



Department for Transport

International Road Freight Statistics, United Kingdom 2015

About this release

This Statistical release summarises the latest statistics on the international activity of UK HGVs. The information is derived from two continuous surveys run by the Department for Transport: the International Road Haulage Survey (IRHS) and the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI).

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International road freight activity falls in 2015

Key results

In 2015 ...



	2014 to 2015 change
3.9 million tonnes exported from the UK	↓ 9 percent
4.3 million tonnes imported to the UK	↓ 7 percent
8.2 million tonnes lifted in total	↓ 8 percent



2.68 billion tonne kilometres moved from the UK	↓ 9 percent
2.81 billion tonne kilometres moved to the UK	↓ 4 percent
5.49 billion tonne kilometres moved in total	↓ 6 percent

- ▶ In 2015, more goods were imported by road to the UK than exported
- ▶ 27 percent of goods lifted by UK HGVs were between the UK and France
- ▶ 98 percent of goods lifted by UK HGVs were to or from the EU15
- ▶ Foreign HGV cabotage accounted for just 1 per cent of road freight activity within the UK

Definitions

Goods lifted: the weight of goods carried measured in tonnes.

Goods moved: a measure of activity taking into account the weight of the load and distance through which it is hauled. It is equal to the weight of goods multiplied by distance and is measured in tonne kilometres.

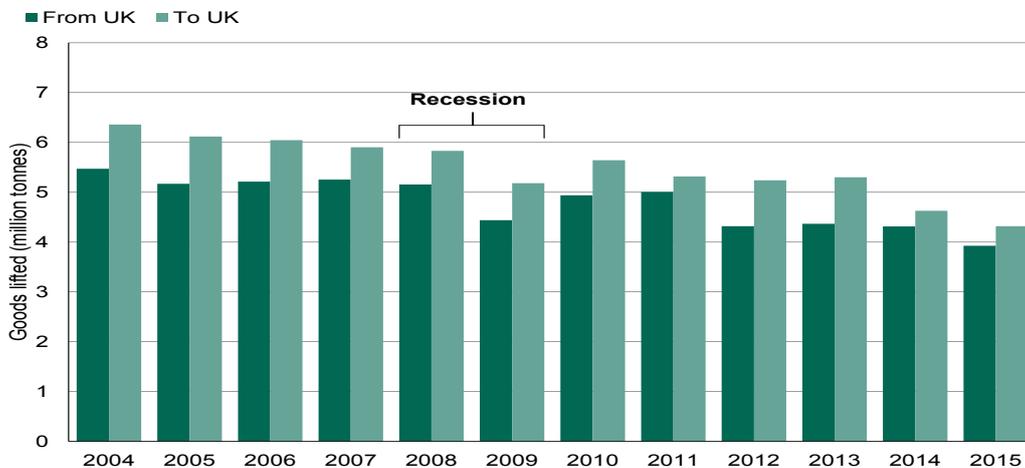
Cabotage: refers to road haulage solely within one country by a vehicle registered in another country.

International activity of UK-registered HGVs

In 2015, the amount of **goods lifted** by UK-registered heavy goods vehicles travelling to or from the UK was 8.2 million tonnes, down 8 per cent on 2014, and is 48 per cent lower than the 1999 peak of 15.9 million tonnes. There was a 12 percent decrease in **goods lifted** in the year following the 2008 recession and decreases seen in 2014 and 2015 may be due in part to the disruptions seen at key freight interchanges e.g. disruption at Dover-Calais. [[Table RFS0201](#)].

Historically, UK registered vehicles have consistently brought more goods to the UK than from the UK. In 2015, of the 8.2 million tonnes of **goods lifted**, 4.3 million tonnes were imported, and 3.9 million tonnes were exported (Chart 1)

Chart 1: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicles, 2004-2015 [[Table RFS0201](#)]



There was a 6 per cent decrease in the amount of **goods moved** from 5.9 billion tonne kilometres in 2014 to 5.5 billion tonne kilometres in 2015. This is a fall of 67 per cent from the 1997 peak of 16.5 billion tonne kilometres. Of the 5.5 billion tonne kilometres of **goods moved**, 2.68 billion tonne kilometres were from the UK and 2.81 billion tonne kilometres were to the UK.

