



**TRANSPORT  
SCOTLAND**  
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

# Scottish Transport Statistics 2024

## Water Transport

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## Introduction

This chapter provides information about foreign and domestic freight traffic at Scottish ports and inland waterways by type of freight and country of origin and destination. It also includes statistics on passengers and vehicles carried on ferry routes operating in Scotland and routes between Scotland and Northern Ireland and Europe as well as some statistics on HM Coastguard search and rescue operations.

Port traffic statistics methodology changed in 2000, to comply with the requirements of a new EC Maritime Statistics Directive. This produced large changes in the figures for one-port and coastwise traffic, and in the split between domestic and foreign traffic, between 1999 and 2000. Details of the method and notes on the effect of the change are given in the water transport section of the user guide.

From 2015 DfT no longer publish a Scottish data for coastwise, one port and inland waterway traffic and we are unable to update tables 9.1, 9.9 and 9.11 as fully as we previously did.

**Transport and travel habits in Scotland were profoundly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, with restrictions on travel and daily activity in place for large parts of 2020. However, with restrictions being lifted in 2021 travel patterns started to recover.**

## Key Points

- There were 55 million tonnes of freight handled by ports in Scotland in 2023.
- There was a total of 8 million passengers and 3 million vehicles carried on ferry routes within Scotland in 2023.
- There were 1.7 million passengers and 0.47 million vehicles carried between Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2023.

## Main Points

### Freight Tonnage

Exports through major Scottish ports rose from 58 million tonnes in 1997 to 68 million tonnes in 2002 before steadily falling to 23 million tonnes in 2023 (there has been a 27% fall in the last ten years) - eight ports were counted as major ports in

1997 and 1998, there were nine in 1999 and 11 from 2000 onwards. Imports totalled 11 million tonnes, considerably less than the volume of exports. (*Table 9.2*)

Waterborne freight (both incoming and outgoing) passing through all ports decreased by 7% between 2022 and 2023 to 55 million tonnes. This was 23% less than in 2014, continuing a steady fall. In 2023, the eleven major ports accounted for 94% of the total traffic through Scottish ports. Exports accounted for 44% of the total freight through major Scottish ports and domestic outward traffic accounted for 22%. Imports, and incoming domestic freight were much lower, together accounting for 34% of the total freight through major Scottish ports. (*Table 9.2*)

## Ports and Destinations

Forth (19 million tonnes) and Clyde (9 million tonnes) accounted for the highest freight traffic in 2023. Forth traffic is 10% lower than 2022, and is 25% below 2014. Clyde's freight traffic has fluctuated between 2014 and 2023, falling overall from 16 million tonnes to 9 million tonnes in 2023. Again, as these figures are for the total volume of traffic, they are unaffected by the change in the method of compiling the statistics. (*Table 9.3*)

Bulk fuel accounted for 31 million tonnes (59%) of the total traffic through major Scottish ports in 2023. (*Table 9.4*)

The top ports for foreign traffic were: Forth (17.2 million tonnes); Clyde (7.0 million tonnes) and Sullom Voe (4.5 million tonnes). Almost all the imports from foreign traffic were at Clyde (6.5 million tonnes) and Forth (3.6 million tonnes). The ports that had the most outward domestic traffic were Glensanda (3.2 million tonnes), Cairnryan (2.1 million tonnes), Aberdeen (1.6 million tonnes) and Loch Ryan (1.3 million tonnes), and the ports that had most inward domestic traffic were Cairnryan (1.8 million tonnes) and Aberdeen (1.5 million tonnes). (*Table 9.6b*)

The main types of traffic through the major ports in 2023 were crude oil (21 million tonnes), other dry bulk (7 million tonnes) and oil products (7 million tonnes). (*Table 9.7*)

In 2023 most exports were destined for Netherlands (8.2 million tonnes), Poland (3.0 million tonnes), Germany (2.6 million tonnes) and Belgium (2.3 million tonnes) while most imports arrived from the USA (2.8 million tonnes) and the Norway (2.1 million tonnes). (*Table 9.8*)

## Passenger Services

### Routes to Northern Ireland and Europe

In 2023, 1.7 million passengers were carried on ferry services between Scotland and Northern Ireland. There were 0.47 million vehicles carried between Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2023, a 2 per cent decrease on 2022. Until its closure in 2018 the Rosyth to Zeebrugge freight route was the only ferry route between Scotland and Europe. (*Tables 9.13 (a) & (b)*)

### Routes within Scotland

This section covers all routes within Scotland for which data is available, for example data is not available for Pentland Ferries. These statistics include routes within Scotland that are subsidised by Scottish Government, local authority ferry services and privately run services. More detail is available in the water transport section of the user guide.

