freight statistics data is published in [filterable tables](#), at the top of the linked webpage is a table index to help you identify which table contains the data you need.

The [Port Freight Statistics dashboard](#) allows you to explore the most detailed data available for major ports more visually.



2. UK Major Ports

Following a dip during the 2008 recession, overall tonnage handled by UK major ports has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years, declining only 3% since 2009. Major ports accounted for 98% of this tonnage in 2019.

The UK trend is mostly driven by trends in English major ports, which made up 70% of tonnage handled in 2019.

Tonnage handled at **Northern Irish ports has remained relatively stable over the past 4 years**. However, 2019 saw the first decrease in traffic since 2013, where all major ports except Londonderry decreased. The majority of this decline was due to a fall in the amount of agricultural and oil products handled in the country in 2019. Belfast experienced the greatest absolute fall out of the major ports in this country, declining by 0.4 million tonnes.

There has been a **long term decline in traffic for Scottish ports**, although it has plateaued over the past 4 years. This decline has been driven by a fall in the amount of liquid bulk, specifically crude oil, being handled. 2019 saw a slight increase in traffic handled, which was mainly driven by a 38% increase in crude oil traffic at Sullom Voe.

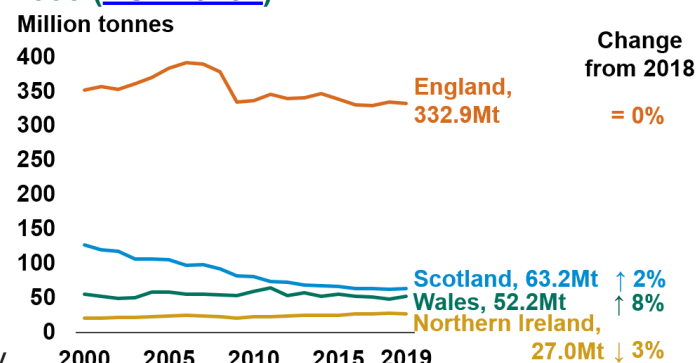
Welsh ports saw an 8% increase in the total tonnage handled compared to 2018, almost returning to 2009 levels, after steady declines over the past 3 years. This increase was mainly driven by 4.8 million tonne increase in liquefied gas handled at Milford Haven. This increase in liquefied gas traffic coincides with a decline in the volume transported by pipeline, based on [UK gas energy trends](#), published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

The top 10 major ports, in terms of the amount of tonnage handled in 2019, remain unchanged from 2018, but with some movement within the top 10.

Milford Haven's increase made it the third largest port in 2019 in terms of tonnage handled, up from fifth in the ranking last year. Southampton's decline in traffic, coupled with Liverpool's increase in traffic, has resulted in Liverpool overtaking Southampton in terms of tonnage traffic in 2019.

London's sustained increase in traffic over the years can be attributed to the expansion of London Gateway, bringing it

Tonnage handled by UK countries since 2000 ([PORT0101](#))



Top 10 UK major ports by tonnage, 2019 ([PORT0303](#))

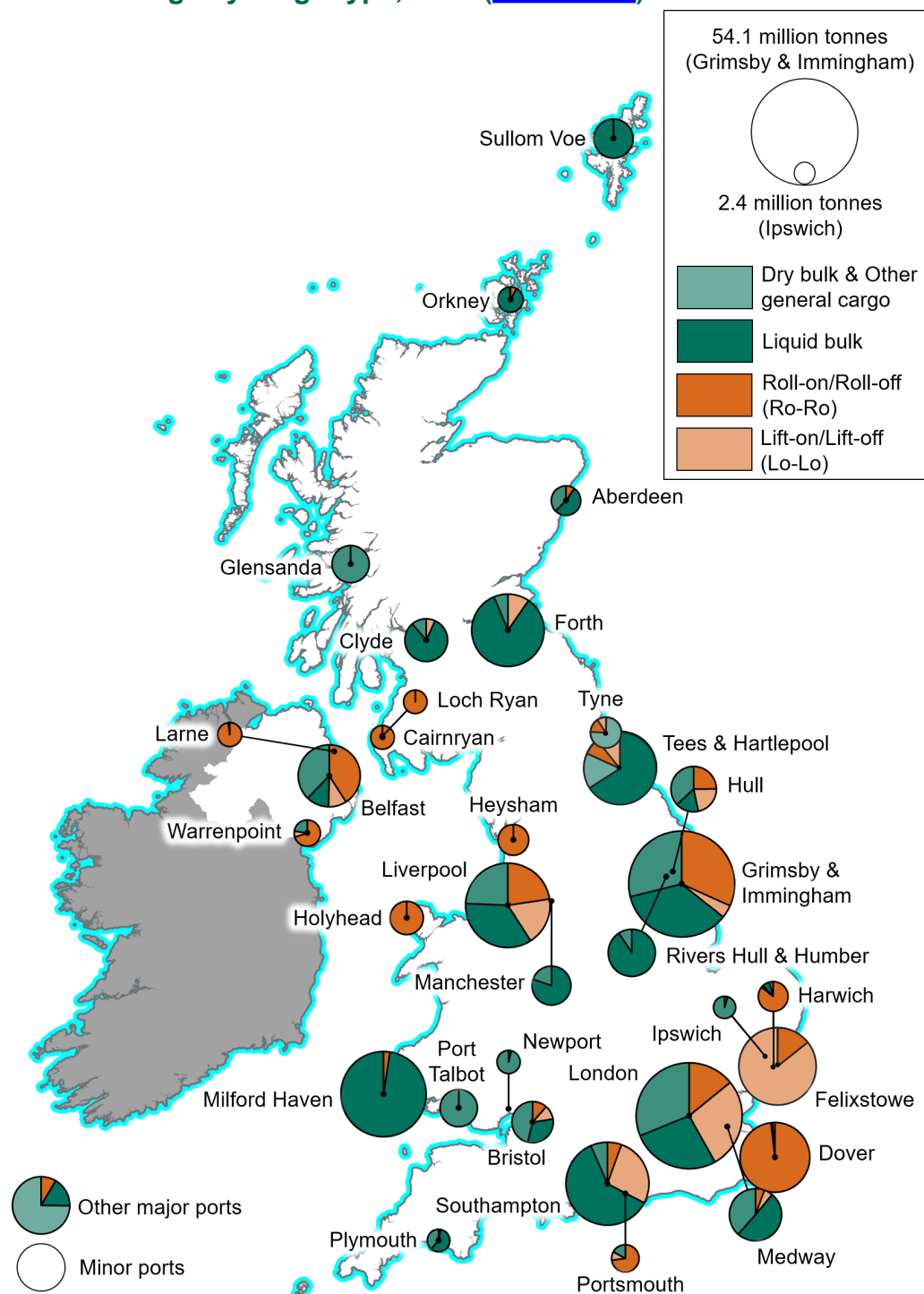
	Million tonnes	Change from 2018
Grimsby & Immingham	54.1	↓ 3%
London	54.0	↑ 2%
Milford Haven	35.0	↑ 13%
Liverpool	34.3	↑ 5%
Southampton	33.2	↓ 4%
Tees & Hartlepool	28.2	↓ 2%
Felixstowe	25.3	↓ 10%
Forth	25.2	↓ 5%
Dover	23.4	↓ 6%
Belfast	18.5	↓ 2%
All other major ports	154.9	↑ 4%

almost level with the amount of tonnage handled at Grimsby & Immingham in 2019.