In 2014 for the first time since 2000, more goods were moved from, rather than to the UK. Neighbouring European countries reported similar patterns in the amount of goods moved to and from the UK. However in 2015, the flow of goods reverted to trend. There is currently insufficient information to assess whether the 2014 data was affected by the intermittent disruptions seen at Calais.

In 2015, around 90 per cent of the tonnage leaving the UK in UK-registered vehicles was unloaded in one of five countries: France (24 per cent), Belgium (22 per cent), Irish Republic (21 per cent), Germany (13 per cent) and the Netherlands (10 per cent). The same five countries also represented the origin of 90 per cent of inward goods (Chart 2 and Tables [RFS0202](#) and [RFS0203](#)).

Definitions

Goods lifted: the weight of goods carried measured in tonnes

Goods moved: a measure of activity taking into account the weight of the load and distance through which it is hauled. It is equal to the weight of goods multiplied by distance and is measured in tonne kilometres

Percentage change between 2014 and 2015

Goods lifted

↓ 7 per cent decrease in the amount of **goods lifted** to the UK

↓ 9 per cent decrease in the amount of **goods lifted** from the UK

↓ 8 per cent decrease in total amount of **goods lifted**

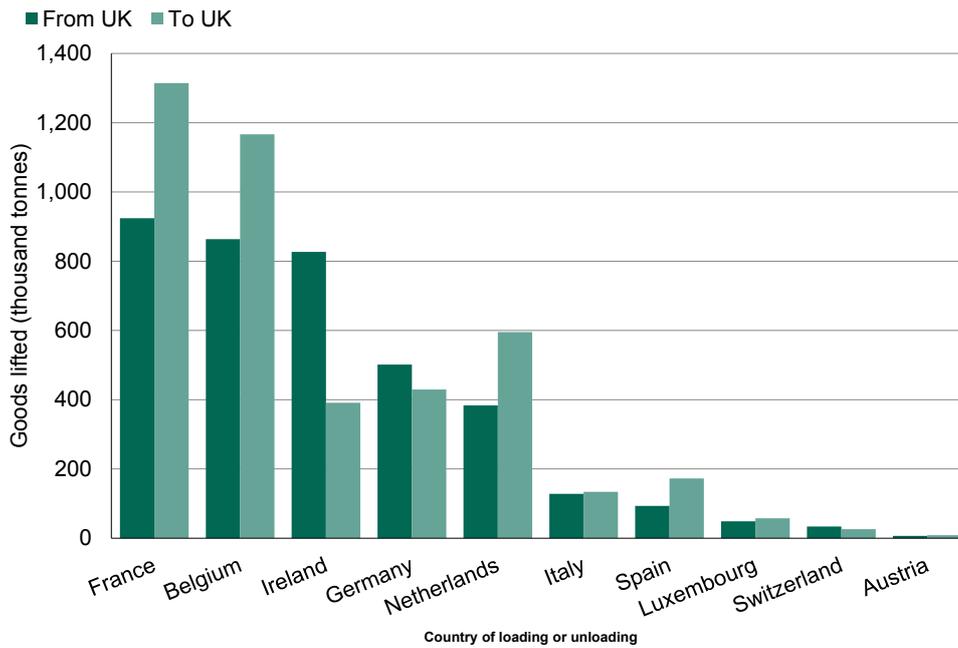
Goods moved

↓ 4 per cent decrease in the amount of **goods moved** to the UK

↓ 9 per cent decrease in the amount of **goods moved** from the UK

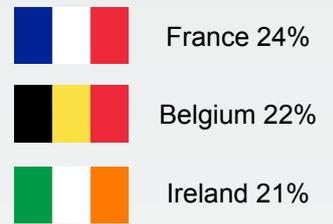
↓ 6 per cent decrease in the total amount of **goods moved**

Chart 2: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicles by country of loading or unloading, 2015 [[Table RFS0202](#)]



Goods lifted in 2015, origin and destination:

From the UK to ...