There were 8.0 million passengers carried on routes within Scotland in 2023, a rise of 5% compared to 2022 and 5% below the peak in numbers in 2007. Caledonian MacBrayne carried 5.1 million of these passengers (63%) and Western Ferries carried a further 16% on the Gourock-Dunoon route. (*Table 9.12a*)

There were 2.9 million vehicles carried on routes within Scotland in 2023, a 12% increase on 2021 (figures for 2022 are unavailable). Of these vehicles, 52% were carried by Caledonian MacBrayne and a further 22% by Western Ferries on the Gourock-Dunoon route. (*Table 9.12b*)

### Operators on subsidised routes within Scotland

Caledonian MacBrayne ferries carried 5.1 million passengers in 2023, 0.2 million (4%) more than in 2022. There were 1.5 million cars carried, (2%) more than 2022, and 86,000 commercial vehicles and buses, 2% less than 2022. (*Table 9.14a*)

Serco Northlink Ferries carried 405,000 passengers in 2023, a 19% increase compared to 2022. There were 94,000 cars carried on these routes in 2023, 15% more than 2022. (*Table 9.14a*)

### Local authority ferry services

Shetland Islands Council services carried 725,000 passengers in 2023, 10% more than 2022. There were 367,000 vehicles carried, a rise of 9% on 2022.

Orkney Ferries services carried 337,000 passengers in 2023, 5% more than in 2022. There were 106,000 vehicles carried on these routes, 5% more than the previous year. (*Table 9.14b*)

Ferries operated by Argyll and Bute Council carried 175,000 passengers in 2023. (*Table 9.14b and 9.16a*)

## Ferry routes within and to/from Scotland

The busiest ferry route within Scotland in terms of passengers and vehicles carried is the service between Gourock and Dunoon, operated by Western Ferries, which carried 1.2 million passengers in 2023. There were 619,000 cars carried on this route and 29,000 commercial vehicles and buses in 2023. (*Table 9.16*)

The second busiest Scottish ferry route over recent years in terms of passenger numbers has been the Cairnryan / Belfast route. This route carried 1.2 million passengers in 2023. (*Table 9.13a*)

The second busiest route in terms of cars carried was the Corran Ferry from Ardgour to Nether Lochaber operated by Highland Council with 146,000 carried in 2023. (*Table 9.16b*)

The busiest subsidised ferry routes are operated by Caledonian MacBrayne. The busiest route in terms of passengers in 2023 was Ardrossan-Brodick, with 724,706 passengers. Wemyss Bay-Rothesay was the busiest subsidised route for car traffic in 2023 with 203,872 car crossings, an increase of 7 per cent over the previous year. (*Table 9.15*)

The Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) scheme involves setting ferry fares on the basis of the cost of travelling an equivalent distance by road, more detail on RET can be found in the water transport section of the user guide. The West Coast routes where Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) has been rolled out carried 2,97,170 passengers in 2023 and 728,650 cars. The Clyde routes where Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) has been rolled out carried 2,682,306 passengers in 2023 and 721,368 cars. (*Table 9.15*)

## Ferry Punctuality

The level of reliability (the number of timetabled sailings actually operated, see table footnote in table for more detail) for Caledonian MacBrayne lifeline ferry services was 98.1% in 2023-24 and the level of punctuality (against the published timetable) was 99.4%. For Northlink the level of lifeline ferry services that were both punctual

and reliable was 99.9% for Aberdeen routes and 99.7% for the Pentland Firth in 2023-24. *(Table 9.17)*

## **Coastguard callouts**

Overall there were 4,396 incidents in 2024, 219 more than the previous year. *(Table 9.18)*



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Published by Transport Scotland, March 2025

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