Dover remains the largest roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) port in the UK, handling 22% of Ro-Ro tonnage and 26% of unitised traffic out of all the UK major ports in 2019.

The [Port Freight Dashboard](#) allows you to further explore trends for individual ports; table [PORT0400](#) has detailed figures for each major port; table [PORT0303](#) ranks ports by cargo type and [PORT0302](#) provides route totals for each port.

UK major ports*: tonnage by cargo type, 2019 ([PORT0304](#))



* All ports marked on map handled over 2 million tonnes of freight in 2019.
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Vessel Arrivals at UK Major Ports

An estimated total of 95,600 cargo vessels arrived at UK major ports during 2019, 3% less than the 2018 level. Over a sixth of these were at Dover, which alone handled over 17,000 vessel arrivals in 2019.

The ports with the highest number of vessel arrivals tend to be those with regular ferry (Ro-Ro) services; ports with the highest number of other cargo vessels included those handling the most tonnage - Grimsby and Immingham, London and Liverpool.

Top 10 UK major ports with most cargo vessel arrivals in thousands, 2019 ([PORT0602](#))

	Ro-Ro Vessels	All Cargo Vessels
Dover	17.1	17.2
Grimsby & Immingham	2.9	7.1
London	2.4	7.0
Liverpool	3.3	6.5
Belfast	3.6	5.3
Southampton	0.1	4.1
Tees and Hartlepool	0.4	3.5
Portsmouth	2.8	3.1
Holyhead	3.1	3.1
Hull	0.8	3.1
All other major Ports	18.1	35.4

Over all major ports, Ro-Ro vessels accounted for over half of cargo vessel arrivals in 2019. In terms of deadweight tonnage (DWT) - a measure of cargo carrying capacity - container ships accounted for 28%, despite having far fewer arrivals.

Since 2010, the number of cargo vessels arriving at UK major ports has fallen overall, whereas the total DWT and gross tonnage (GT) arriving have remained broadly stable - reflecting an increase in average vessel size, particularly for container ships.

Trends in deadweight tonnage of vessels arriving (shown in table [PORT0601](#)) tend to broadly mirror trends in cargo handled, however this was not so much the case in 2019, where there was a fall in tanker, Ro-Ro and other dry bulk ship arrivals, and increase in container ship arrivals.

Cargo vessels arriving at UK major ports by ship type, 2019 ([PORT0601](#))

Ro-Ro	49% of Arrivals 28% of DWT 63% of GT
Other dry cargo	19% 15% 9%
Tankers	13% 26% 9%
Containers	7% 25% 13%

Arrivals statistics

Statistics on vessel arrivals are outside the scope of National Statistics, and are based on data from a number of sources including the Maritime and Coastguard Agency CERS system.

The methods used to compile these figures changed in 2018. 2017 figures using the previous and current method are provided in the [PORT06](#) tables for comparison. Further details are provided in the [Notes and Definitions](#).

These figures largely exclude domestic ferries such as to and from the Isle of Wight.

The [PORT06](#) tables cover all vessels arriving at all UK ports, whilst this page only covers arrivals at UK major ports.

Definitions

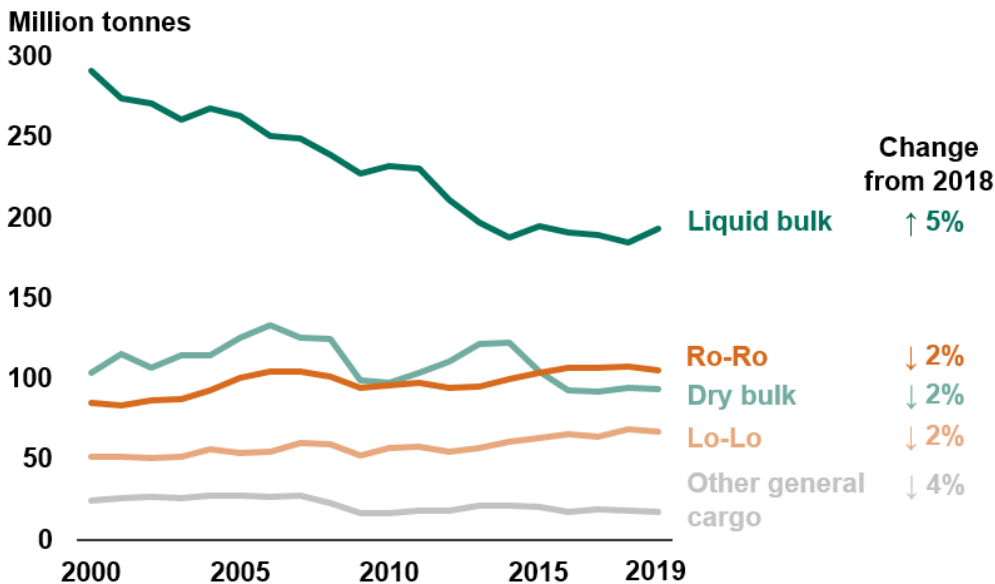
Gross Tonnage (GT) refers to the measurement of the ship's internal volume (i.e. the space on the ship).

Deadweight Tonnage (DWT) refers to the maximum weight, in tonnes, a ship can carry in terms of cargo, fuel and stores, before reaching its loadline mark.

3. Major Port Freight by Cargo Type

In 2019, all cargo categories, apart from liquid bulk, saw a relatively small decline in tonnage traffic. Ro-Ro saw the greatest decline out of the cargo groups, falling by 2.6 million tonnes. Liquid bulk has been on a general downward trend since 2000, however a noticeable increase in liquefied gas traffic saw an increase in the bulk trend in 2019.

UK major port tonnage by cargo since 2000 ([PORT0201](#))



How can tonnage increase while units decrease?

For unitised traffic, the number of carrying units (e.g. a lorry or shipping container) are recorded as well as the weight of the cargo being carried, excluding the weight of the carrying unit itself. Passenger vehicles are recorded with no weight and empty containers/goods vehicles are recorded as one unit with no weight. Therefore if the ratio of empty to loaded vehicles changes, it is possible for tonnage to increase while units decrease, as has happened in 2018.

