



Irish Maritime
Development Office



Foras na Mara
Marine Institute

UNITISED TRAFFIC REPORT Q3 2024

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UNITISED TRAFFIC REPORT – Q3 2024

ABOUT THE IMDO

The Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) operates within, and is part of, the Marine Institute. The IMDO provides development, promotional and marketing support to the shipping and shipping services sector. It the aim of the IMDO to be the focal point for national and international maritime businesses in Ireland. The IMDO provides government and industry with a range of information and reporting across the sector and works with international businesses to help them set up or expand in Ireland.

The IMDO Economics team provide quarterly economic analysis, academic research, and regular policy advice to the Department of Transport relating to the Irish shipping market, ports and Irish trade. The IMDO will be centrally involved in the review of National Ports Policy in 2024. The IMDO produces an annual statistical bulletin on the Irish shipping market; The Irish Maritime Transport Economist. This is Ireland’s most comprehensive source of national maritime traffic data. Past editions of the Irish Maritime Transport Economist are available from the IMDO [website](#).



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NOTES

1. **UK Landbridge:** The UK Landbridge is a term used to describe a route to market that connects Irish importers and exporters to international markets via the UK road and ports network. It is a strategically important means of access to the single market that has been favored by traders in high value or time sensitive goods because it offers significantly faster transit times than alternative routes. The reintroduction of customs controls as a consequence of Brexit increases transit times and places additional costs on Irish businesses that undermines their competitiveness in accessing international markets.
2. **RoRo (Roll-on Roll-off):** RoRo involves vessels designed to carry wheeled cargo, such as cars, trucks, semi-trailer trucks, trailers, etc., that can be driven on and off the ship on their own wheels, or using a platform vehicle, such as a self-propelled modular transporter.
3. **LoLo (Lift-on Lift-off):** LoLo involves a specific ship that engages in the transportation of containerized freight, that is loaded and unloaded by ship-to-shore cranes.
4. **TEU:** The twenty-foot equivalent unit (often TEU or teu) is a unit of cargo often used to describe the capacity of container ships and container terminals.
5. **RoPax:** The sector that uses vessels capable of carrying passengers, passenger vehicles, and RoRo freight
6. **Ireland / ROI / Irish:** Republic of Ireland
7. **NI:** Northern Ireland
8. **GB:** Great Britain
9. **ROI – EU:** RoRo services operating between Dublin, Cork or Rosslare Europort, and a mainland European Port that is inside the European Union
10. **ROI – GB:** RoRo services operating between Dublin, Cork or Rosslare Europort, and a port in Great Britain.
11. For **Data requests**, please contact the IMDO team.

UNITISED TRAFFIC GROWTH IN Q3 2024 (Vs H1 2023)



ROI RORO: -1%

NI RORO: 2%



ROI LOLO: 15%

NI LOLO: -1%



ROI Tourist Passengers: -1%

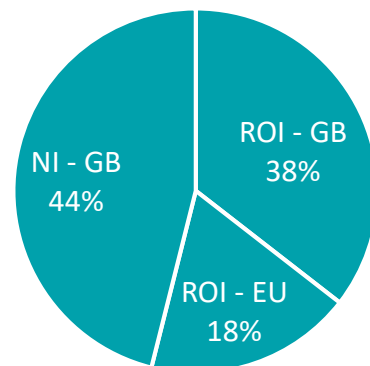
NI Tourist Passengers: -2%



ROI – EU RoRo: -3%

ROI – GB RoRo: 0%

All Island RoRo Share



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Executive Summary

In the third quarter of 2024, the unitised traffic market, comprised of the Roll-on/Roll-off (RoRo) and Lift-on/Lift-off (LoLo) sectors, showed contrasting trends.

ROI RoRo volumes recorded a 1% decline compared to Q3 2023. Rosslare-Europort was the only port to record an increase, with volumes growing by 2%. This was driven by an increase in traffic on Rosslare – GB routes, which have declined significantly through this port post-Brexit. In Dublin, RoRo volumes fell by 1%, stemming from a drop in Dublin – EU traffic.

However, the fluctuations this quarter were minimal. For the first nine months of the year, RoRo volumes are similar to those of 2023, lagging just 1% behind. The decrease in 2024 has resulted from small, but consistent declines in driver accompanied traffic, with unaccompanied RoRo traffic remaining stable. There has also been remarkable stability in the separate markets for ROI – GB and ROI – EU RoRo traffic, post-Brexit. Since the midway point of 2021, both have averaged 0% monthly growth on a seasonally adjusted basis, indicating no sign of a return to their pre-Brexit levels.