To the UK from ...

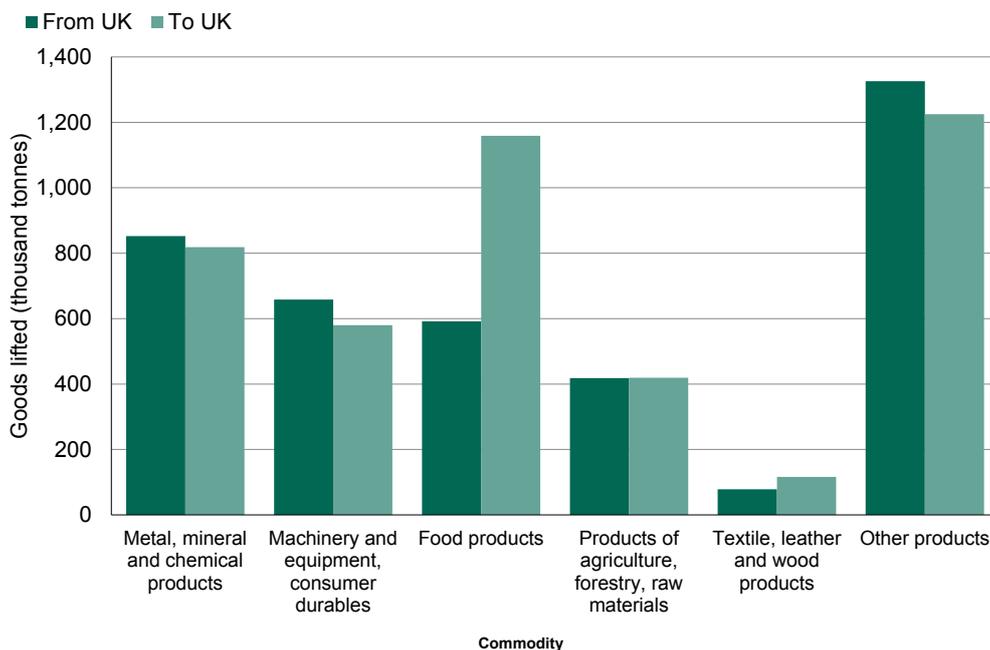


NB Some HGV trips may be part of a multi-modal or multi-stage journey. The final destination of the HGV road element may therefore not be the final destination of the goods.

Commodities carried by UK-registered vehicles

The most common single category of commodity exported by UK vehicles in 2015 was “Metal, mineral and chemical products” (22 per cent). This was followed by “Machinery and equipment, consumer durables” (17 per cent) and “Food products” (15 per cent). The main commodities imported were ‘Food products’ (27 per cent), “Metal, mineral and chemical products” (19 per cent) and “Machinery and equipment, consumer durables” (13 per cent). Non-categorised “Other products” accounted for around 30 per cent of both exports and imports (Chart 3 and [Table RFS0206](#)).

Chart 3: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicle by commodity type, 2015 [[Table RFS0206](#)]



Goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe

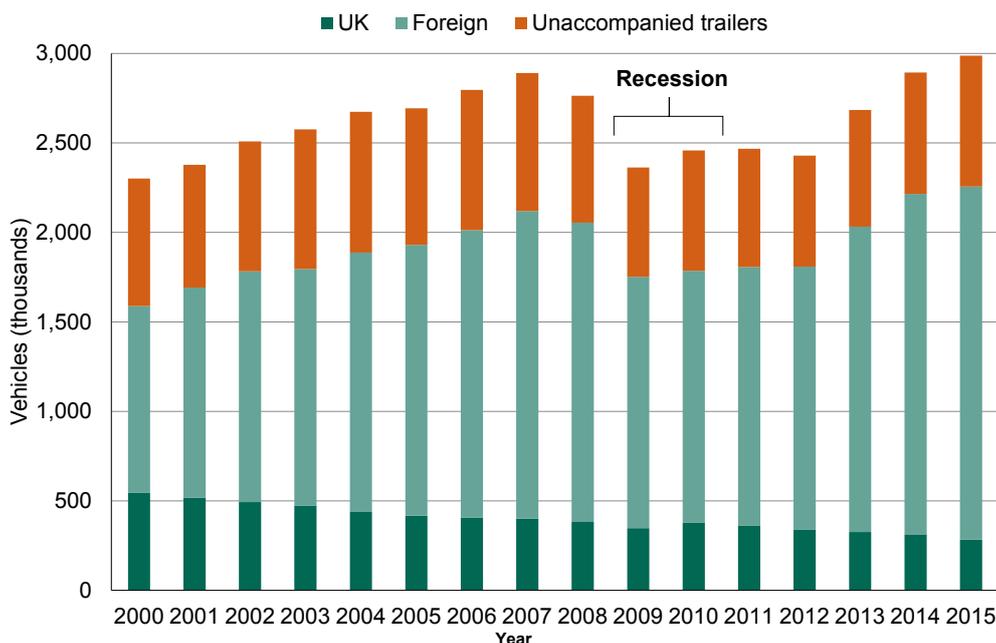
Chart 4 (Table [RORO0101](#)) shows that the number of goods vehicles (powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers) travelling to mainland Europe from the UK rose by 3 per cent between 2014 and 2015, from 2.9 to 3.0 million. The number of UK-registered vehicles travelling to mainland Europe fell by 10 per cent (313,000 to 283,000) while the number of foreign-registered vehicles rose by 4 per cent (1.9 million to 2.0 million).

Since the turn of the century, the total number of goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from the UK has increased by 29 per cent; foreign-registered vehicles have increased by 89 per cent while the number of UK-registered vehicles has decreased by 48 per cent.

During the recession period of 2008 to 2009, there was a drop in the total number of goods vehicles travelling to the UK, with the majority of this fall being accounted for by fewer foreign vehicles. It wasn't until 2013 that the total number of vehicles begin to increase again.

Of the foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from the UK in 2015, the most common (468 thousand) were Polish-registered, followed by vehicles registered in the Romania (212 thousand), Netherlands (212 thousand), Germany (133 thousand) and Spain (132 thousand) (Table [RORO0201](#)).

Chart 4: Heavy goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from the UK, 2000-2015 [[Table RORO0101](#)]



Definitions

Powered vehicles:

comprise rigid vehicles, lorries with semi-trailers (articulated units) and lorries with drawbar trailers (some vehicles under 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight are also included)



Unaccompanied trailers:

comprise trailers and semi-trailers not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit. These trailers are moved on and off the ferry by means of a motive unit, often called a tug. After this they can be re-connected to a powered unit to continue their onward journey.

Unaccompanied trailers



Detailed statistics...

on road goods travelling to mainland Europe can be sourced from [roll-on, roll-off international freight statistics](#), Department for Transport.