In units, unitised traffic has continued its short term trend, declining by 3% to 23.3 million units in 2019. This decline was mainly driven by Ro-Ro cargo, namely passenger and trade vehicles. Lift-on/lift-off (Lo-Lo) unitised traffic continued to increase, driven by a rise in containers of at least 40ft being handled mainly on deep sea routes.



Liquid Bulk

Liquid bulk consists of any liquid or gas that is transported in a tank.

Liquid bulk traffic accounted for 41% of tonnage handled at UK major ports in 2019, continuing to account for the largest proportion out of the cargo groups.

Liquid bulk traffic has declined in recent decades, mainly driven by falling levels of crude oil handled which, together with oil products, make up the majority of the liquid bulk category, accounting for 84% in 2019.

Liquid bulk can be broken down into:

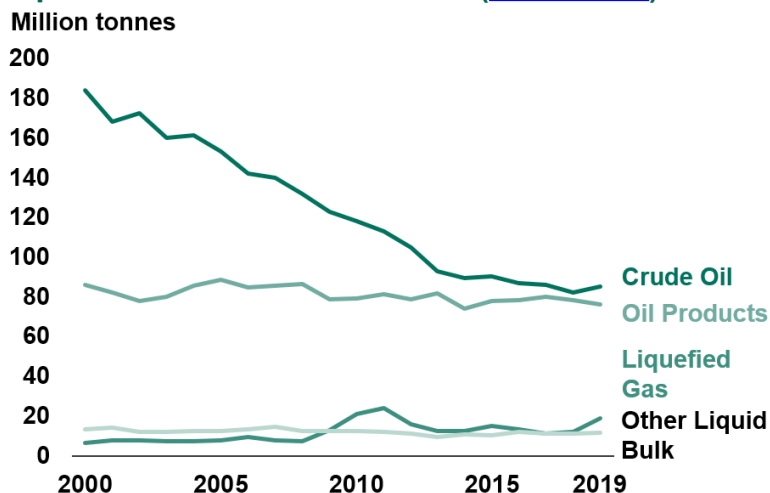
	2019 Volume
Crude Oil	85.5Mt
Oil Products	76.2Mt
Liquefied Gas	19.1Mt
Other Liquid Bulk	11.9Mt

However, **2019 saw an increase** in this cargo group due to a **57% increase in liquefied gas being handled at UK major ports**, after around 6 years of relative stability. The ports that handled a noticeable increase in this good were Milford Haven and Medway, where most of this type of cargo occurred between Milford Haven and ports in Qatar, and between Medway and ports in Norway and Saudi Arabia.

Milford Haven upgraded one of its jetties at the end of 2018, increasing the capacity of goods it can handle from countries other than Qatar. This can be linked to the increase in the amount of liquefied gas the port handled from the USA in 2019 (up from 0.5 in 2018 to 1.3 million tonnes), which partly contributed to the port's increase in traffic.

2019 also saw a **4% increase in crude oil being handled** at UK major ports, despite its general downward trend since 2000. The ports that saw the largest increases in this traffic were Sullom Voe (up by 38%) and Liverpool (25%).

Liquid bulk handled since 2000 ([PORT0201](#))



Dry Bulk

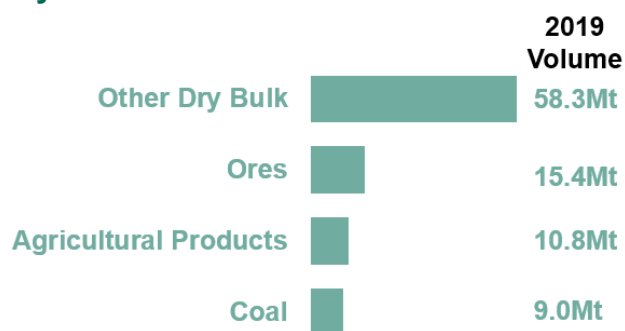
Dry bulk consists of cargo that is in bulk, so can be scooped up, not bagged items.

Overall dry bulk volumes have varied considerably over the past decade, largely due to fluctuating volumes of coal and ores. In 2019, **coal handled was at an all-time low**, at 9 million tonnes, but the rate of decline has flattened since 2016.

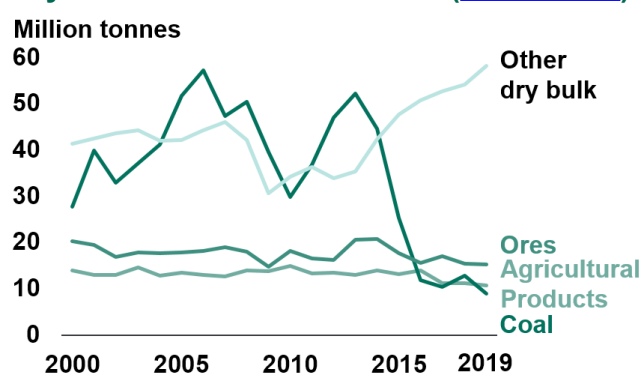
These changes in dry bulk goods over time reflect changes in fuels used for energy generation. The announcement in 2015 to [close coal power stations](#) to meet the 2025 emissions target contributed to the large fall in the amount of coal being imported between 2013 and 2016. Conversely, other dry bulk has continued to increase steadily, which is likely to be driven by increased imports of biomass products.

From internal analysis, using DfT cargo categorisation being applied to HMRC Trade Statistics, the **UK imported 18.6 million tonnes**

Dry bulk can be broken down into:



Dry bulk handled since 2000 ([PORT0201](#))



of biomass from international countries, mainly from the United States (34% of all imports). The ports of Grimsby & Immingham and Liverpool accounted for 62% of the non-EU imports. See section 4 of the Notes and Definitions for further information.



Lift-on/Lift-off (Lo-Lo) Cargo

Lo-Lo consists of container traffic. Information about the cargo transported in the containers is not collected in the port freight series, but can be found in [HMRC data](#) for goods moved to and from outside the EU.