The RoRo market in 2024 can therefore be characterised as steady, but ultimately lacking upward momentum. That stands in stark contrast to the LoLo market, where volumes are rising sharply. LoLo volumes in Q3 2024 grew by 15% compared to the same period in 2023, achieving a record high of approximately 320,000 TEU's in one quarter. For the first nine months of the year, LoLo volumes are outperforming 2023 by 10%. The sector is on track to exceed the previous annual record of 1.17 million TEU's recorded in 2021, when COVID-19 changes in consumer behaviour drove a surge in traffic.

Such growth is a welcome development in this market after a difficult 2023, when inflationary pressures resulted in an annual decline of 5%. All of the losses from that year are set to be recovered in 2024. All three LoLo ports – Dublin, Cork and Waterford - have benefited from the increase in traffic, with market shares remaining relatively stable. Among them, Dublin Port has performed marginally better than its counterpart ports. This is attributable to modal shifts, from RoRo to LoLo, that have occurred within the port this year.

Overall, more containerised cargo is passing through Irish ports in 2024 compared to 2023. That is not surprising, given that inflation rates have eased considerably compared to 2023, and domestic demand remains strong. That is reflected in the latest report by the Central Bank of Ireland, which forecasts domestic demand to grow by 2.4% in 2024 and the inflation rate to fall to 1.6% for the year. When combined, Irish unitised traffic is performing well in 2024. Combined volumes are above 2023 and slightly behind 2022. This sector of the Irish shipping market therefore remains stable and resilient in the wake of rising prices in recent years.

Roll-on / Roll-off (RoRo)

Table 1 illustrates the volume of RoRo traffic handled at ports across the island of Ireland in the third quarter of 2023 and 2024. Table 2 shows total RoRo volume on the island of Ireland broken down by accompanied and unaccompanied RoRo traffic.

Table 1:

Port	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	RoRo Units	RoRo Units	%	RoRo Units
Dublin	242,968	239,690	-1%	-3,278
Rosslare - Europort	50,629	51,682	2%	1,053
Cork	1,723	1,708	-1%	-15
Republic of Ireland	295,320	293,080	-1%	-2,240
Belfast	155,082	158,163	2%	3,081
Larne	43,344	43,645	1%	301
Warrenpoint	26,869	27,643	3%	774
Northern Ireland	225,295	229,451	2%	4,156
All - Island	520,615	522,531	0%	1,916

Source: IMDO

Table 2:

Port	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	RoRo Units	RoRo Units	%	RoRo Units
Accompanied	83,642	80,383	-4%	-3,260
Unaccompanied	211,678	212,697	0%	1,019
Republic of Ireland	295,320	293,080	-1%	-2,240
Accompanied	80,032	78,772	-2%	-1,260
Unaccompanied	145,263	150,679	4%	5,416
Northern Ireland	225,295	229,451	2%	4,156
Accompanied	163,674	159,155	-3%	-4,520
Unaccompanied	356,941	363,376	2%	6,435
All - Island	520,615	522,531	0%	1,916

Source: IMDO

Subdued Demand

Figure 1 presents a visualisation of the volume of accompanied, unaccompanied and total RoRo traffic carried through ROI ports in the third quarter of each year between 2017 and 2024.

