



# Roll-on roll-off international freight statistics: Notes and Definitions

## Introduction

This document supports the latest statistics in the Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe series. Detailed data tables are available from the website.

It is based on survey data collected from roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators and Eurotunnel. It collects information on the number of powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers, carried on all the ferry routes from Great Britain and Europe, plus the Channel Tunnel.

These notes provide definitions, background information and methodology on the Department for Transport's (DfT) roll-on roll-off international freight statistics for road goods vehicles travelling to Europe. The latest statistics and accompany data tables can be found on the [DfT road freight webpage](#).

## Background

The statistics in the Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe series are compiled from the Roll-on Roll-off goods vehicle survey provided by all of the roll-on roll-off ferry operators in Great Britain, as well as Eurotunnel. These returns are provided by the operators for each ferry route leaving Great Britain that carried roll-on roll-off goods vehicles and by Eurotunnel for data pertaining to the Channel Tunnel. This release and the traffic it details is sometimes referred to as 'RoRo'.

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The Roll-on Roll-off Goods Vehicle Survey started in 1971. Up to 1978, inward traffic was also recorded, but because it was similar to outward traffic, the data requirement was discontinued to save respondent effort; consequently statistics in this series are for outward traffic only. Data in this series is published from 1983 to 2003 covering vehicles departing Great Britain for mainland Europe. From 2004 onwards this series includes vehicles travelling to the Republic of Ireland, and so incorporates the whole of Europe (mainland Europe plus the Republic of Ireland).

## Further information

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More information on port freight statistics can be found on the [DfT maritime and shipping statistics webpage](#).

## Definitions

<b>Roll-on / Roll-off ('RoRo')</b>	The action of vehicles driving on and off a ferry on their own wheels.
<b>Goods vehicle</b>	Freight vehicles with a gross vehicle weight of more than 3.5 tonnes.
<b>Powered vehicle</b>	A goods vehicle classed as either: (i) a rigid lorry; (ii) an articulated lorry (tractor and trailer, counted as one unit); or (iii) a tractor unit only.
<b>Unaccompanied trailer</b>	A tow-bar trailer or articulated semi-trailer not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit. Unaccompanied trailers are not carried by the Eurotunnel freight service.
<b>Great Britain (GB)</b>	England, Scotland and Wales, but excluding Northern Ireland.
<b>European Union (EU)</b>	The political union of 28 European nations. The current EU member states at time of writing are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
<b>Travelling to Europe</b>	International ferry routes leaving Great Britain for the commonly held geographical description of Europe, including all associated islands. Domestic routes (within the UK, such as those to Northern Ireland) and those to the UK Crown Dependencies or Gibraltar, are excluded from the main findings of this series.
<b>Port Group</b>	A classification of ports around Great Britain. There are four port groups in this series: North Sea, Dover Strait, English Channel, and Irish Sea.
<b>North Sea port group</b>	All ports on the east coast of Great Britain, north of and including the Thames estuary.
<b>Dover Strait port group</b>	Ferry routes from Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate; along with road goods vehicles using the Channel Tunnel (which opened in 1994).
<b>English Channel port group</b>	All ports on the south coast of Great Britain, west of Folkestone.
<b>Irish Sea port group</b>	All ports on the west coast of Great Britain.
<b>Country of disembarkation</b>	The country where the port in which the goods vehicle rolls off the ferry is located – regardless of the vehicle's country of registration. Only activity travelling to Europe – as defined above – is included. There have only been thirteen countries of disembarkation recorded in this series since 2004: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Spain and Sweden. Statistics where the country of disembarkation is Northern Ireland are excluded from the main findings in this series, but are given separately in Table RoRo1001.
<b>Country of vehicle registration</b>	The country where the powered vehicle is registered to, regardless of where it has travelled from, or the nationality of the driver. The country of vehicle registration is not collected for unaccompanied trailers.

### The Roll-on / Roll-off Goods Vehicle Survey

The statistics in the *Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe* series are compiled from quarterly returns of the Roll-on Roll-off Goods Vehicle Survey provided by all the roll-on roll-off ferry operators in Great Britain, for each ferry route leaving Great Britain that carried roll-on roll-off goods vehicles; and by Eurotunnel, for data pertaining to the Channel Tunnel. Only data on vehicles travelling to Europe are collected, where this is defined as the commonly held geographical description of Europe. A list of active routes recorded since 2004 can be found in Table [RoRo0901](#).

In each return, operators are asked to provide information on the number of powered vehicles (disaggregated by country of registration) and unaccompanied trailers travelling outbound from Great Britain on the route, during a three month period. Powered vehicles includes: rigid lorries; articulated lorries (tractor and trailer counted as one unit) and tractor units only; all over 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight. Unaccompanied trailers includes: tow-bar trailers and articulated semi-trailers not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit. Vehicles being exported as freight are excluded from the figures.