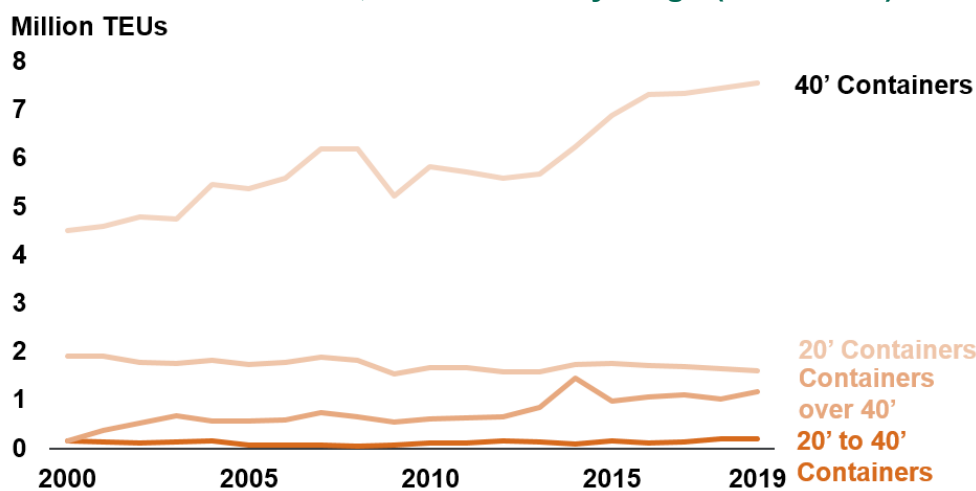
When measured in twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU), **Lo-Lo traffic in 2019 increased by 2% to 10.5 million TEUs** compared to 2018, continuing the upwards trend since 2012. This year's increase was again mainly driven by a 2% increase in 40ft containers being handled at UK major ports.

Felixstowe continues to handle the **largest amount of containerised traffic in the UK**, handling 36% of TEUs in 2019. This is a 2% increase compared to the previous year, however, in terms of tonnage, the port has experienced a 11% decrease in the container traffic, especially traffic leaving the port.

Lift-on Lift-off traffic can be broken down into:

	2019 Volume
40' Containers	38.5Mt
20' Containers	19.6Mt
Containers over 40'	7.1Mt
20' to 40' Containers	1.7Mt

Lo-Lo traffic since 2000, in TEUs and by cargo ([PORT0201](#))



Definitions

TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units) is a standardised measure to allow for the different sizes of container boxes. See the [Technical Note](#) for TEU values for each of the container categories.

Lo-Lo tonnage excludes the weight of the container itself, so an empty container has a weight of 0.

In tonnage terms, although Lo-Lo has generally been increasing since 2009, 2019 saw a decline, mainly driven by Felixstowe's 2.8 million tonne fall in traffic between 2018 and 2019. The countries which have seen a decline in container tonnage traffic between 2018 and 2019 were China, Netherlands and France, totalling a decrease of 1.5 million tonnes ([PORT0499](#)).

Tonnage has declined for this cargo group, even though the number of units has increased. This is due to a 6% increase in the number of empty containers being handled at UK major ports (especially those coming into the port) in 2019.



Roll-on/Roll-off (Ro-Ro) Cargo

Ro-Ro traffic consists of cargo that can be moved on to, or off, a vessel either by their own propulsion (such as a passenger car) or with assistance (such as an unaccompanied trailer).

Ro-Ro unitised traffic has declined back down to 2014 levels in 2019, after a peak in 2017, driven by passenger vehicles (including cars, buses, motorcycles) and import/export vehicles (for trade purposes). The number of road goods vehicles handled at UK major ports continued to fall, but the magnitude was less than the previous year.

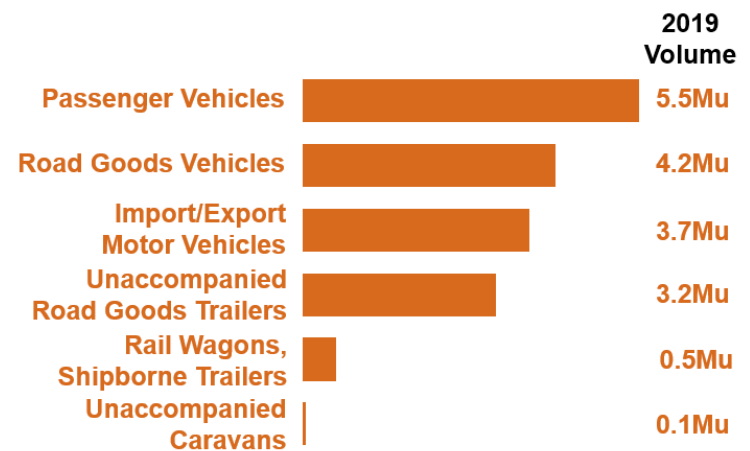
The **number of passenger vehicles fell** from 5.9 in 2018 to 5.5 million units in 2019, driven by the decline in traffic at Dover, which accounted for 37% of passenger vehicle traffic. Whilst these statistics do not include the number of passengers carried, this is available in the Department's [Sea Passenger Statistics](#) series, which showed a 6% decrease in passengers on short sea international routes in 2019 (see page 13 for more information on short sea traffic).

Trade (import/export) vehicles continued its recent 3 year downward trend, falling from 4.0 in 2018 to 3.7 million units in 2019, after strong growth between 2010 and 2016. Southampton and Tyne saw the greatest declines in the amount of trade vehicles being handled, especially those outward bound (down by 16% and 26% respectively).

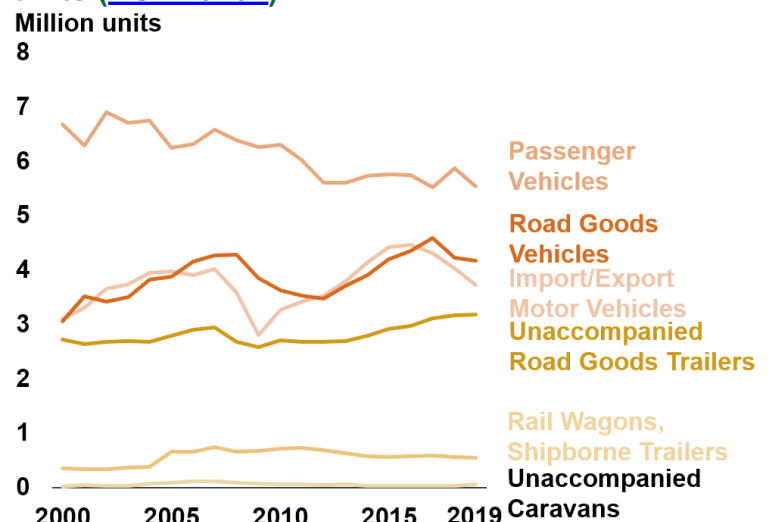
This could be linked to the fall in the number of vehicles being produced in the UK, as mentioned in [SMMT's June 2020](#) report and on [Statista](#).

For further information on the movement of goods by heavy goods vehicles from ports, see the "Inter-modal road freight activity" section in the [Domestic Road Freight Statistics](#). In 2019, 77 million tonnes of goods lifted by GB-registered heavy goods vehicles in the UK involved inter-modal activity - of these journeys, 87% began or ended at a shipping dock.