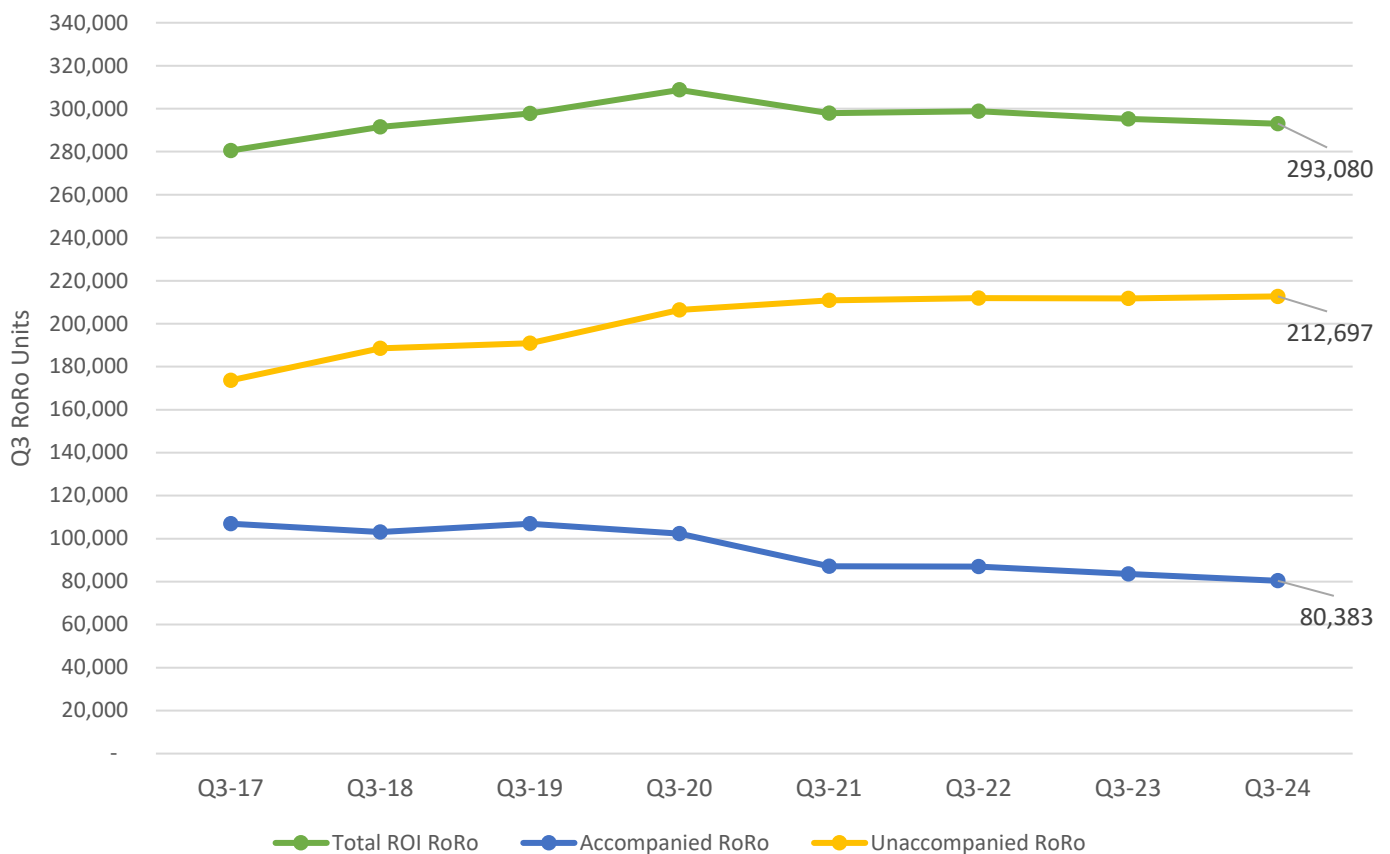
A key takeaway from Figure 1 is that third quarter RoRo volume has held firm in the post-Brexit era, hovering slightly above or below 295,000 units, but ultimately lacking significant growth. The total for Q3 2024 of 293,080 units, is the lowest Q3 total since Q3 2018.

On average, RoRo traffic in the third quarter of a given year is not subject to significant seasonality, with volumes typically aligning closely with the quarterly average for the year. The third quarter is therefore a good bellwether for the general performance for the year.

Year to date, RoRo volumes are 1% below where they were after three quarters in 2023: 877,000 units compared to 886,000 units. Looking ahead to Q4, the busy retail months of October and November - which are typically 7% above average - will need to outperform 2023 to make up for lost ground in the first three quarters of 2024.

Between 2022 and 2024, wherein global inflation rose sharply and gradually declined, and the most disruptive effects of Brexit and COVID-19 have abated, the long term trend for ROI RoRo traffic has been stable, if very slowly declining. The long term trend points to a total of 295,000 units per quarter. At 293,080 units, the total for Q3 2024 is slightly below this benchmark.

Figure 1: Q3 ROI RoRo Volume by Traffic Mode, 2017 – 2024



Source: IMDO

Another key point to take from Figure 1 is the contrasting trends in accompanied and unaccompanied RoRo traffic. As evident in Figure 1, third quarter unaccompanied RoRo volume was rising between 2017 and 2020, and has remained remarkably stable between 2021 and 2024. In this latter period, Q3 unaccompanied RoRo volume has averaged 212,000 units with very little fluctuation.