The survey requires the operator to provide the country of registration for powered vehicles. For some routes, information on country of registration is extracted by the operator directly from the manifests or waybills, while on others it is identified from the vehicle registration number pattern. Where this information is not available, driver nationality is sometimes used as a proxy for the country of vehicle registration. The country of vehicle registration is not collected for unaccompanied trailers.

Revised estimates for 2004 to 2007 were published in May 2008 following a data quality review. New methodology was used to impute the country of registration for powered vehicles causing a break in the series between 2003 and 2004. As such, comparing figures on countries of registration across this break should be done with caution. Following the review, the survey was put onto a statutory basis, and since early 2008 returns have been received from all operators, with more complete reporting of country of vehicle registration. The quality of the results is therefore thought to have been substantially improved since 2008. This is particularly noticeable for data from the Irish Sea port group where prior to this period, a large number of powered vehicles were recorded as having an unknown country of registration.

## Published statistics

A list of accompanying statistical data tables are as follows:

<a href="#">Table RoRo0101</a>	Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe
<a href="#">Table RoRo0201</a>	Powered goods vehicles, by country of registration
<a href="#">Table RoRo0301</a>	All goods vehicles, by country of disembarkation and port group
<a href="#">Table RoRo0302</a>	All goods vehicles from each port group, to each country of disembarkation
<a href="#">Table RoRo0401</a>	Powered vehicles, by country of disembarkation and port group
<a href="#">Table RoRo0402</a>	Powered vehicles from each port group, to each country of disembarkation
<a href="#">Table RoRo0501</a>	Unaccompanied trailers, by country of disembarkation and port group
<a href="#">Table RoRo0502</a>	Unaccompanied trailers from each port group, to each country of disembarkation
<a href="#">Table RoRo0601</a>	UK-registered goods vehicles, by country of disembarkation and port group
<a href="#">Table RoRo0701</a>	Foreign-registered goods vehicles, by country of disembarkation and port group
<a href="#">Table RoRo0901</a>	Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe, list of active routes
<a href="#">Table RoRo1001</a>	Road goods vehicles travelling to the island of Ireland, by country of disembarkation and country of registration

None of the results from this survey are seasonally adjusted. Comparisons between quarters should be limited to comparisons with the same quarter in other years, or between twelve month periods, to avoid seasonal effects.

Note that the pre-2004 figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. As such, there may be slight discrepancies between the sum of constituent items and totals as shown; whilst any recorded value of less than 500 will be shown as “~”. Historic data for some countries of registration is not available, therefore comparisons between historic EU totals as given in Table [RoRo0201](#) should be treated with some caution.