Roll-on Roll-off unitised traffic can be broken



Ro-Ro traffic handled at UK ports since 2000, in units ([PORT0201](#))



4. Major Port Freight by Direction and Route

The majority (65%) of traffic through UK major ports in 2019 was in an inwards direction.

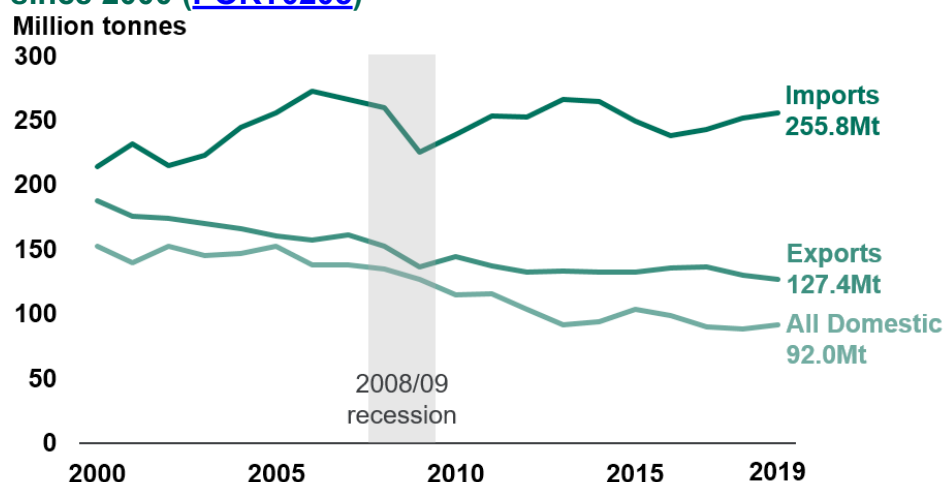
The route on which freight cargo travelled can be split into international and domestic.



International tonnage handled by UK major ports in 2019 remained relatively stable at 383.2 million tonnes compared to 2018, and **the UK continues to import more than it exports by sea**; imports accounted for 67% of international traffic in 2019.

Domestic traffic increased 3% in 2019, despite its general downward trend, driven by an increase in bulk goods.

Major port international freight by direction and domestic freight since 2000 ([PORT0205](#))



The EU continues to be our largest continental trading partner, accounting for 51% of all international trade at UK major ports in 2019, even though the volume of trade has fallen for the second consecutive year. However, trade with Asia saw the most noticeable change, mainly driven by an increase in trade of liquefied gas with Qatar, as well as crude oil with China.

International freight by route, 2019 ([PORT0204](#))

	2019 Volume	Change from 2018
All European Union	196.9Mt	↓ 5%
Other Europe & Mediterranean	64.7Mt	↑ 2%
All America	55.6Mt	↑ 6%
Asia	55.6Mt	↑ 13%
All Africa	8.5Mt	↓ 12%
Australasia	1.8Mt	↓ 22%

Definitions

Inwards/outwards:

Inwards and outwards include both domestic and international traffic.

Imports/exports:

International traffic only.

Domestic: Goods moved between two UK ports (coastwise) and one-port traffic to or from UK offshore locations such as wind farms or sea dredging.

Note on Routes

In this series, route refers to the port of load/unload, not the final destination or source of the goods. Sometimes goods are shipped to an intermediate destination (e.g. Rotterdam), and then to another destination (e.g. UK ports), this is known as transshipment. Numerous attempts have been made to quantify the effects of transshipment with limited success. An example is a 2014 article [UK Trade in goods estimates and the 'Rotterdam Effect'](#), published by the Office for National Statistics.

Liquid bulk accounted for the largest proportion of both imports and exports at UK major ports in 2019 (40% and 44% respectively). Most of the imported liquid goods came from other Europe and Mediterranean countries, accounting for 32% of imported liquid bulk goods in 2019. The UK continued to import the most liquid bulk goods from Norway, totalling 18.9 million tonnes in the year. For exports, just under half of exported liquid bulk goods went to EU countries (49%), with the Netherlands handling most of the exports, totalling 14.3 million tonnes, in 2019. Further information can be found in table [PORT0204](#).

The **top 5 countries the UK traded with in 2019 generally remained unchanged from last year**. The only difference was more goods were imported from Belgium than Russia, which was in the top 5 in 2018. For imported goods, the top 5 countries accounted for 47% of total imports. For exported goods, the top 5 countries accounted for 57% of total exports.

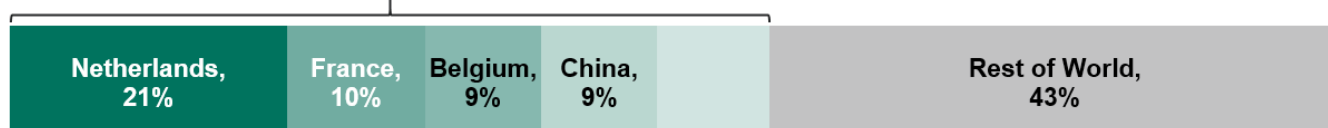
Share of top 5 countries UK major ports imported from and exported to, 2019 ([PORT0206](#))

Top 5 countries imports = **119.1** million tonnes



Belgium,
6%

Top 5 countries exports = **72.8** million tonnes



Irish Republic,
8%

The value of goods imported and exported by all modes in the UK and further information on businesses is available from [HMRC trade statistics](#). For non-EU countries, HMRC also publish tonnage of goods moved by mode and port of clearance, allowing comparisons with port freight. The [notes and definitions](#) accompanying these statistics outline these comparisons between port freight and HMRC tonnage for certain cargo types.

HMRC Trade Statistics

Value of goods traded for all modes

Imports

£540 billion

Top trading partners

1. Germany
2. United States
3. China
4. Netherlands
5. France

Top commodities traded

1. Precious metals
2. Machinery
3. Vehicles
4. Audio-visual and electrical equipment
5. Mineral substances

Exports

£365 billion

Top trading partners

1. United States
2. Germany
3. France
4. Netherlands
5. China

Top commodities traded

1. Machinery
2. Vehicles
3. Precious metals
4. Mineral fuels
5. Audio-visual and electrical equipment



* Ordered by value in pounds.