Q3 accompanied RoRo volume was stable in the years preceding Brexit, but declined in the years thereafter. This reflects trends highlighted in previous IMDO reporting, which show that accompanied RoRo traffic has fallen as more traffic moves onto direct RoRo services to mainland European ports. Due to their longer journey times at sea, the unaccompanied RoRo

mode is more commonly chosen on these routes¹. Given the stability in unaccompanied RoRo traffic in the post-Brexit period, the 2024 decline in Q3 ROI RoRo traffic has therefore been driven by the accompanied mode. Consequently, the share of RoRo traffic held by the unaccompanied mode has ticked upward once more and is now above 72% in 2024, compared to 64% in 2019.

ROI RoRo Traffic by Route

Table 3 presents RoRo volume on ROI – GB routes. ROI – GB represents ferry routes between Dublin Port/Rosslare-Europort, and Great Britain ports including Holyhead, Liverpool, Heysham, Pembroke and Fishguard. Table 4 presents RoRo volume on ROI – EU routes. ROI – EU represents direct ferry services between Dublin, Cork, and Rosslare – Europort, and seven mainland European ports: Bilbao, Cherbourg, Dunkirk, Roscoff, Rotterdam, Santander, Zeebrugge.

Table 3:

Route	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	RoRo Units	RoRo Units	%	RoRo Units
Dublin - GB	181,982	181,956	0%	-26
Rosslare - GB	14,947	15,869	6%	922
ROI - GB	196,929	197,825	0%	896

Source: IMDO

Table 4:

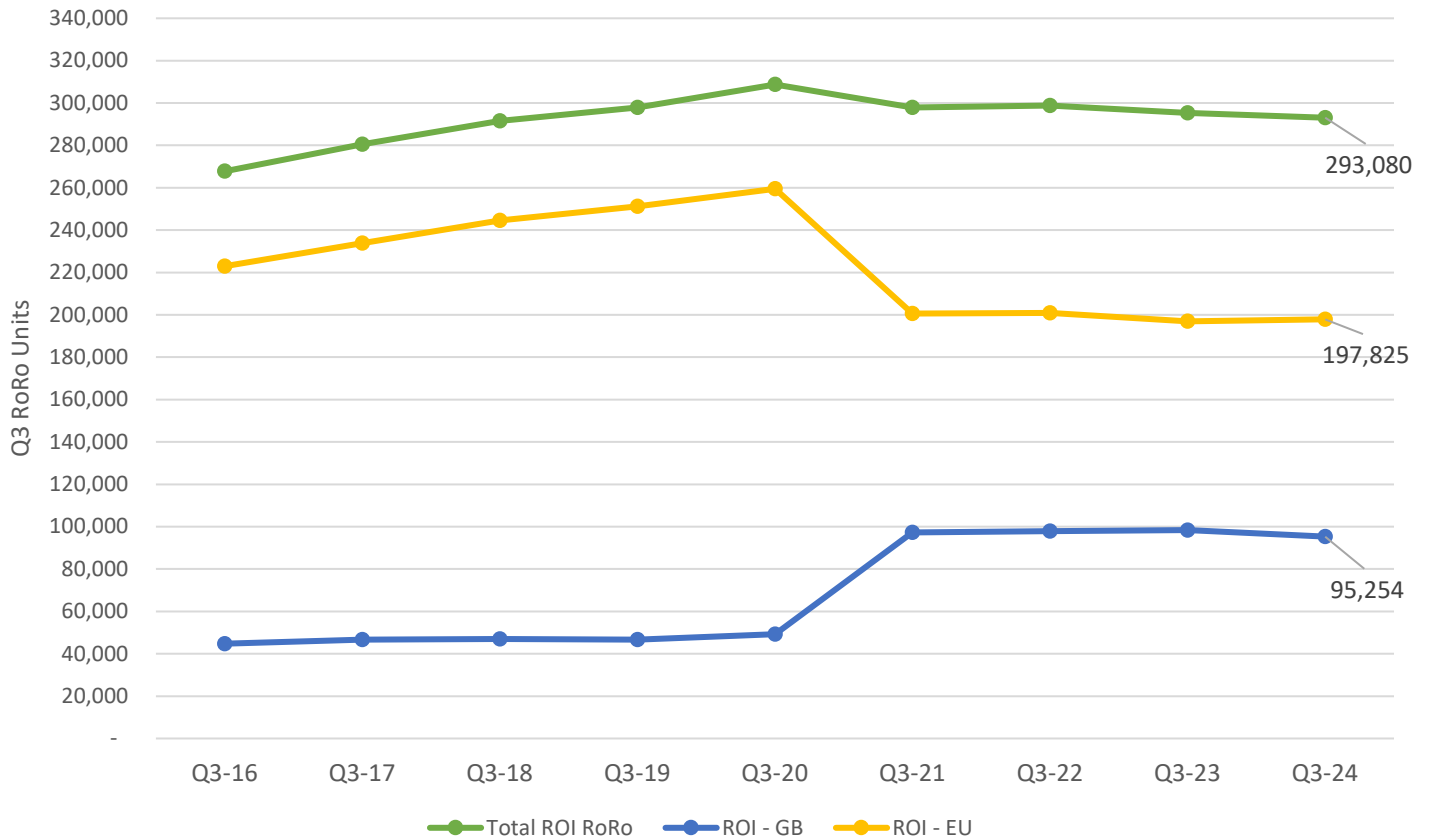
Route	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	RoRo Units	RoRo Units	%	RoRo Units
Dublin - EU	60,986	57,734	-5%	-3,252
Rosslare - EU	35,682	35,812	0%	131
Cork - EU	1,723	1,708	-1%	-15
ROI - EU	98,391	95,254	-3%	-3,136