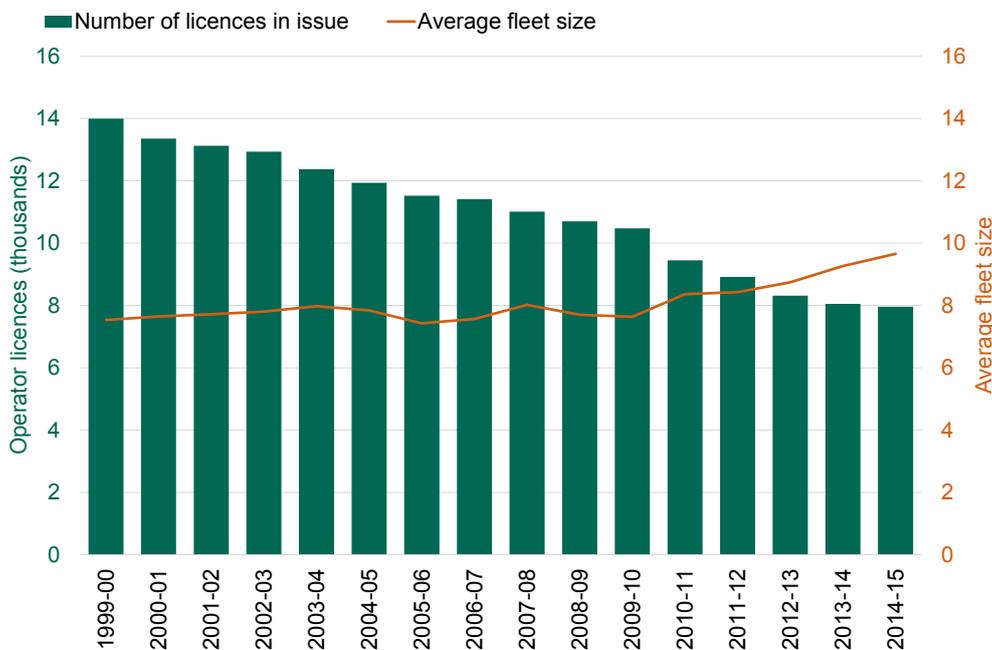
Goods vehicle operator licences

The number of HGV Standard International (SI) Operator Licences in issue in Great Britain dropped from 8,048 in 2013-14 to 7,960 in 2014-15, a fall of one per cent. This continues the trend that has been seen for over a decade, with the number of licences declining by 43 per cent since 1999-00 when just under 14 thousand licences were in issue (Chart 5).

The highest number of licences were issued in the Eastern region of GB, 1,716 in 2014-15, virtually unchanged from the 1,714 in issue in 2013-14. The large number of licences issued in the Eastern region maybe due in part to the proximity to port links to European destinations and generally higher levels of freight activity in this area.

The total number of vehicles covered by SI licences increased by 3 per cent, from 74,578 in 2013-14 to 76,869 in 2014-15. The average size of operators' international fleet has increased from 7.5 vehicles in 1999-2000 to 9.7 vehicles in 2014-15. This means fewer licences are in issue but more vehicles are being specified under these licences (Chart 5). The same trend can be seen for domestic licences.

Chart 5: Standard International Licences in issue and average fleet size, Great Britain, 1999-2000 to 2014-2015 [[Traffic Commissioner's Annual Report](#)]



Definitions

UK hauliers must obtain a Standard International Operator's Licence to carry goods for others, for hire or reward, within the UK and on international journeys. This applies to all vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating above 3.5 tonnes.

Change in Standard International licences in issue between 2013 and 2014

↓ 1 per cent decrease in number of SI licences in issue

↑ 3 per cent increase in number of vehicles specified under SI licences

Detailed statistics...

on the number of operator licences, broken down by issuing office, can be found within the [Traffic Commissioner's Annual Reports](#).