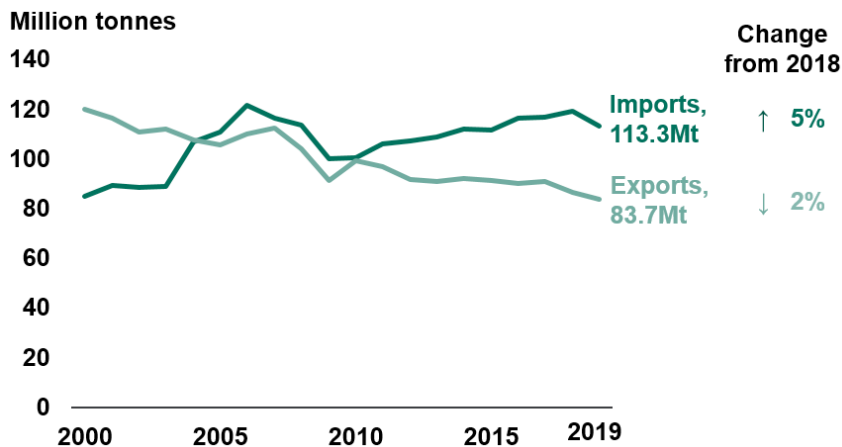
Short Sea Freight with EU, Non-EU European and Mediterranean Countries

All short sea freight fell for the second consecutive year to 261.6 million tonnes in 2019, from 269.4 million tonnes in 2018.

The large majority of short sea freight is trade with the EU, which fell by 4% from 206.2 in 2018 to 196.9 million tonnes in 2019. All cargo groups saw a decline in EU traffic, with liquid bulk goods experiencing the largest fall of 3.6 million tonnes.

Imports made up the majority of trade with the EU in 2019. Prior to 2005, the majority of trade was historically exports, but imports grew sharply during the early 2000's, while exports declined. Imports from the EU have generally risen since 2009, however trade declined in 2019. For exports, this is the second consecutive year of decline, following a period of relative stability since 2012.

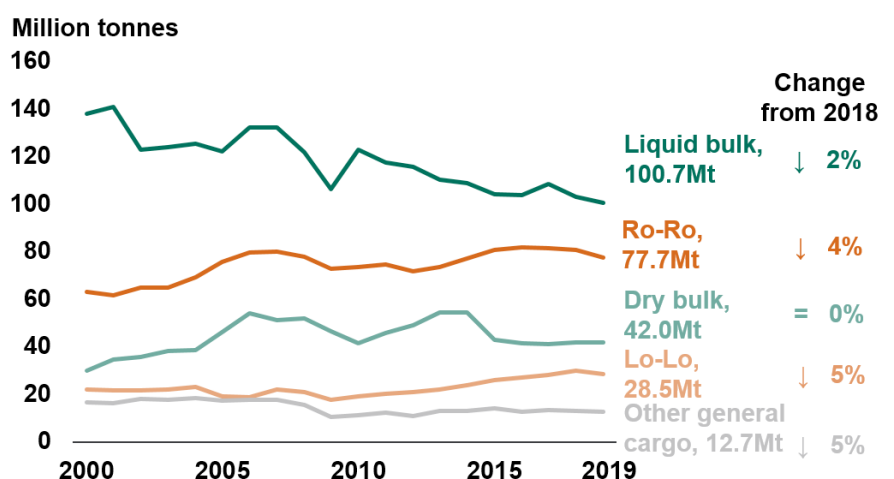
European Union traffic by direction since 2000 ([PORT0499](#))



Trade with other European and Mediterranean countries saw an increase across all cargo groups, with liquid bulk goods from these countries seeing the largest rise. This was mainly driven by an increase in liquid bulk trade with Norway: Tyne, Swansea and Londonderry experienced the greatest increase in this traffic ([PORT0499](#)).

Ro-Ro trade with France drives much of the trend for short sea traffic, accounting for 33% of all Ro-Ro tonnage trade with the EU. Ro-Ro tonnage traffic between the UK and France has fallen 14% since 2016, where 90% of this continues to pass through Dover.

Short sea traffic by cargo type since 2000 ([PORT0499](#))



Definitions

Short Sea: Maritime traffic that moves cargo along a coast without having to cross an ocean. This consists of European Union (EU) and 'Other Europe and Mediterranean' (Extra-EU) countries.

Extra-EU: A Eurostat term encompassing all European and Mediterranean countries that are not part of the European Union

Transshipment

These statistics cover freight handled at UK major ports. The port of loading or unloading is also recorded - this may not be the port of ultimate origin or destination. For example, if a ship carrying cargo from Asia unloads/loads the cargo at a European port which is then put on another ship to the UK, our statistics will state the port of load as the European port, rather than the port in Asia.



Deep Sea International Freight

Deep sea traffic increased 7% to 121.6 million tonnes in 2019. This was **driven by a 20% increase in liquid bulk traffic**, which offset the declines in the other cargo groups.

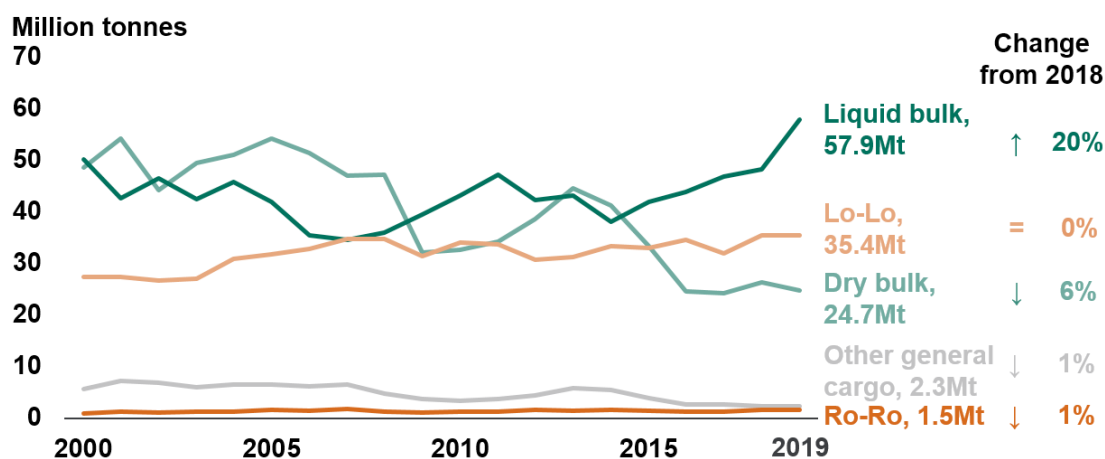
Since 2000, overall trade with deep sea countries has fluctuated only slightly, but with notable differences between cargo groups:

- Dry bulk has followed the national trend, declining 44% since 2013, with reduced coal imports contributing to this pattern.
- Liquid bulk has increased steadily between 2014 and 2018. 2019's rise was driven by a noticeable increase in liquefied gas trade between Qatar, and crude oil trade with the USA.

Definitions

Deep Sea: Maritime traffic that crosses oceans. This consists of countries in Africa, America, Asia and Australasia. Mediterranean countries are classed under short sea in the port freight series.