## List of ports included in the statistics

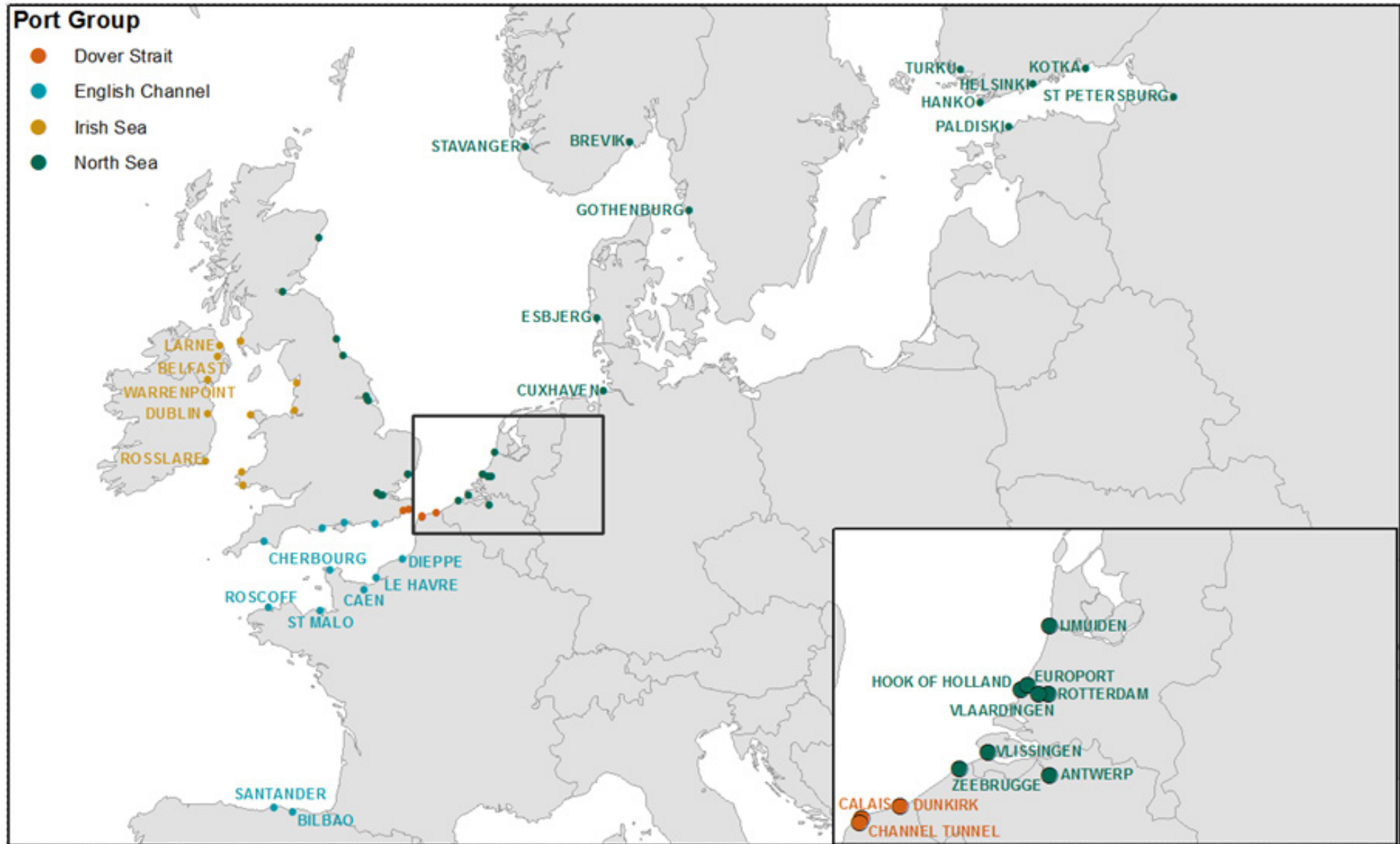
A list of all routes where roll-on roll-off activity was recorded is available from 2004 onwards in Table [RoRo0901](#). For some of these routes, roll-on roll-off activity has not have been recorded for each quarter but the route may still have been active during that quarter.

A list of all Great Britain ports which recorded roll-on roll-off activity in 2017 is given below:



*Note: Some routes from Cairnryan, Heysham and Liverpool go to Northern Ireland and therefore these domestic routes not included in overall figures in the release. Routes from Cairnryan only go to Northern Ireland.*

A list of all foreign ports which recorded roll-on roll-off activity in 2017 is given below:



Note: Domestic routes to Northern Ireland via Belfast, Larne and Warrenpoint are not included in overall figures in the release.

### Revisions in 2017

Whilst undertaking routine data quality assurance checks, the DfT identified inconsistent figures in data supplied by a large ferry operator in the Dover Strait port group dating back to 2008.

The inconsistencies related to the total number of powered vehicles, the country of vehicle registration and the number of unaccompanied trailers. The ferry operator was only able to supply corrected data from 2013 onwards. As such, care should be taken when reviewing data relating to the country of vehicle registration between 2008 and 2013 for the Dover Strait port group, as there may be some minor classification issues.

Following the identification of these errors, DfT undertook a full review of data for all other routes and operators and a number of minor revisions were also made to the data, mainly affecting the country of registration for powered vehicles as given in Table [RoRo0201](#).

More information regarding these revisions can be found on page 7 of the statistical release at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/road-goods-vehicles-travelling-to-mainland-europe-april-to-june-2017>.

### Revisions in 2007

In 2007, several operators were able to supply more reliable information about both the number of road goods vehicles and their country of registration for powered vehicles, from 2004 onwards. As a result of this new data, revisions were made to the figures from 2004 to 2007; which largely reflected the removal of vans (with a gross vehicle weight of 3.5 tonnes or less) from the figures reported by several major operators.

Furthermore, new methodology for the country of registration for the years 2004 to 2006 was developed as a result of discussing the new information supplied with operators. The new methodology resulted in a break in the series between 2003 and 2004 and comparisons of country of registration across this time period should therefore be treated with caution.

## Users and uses of these statistics

One of the primary uses of this data is to provide a census of vehicles leaving Great Britain, which is used for grossing up the associated sample survey of International Road Haulage (IRHS). This grossing process is used to align data from the IRHS to the total international road freight activity carried out by vehicles registered in Great Britain, which enables the Department to meet the EC Regulation [1172/98](#). More information on how these statistics are used to gross up figures in the IRHS can be found in the [Road Freight Statistics Notes & Definitions](#).

Other uses of these statistics include informing Government policy on international road freight, including analysis on international road haulage demand, economic activity and demand for Great Britain ports.

## National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated roll-on roll-off international freight statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#). The letter of confirmation as National Statistics can be found [here](#).

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.



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