Data for 2015-2016 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

Road haulage by foreign-registered HGVs in the UK

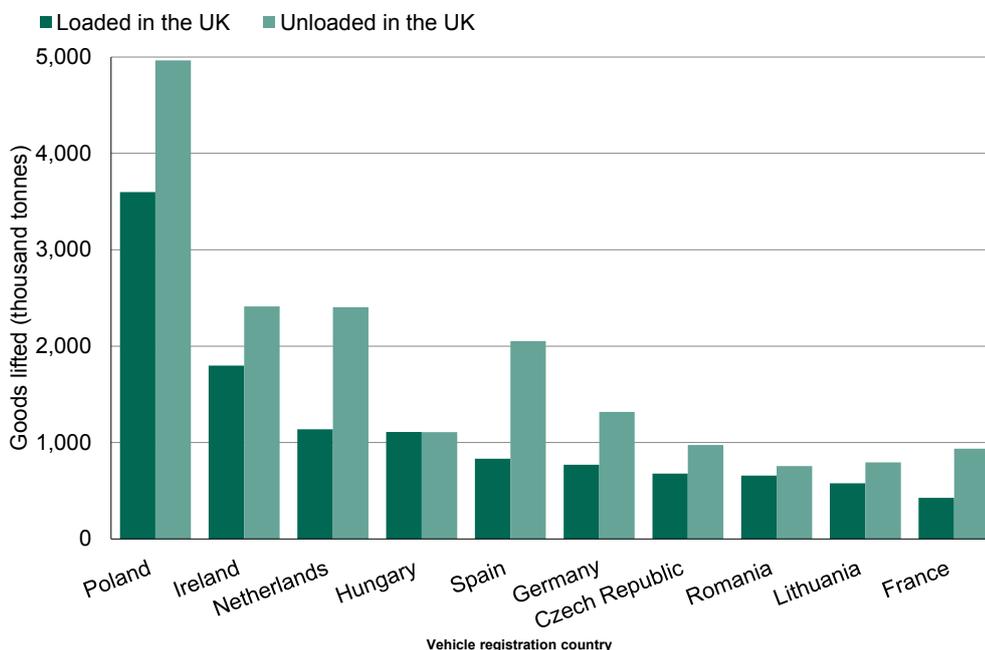
In 2014, 34.2 million tonnes of goods were lifted to and from the UK by foreign-registered HGVs, a fall of 7 per cent on 2013. Since 2009, Polish HGVs have lifted the largest tonnage of goods in total of all the EU28 countries, lifting 8.6 million tonnes in 2014. Prior to this, between 2002 and 2008, Irish HGVs carried the largest total weight of goods into or out of the UK, mostly across the Irish land boundary between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Irish vehicles continued to carry significant quantities in 2014, as did Dutch, Hungarian, Spanish and German HGVs (Chart 6 and Tables [RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)).

Detailed statistics...

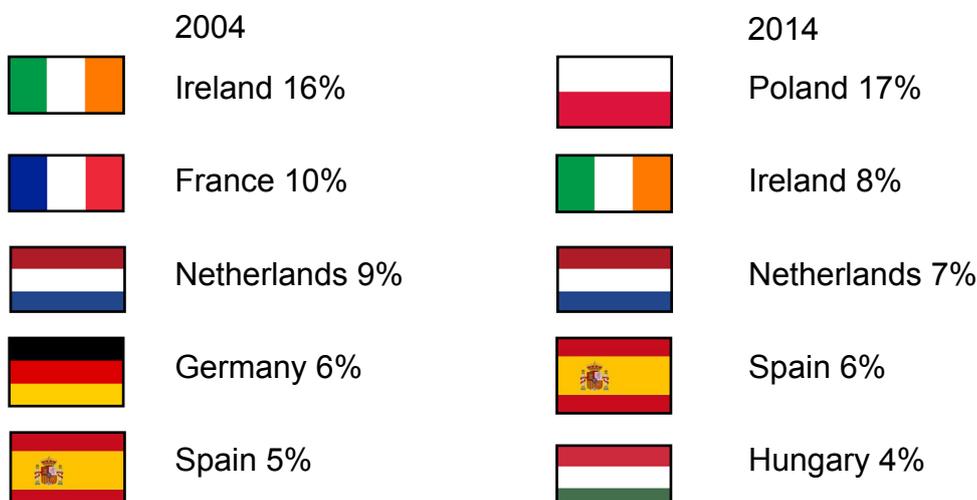
on the activity of foreign registered vehicles can be obtained from the [Eurostat Transport Database](#).

Data for 2015 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

Chart 6: Goods lifted to and from the UK by foreign-registered vehicle: by vehicle registration country, 2014 [[Tables RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)]



Total goods lifted to or from the UK by foreign-registered vehicles - Ten year comparison



Cabotage within the UK by foreign-registered vehicles

In 2014, the overall level of cabotage **goods moved** in the UK was 1.4 billion tonne kilometres, just one per cent of all HGV activity within the UK. The level of cabotage has remained relatively stable for the last decade, however a drop was seen during the period following the 2008 recession. (Table [RFS0212](#)).