International deep sea traffic by cargo type since 2000 ([PORT0499](#))



This increase in trade with Qatar could be linked to [improved diplomatic relations](#) between the UK and the country, ever since the crises that started in 2017 where Qatari ports were blockaded by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Trade with deep sea countries continue to account for the majority of Lo-Lo container traffic, accounting for 53% of tonnage Lo-Lo traffic in 2019.

China has been the main trading partner to the UK for container traffic since 2004. Ever since its peak in 2016, China's Lo-Lo traffic has been declining where 2019's volume is almost at 2008 levels (8.5 million tonnes). Even with its decline, China still continues to account for most of Lo-Lo tonnage traffic, accounting for 24% in 2019.

Further information can be found in tables [PORT0204](#) and [PORT0205](#).

5 biggest deep sea container trade routes, 2019 tonnage			Change from 2018
1. China	8.6Mt	↓	6%
2. USA	4.0Mt	↑	11%
3. Singapore	3.8Mt	↓	1%
4. India	3.3Mt	↑	3%
5. Malaysia	2.1Mt	↓	3%



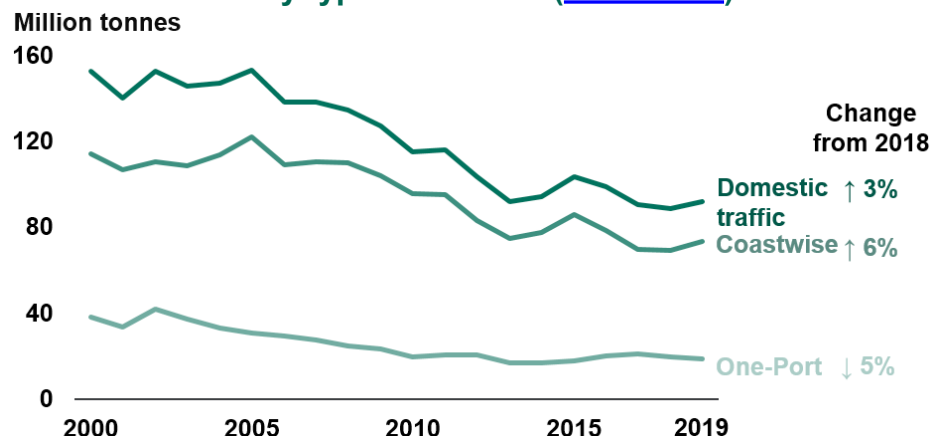
Domestic Port Traffic

Tonnage carried on domestic routes made up 19% of all traffic handled by UK major ports in 2019, totalling 92.0 million tonnes. Domestic tonnage increased by 3% compared to 2018.

The majority of domestic traffic is coastwise - 73.3 million tonnes in 2019, increasing 4.1 million tonnes compared to last year. Non-self-propelled vehicles have increased in the last decade, reaching 17.1 million tonnes in 2019. However, since 2005, coastwise traffic has generally declined, mainly as a result of a fall in liquid bulk moved. This is likely to be associated with lower volumes of crude oil being refined in the UK.

One-port tonnage has remained relatively stable for the last decade. It represents mainly aggregates extracted from the sea bed (12.7 million tonnes in 2019) and crude oil extractions (2.7 million tonnes in 2019). Crude oil has declined considerably since 2000, driven by the reduction in North Sea oil and gas production.

Domestic traffic by type since 2000 ([PORT0499](#))



Definitions

Coastwise: Traffic carried around the coast from one UK port to another, including domestic ferry services.

Figures are double-counted in the port freight data for this type of traffic. For example, data of a shipment from Liverpool to Belfast is collected from both Liverpool's and Belfast's perspective (one being an inwards, the other record being an outward voyage).

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

In 2019, Belfast remained the UK port that handles the most domestic traffic - 12.2 million tonnes. The vast majority of this traffic is coastwise which has increased steadily since 2009, and is mainly Ro-Ro traffic, with 7.6 million tonnes. Additionally, other dry bulk has increased for the fourth consecutive year since 2016, reaching 1.7 million tonnes in 2019 ([PORT0400](#)).

Grimsby & Immingham saw an increase of 22% compared to 2018, driven by an increase in coastwise traffic of oil products ([PORT0499](#)).

Top 10 UK major ports by domestic tonnage, 2019 ([PORT0499](#))

	Million tonnes	Change from 2018
Belfast	12.2	↑ 1%
London	9.8	↑ 5%
Tees & Hartlepool	8.0	↑ 4%
Liverpool	5.4	↑ 5%
Grimsby & Immingham	5.2	↑ 22%
Milford Haven	3.9	↓ 2%
Heysham	3.9	= 0%
Rivers Hull & Humber	3.5	↑ 9%
Aberdeen	3.3	↑ 1%
Southampton	3.0	↑ 3%
All other major ports	33.8	↑ 2%

Domestic Waterborne Freight







Domestic waterborne freight covers freight moved by water in the UK, and includes traffic on inland waterways in addition to coastwise and one port traffic. These figures are calculated using a different method to those presented above and include freight handled on rivers and canals, and by minor ports. Figures in this section are not directly comparable to the rest of this release.

The total amount of goods moved by water within the UK increased by 4% to 25.2 billion tonne-kilometres (bt-k) in 2019, despite its recent downward trend. In terms of goods lifted, traffic remained stable at 97.5 million tonnes.

Although inland waters traffic accounts for the majority of goods lifted (i.e. tonnage), the majority of tonne-kilometres moved are on coastwise routes.

The trends over time for goods moved on coastwise and one-port routes broadly mirror those for tonnage (shown on the previous page).

Domestic waterborne freight goods moved and lifted, 2019 ([PORT0701](#))

Goods lifted		Million tonnes	Change from 2018
One-port		19.4	↓ 6%
Coastwise		37.8	↑ 2%
Inland waters		50.5	↑ 1%
Total		97.5	= 0%
Goods moved		Billion tonne-km	
One-port		7.1	↓ 12%
Coastwise		16.8	↑ 12%
Inland waters		1.7	↑ 6%
Total		25.2	↑ 4%

Note: Coastwise and one port traffic which travels on inland waterways is counted twice in the above figures (so total goods lifted is less than the sum of the three individual categories).

Water accounts for a relatively small share of domestic goods moved across all modes (where road dominates) - around 13% of goods moved, and 6% of goods lifted, based on data for 2018 published in [Transport Statistics Great Britain](#).

About Domestic Waterborne Freight

Figures in this section are based on analysis of the port freight statistics, and also include data for inland waterway movements collected from barge operators and minor ports.

In contrast to the domestic figures above, coastwise traffic between two ports is only counted in one direction, and international traffic which travels on inland waters is included.

For further information regarding the figures in this section, see the Domestic Waterborne Technical Note.

Data tables for DWF can be found in the [PORT07](#) section.

Definitions

Inland waterways traffic:

movement of freight on a ship or barge along one of British inland waterways, such as rivers or canals.