Source: IMDO

Figure 2 presents a visualisation of the volume of ROI - GB, ROI - EU and total RoRo traffic carried through ROI ports in the third quarter of each year between 2017 and 2024.

¹ For more information on the post-Brexit divergence between accompanied and unaccompanied RoRo traffic, see the [Irish Maritime Transport Economist Vol 21, pg. 29](#)

Figure 2: Q3 ROI RoRo Volume by Route, 2016 – 2024



Source: IMDO

The key takeaway from Figure 2 is the remarkably stability in both ROI – GB and ROI – EU volumes following the dramatic shifts which occurred at the end of the Brexit transition period in 2021. In the third quarter of each year between 2021 and 2024, ROI – GB traffic has averaged just under 199,000 units, while ROI – EU traffic has averaged 97,000 units. Little fluctuation has been evident in these third quarter volumes.

In Q3 2024, ROI – EU RoRo volume fell by 3% to 95,254 units. This is the routes lowest total since the shift towards direct routes in 2021, and it drove the overall decrease in ROI RoRo traffic in Q3 2024. ROI – GB volumes took a step towards the 200,000 mark, by adding 896 units. This follows a relatively steep decline of 3,900 units which was recorded in Q3 2023.

Northern Ireland RoRo

As shown in Table 1, RoRo traffic at NI ports increased slightly, by 2%, to 229,451 units. Northern Irish RoRo traffic has been relatively stable since 2022 with volumes consistently falling between 220,000 and 230,000 units per quarter. This is in contrast to a quarterly average of 211,000 units per quarter between 2017 and 2020, i.e. the years leading up to the end of the Brexit transition period².

² To read more about the impact of Brexit on Northern Irish RoRo traffic, see [The Irish Maritime Transport Economist, Vol 20, pg. 29](#)

At the port level, volumes at Belfast, Larne and Warrenpoint ports have also been relatively consistent, with little fluctuation throughout the post-Brexit period. Between 2021 and 2024, Belfast records, on average, a volume of approximately 153,000 RoRo units per quarter, Larne 44,000 and Warrenpoint 27,000.

Lift-on / Lift-off (LoLo)

Table 5 presents the volumes of LoLo traffic handled at ports across the island of Ireland in the third quarters of 2023 and 2024. It shows the total LoLo volume, measured in twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), encompassing both laden (full) and unladen (empty) LoLo volumes.

Table 5:

Port	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	TEU's	TEU's	%	TEU's
Cork	66,084	73,178	11%	7,095
Dublin	202,216	234,017	16%	31,802
Waterford	9,725	12,610	30%	2,885
Republic of Ireland	278,024	319,805	15%	41,781
Belfast	55,733	55,448	-1%	-285
Warrenpoint	0	0		0
Northern Ireland	55,733	55,448	-1%	-285
All-Island	333,757	375,253	12%	41,497

Source: IMDO

In the third quarter of 2024, LoLo (container) volumes in ROI ports rose by 15% to a total of 319,805 TEU's, adding 41,781 TEU's compared to Q3 2023. This is a record total for quarterly LoLo traffic, surpassing the previous peak of 310,485 TEU's set in Q2 2022.