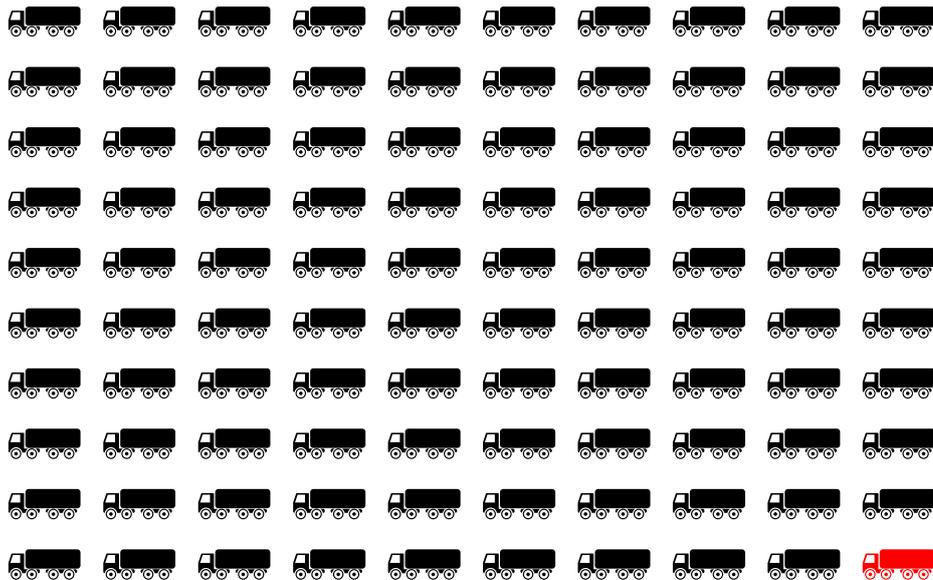
In terms of **goods moved**, the major participants to cabotage in the UK were vehicles from Poland, Netherlands and Ireland. These three countries accounted for 57 per cent of cabotage in the UK. France, Germany and Portugal together accounted for most of the remaining cabotage in 2014.

The amount of cabotage by Polish vehicles in the UK has increased seven fold between 2004 and 2014 from 52 million tonnes kilometres to 371 million tonne kilometres. Over the same period cabotage tonne kilometres from Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland dropped by 80 per cent, 64 per cent and 61 per cent respectively.

In 2014, cabotage accounted for just 1 per cent of UK HGV activity (Table [RFS0212](#))

 UK domestic activity

 Foreign cabotage



Definitions

Cabotage: refers to road haulage solely within one country by a vehicle registered in another country.

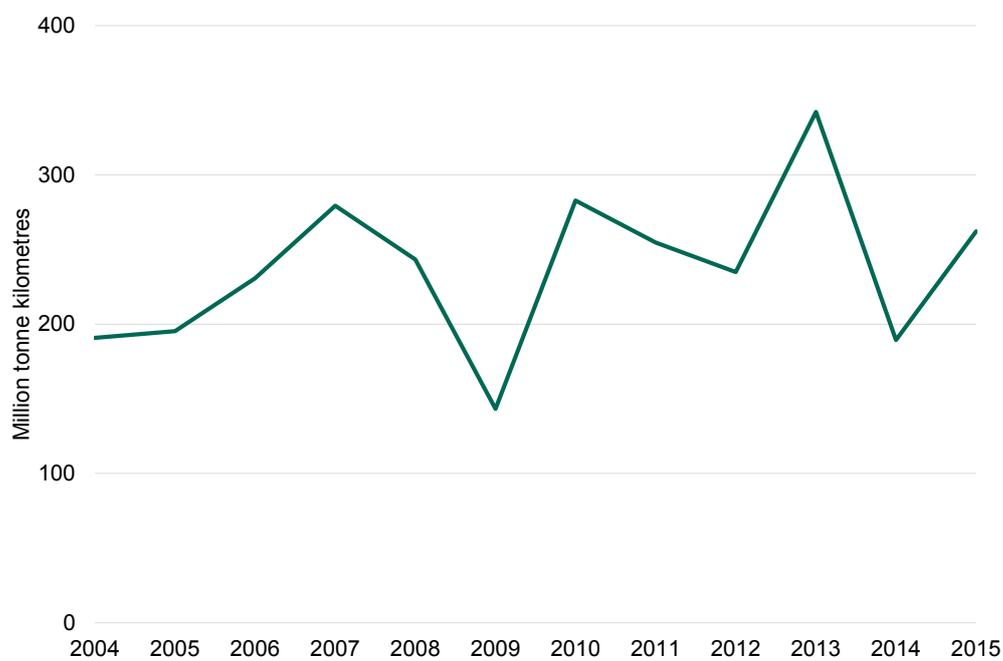
Detailed statistics...