Where coastwise or one-port traffic is handled by a port classified as being on inland waters (e.g. on a river) this is also included in the inland waters within this section.

Goods moved: metric used for freight traffic. It is the tonnage of goods lifted multiplied by the distance travelled, expressed as tonne-kilometres. For foreign traffic, distance is counted to the smooth water boundary only.

Liquid bulk traffic remains the most transported cargo type along domestic waterborne routes (46%) in 2019, followed by dry bulk (32%), increasing 3 percentage points from last year.

Despite the declining trend in liquid bulk since 2000 associated with the decline in North Sea oil, the majority of the liquid bulk cargo continues to come from crude oil and oil products. Dry bulk is mainly composed of aggregates extracted from the sea bed.

Additionally, Ro-Ro and Lo-Lo accounted for 15% of all tonne-kilometres increasing 1 percentage point from last year.

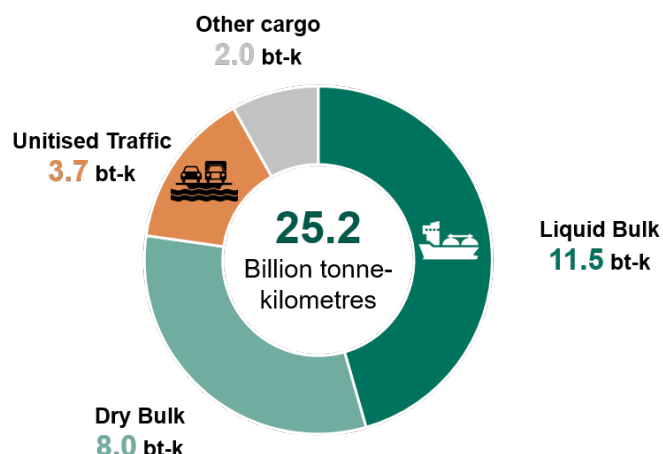
Inland waters traffic overall accounts for 7% of domestic waterborne freight traffic measured by goods moved. This traffic can be carried by barges or seagoing vessels on inland waterways.

In 2019, inland waters traffic reached 1.7 billion tonne kilometres, increasing 6% compared to last year ([PORT0705](#)).

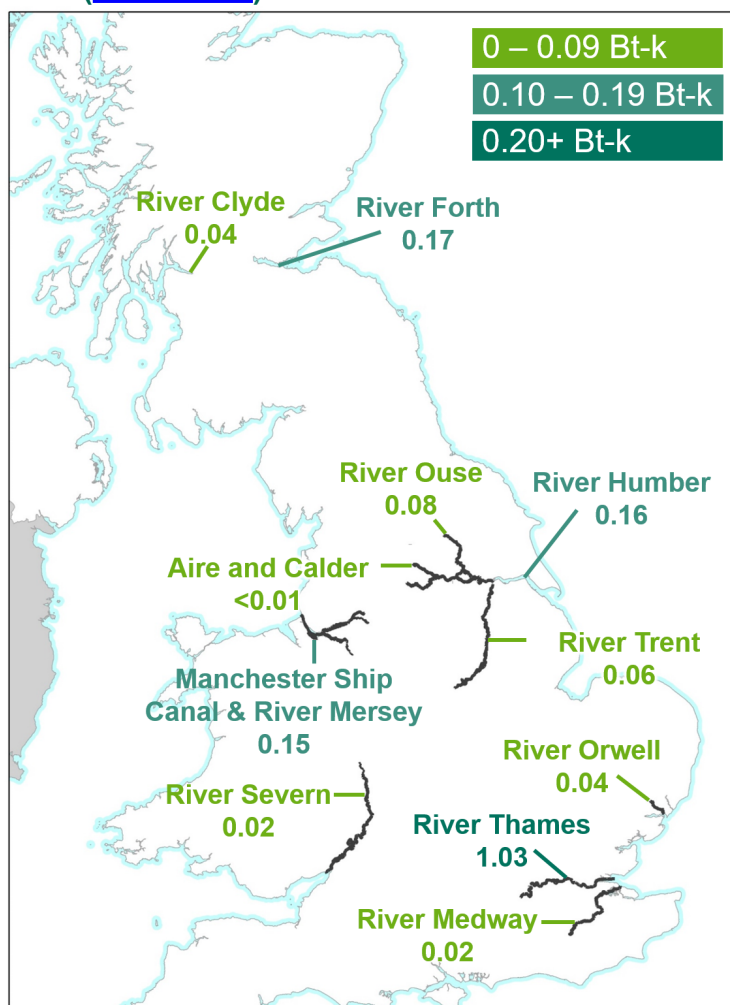
Of the navigable waterways, the Thames handled the most domestic traffic in the UK, accounting for over half (62%) of all goods moved by inland waterway in 2019.

In terms of goods lifted, the River Thames handled around 26.6 million tonnes of freight (53% of all total traffic on UK waterways - table [PORT0704](#)).

Domestic waterborne freight goods moved by cargo, 2019 ([PORT0702](#))



Major inland waterway routes, goods moved, 2019 ([PORT0705](#))



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5. Background Notes

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

- Overall the port freight statistics are believed to be fit for the purposes outlined on page 2, though data are known to be less reliable at lower levels of aggregation e.g. port, route and country level. The notes and definitions document includes comparisons with other sources which illustrate some differences.
- Final port freight statistics are published 8 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 in the [Technical Note](#) and [Background Quality Report](#) are completed and checked. The detailed results in this release are based on this grossed data.
- Vessel arrivals statistics are considered less robust, and are outside the scope of National Statistics as a result, though are believed to give a good general indication of the more significant seagoing movements.
- Domestic waterborne freight (DWF) statistics are National Statistics, and draw largely on data from the same collection as port freight statistics. Further details of the coverage and compilation of these statistics are given in the [DWF notes and definitions](#) document.

Related information

- The web tables and charts give further detail of the key results presented in this statistical release. They are available here: [port and domestic waterborne freight statistics](#).
- These [notes](#) provide further information such as definitions and a list of UK ports.
- The [Background Quality Report](#) provides further information on how the data is collected, quality assured and comparisons with relevant data sources.
- 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: [Code of Practice](#). The arrivals statistics included in this release are not National Statistics.
- These statistics were [designated as National Statistics](#) in February 2013. The continued designation was confirmed in December 2018.
- Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: [pre-release access list](#).
- Provisional summary quarterly statistics on freight handled by UK major ports are also updated quarterly. The latest tables can be found here: [port freight quarterly statistics](#).

Feedback

We welcome any feedback on these statistics by email to maritime.stats@dft.gov.uk, or fill in our two-minute [user feedback survey](#) which aims to make Maritime Statistics better, more informative and more user friendly.



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