on cabotage in the UK by vehicle registration country can be sourced in Table [RFS0212](#)

Cabotage by UK registered vehicles

UK vehicles did approximately 262 million tonne kilometres of cabotage in foreign countries in 2015, up from 189 million tonne kilometres in 2014 (Table [RFS0144](#) and Chart 7).

Chart 7: Cabotage by UK registered vehicles, 2004-2015 [[Table RFS0144](#)]



Users and uses of statistics

Road freight statistics are a key source of management information on the use of the country's infrastructure. Main use occurs across various types of public and private bodies: the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat), local and central government, such as the Office for National Statistics and Highways England; local town and transport planning bodies; commercial organisations, such as haulage operators and transport consultants, and academics.

Users are mainly interested in information such as the length of haul, empty running, the pattern of freight from abroad on UK roads. The statistics also support policies on freight, road safety and on reducing congestion and pollution.

Strengths and weaknesses of data

The figures in this release are derived from the International Road Haulage Survey (IRHS) which collects information on HGVs registered in Great Britain making international trips. Excluded from the survey are HGVs registered in Northern Ireland, foreign-registered vehicles and vehicles of 3.5 tonnes or less gross vehicle weight (Light Goods Vehicles).

The IRHS is a continuous survey which collects a range of information on freight movements from a sample of firms holding a standard international HGV licence. These licences are issued by the eight regional Traffic Commissioner Offices (TCO) and data provided to DfT by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA).

Figures are weighted to be representative of the volume of HGV traffic travelling from GB to mainland Europe using ferry routes and the Channel Tunnel. This information is collected from returns provided by the roll-on / roll-off ferry operators (RORO), giving the number of powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers carried on each route from GB to mainland Europe, and from monthly information supplied by Eurotunnel.

The use of RORO data to weight the IRHS data may introduce a small bias due to the fact that this information is collected on outward traffic only. This will affect the weighting of vehicles which return to the UK using a route different than that for the outward journey. RORO data is also only able to disaggregate between UK and foreign vehicles. An assumption is therefore made on the proportion of UK vehicles which are registered in Northern Ireland to obtain an estimate of GB registered vehicles.

Between 2011 and 2012, a number of changes were made to how the three DfT road freight surveys were processed. Caution should therefore be used for statistics based on the three freight surveys when making comparisons over time. See the [Road Freight Statistics methodology note](#) for more information.

Guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics and further information can be found in the [Road Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

Background Notes

The data tables give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other road freight topics, including the domestic activity of UK-registered HGVs. These data tables are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>

This release also collates statistics from a number of published sources that are revised and updated throughout the year. The data for this release were extracted in July 2016, and users can refer to the links overleaf for the most recent or revised data available for each of the sources used, and also caveats relating to the sources.

1. The web tables give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other road freight topics, including domestic activity of GB-registered HGVs. They are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>
2. The statistics on vehicles travelling to mainland Europe are available on the 'Roll on roll off International Freight' webpages via <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>
3. The statistics on road freight undertaken by foreign-registered vehicles have been taken from the Eurostat Transport database at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/transport/data/database>
4. In 2009, the Department for Transport undertook a survey of foreign vehicle activity in the UK. The results from this survey are available here: <http://tna.europarchive.org/20110503185748/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/freight/foreignvehicle/>
5. Guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics and further background information can be found in the Road Freight Statistics [Notes and Definitions](#).
6. 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/road-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>
7. The next annual Road Freight Statistics release will be published in the Summer of 2017. It will contain statistics for 2016.

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/road-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>.

Acknowledgements

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