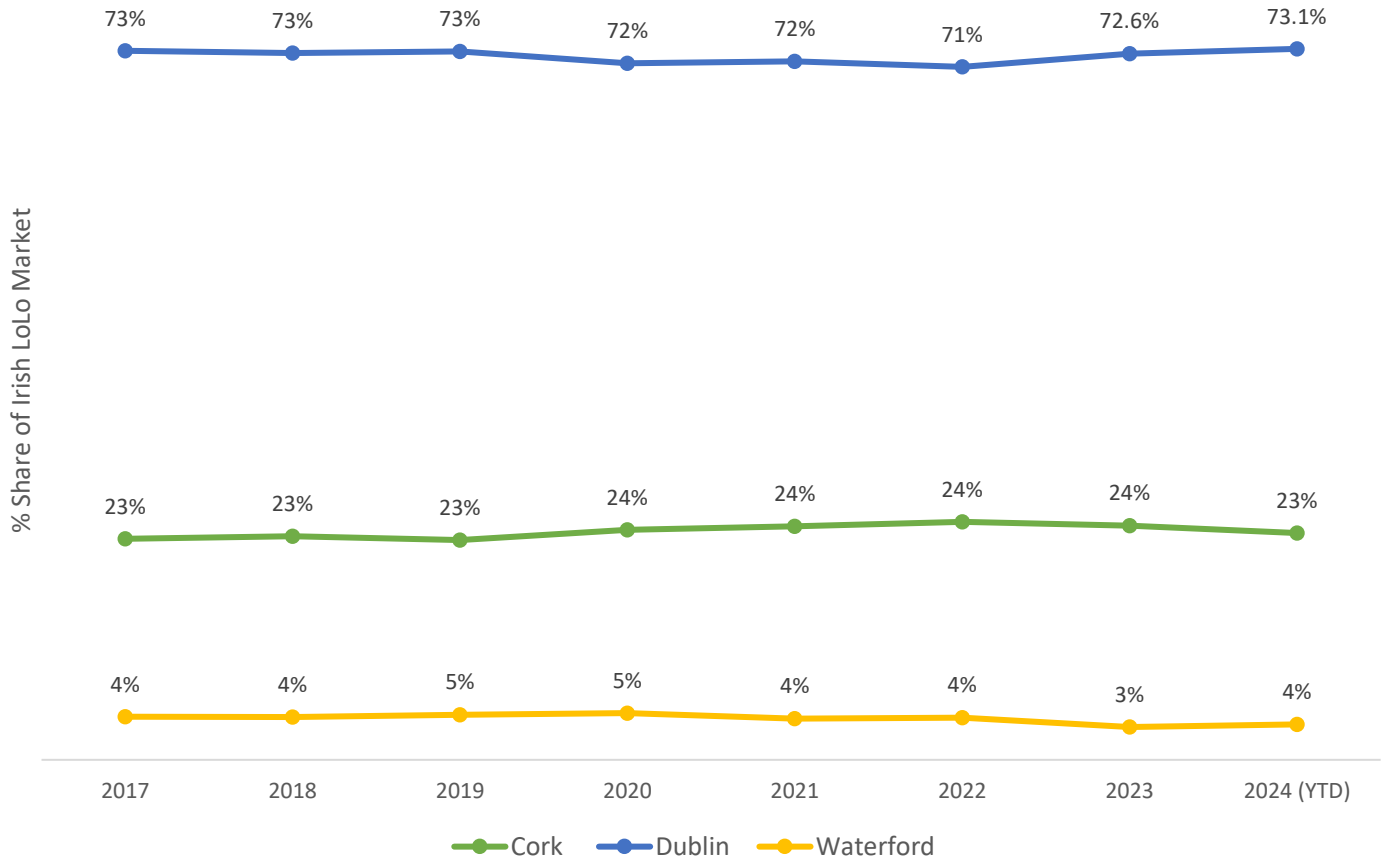
Put simply, Irish LoLo traffic is currently exhibiting a notable upward trend. Container volumes are more than 80,000 TEU's (10%) above where they were at the same point in 2023. The quarterly average for 2024 is slightly above 300,000 TEU's, compared to 274,000 TEU's throughout 2023. If Q4 2024 exhibits similar strength, the LoLo market in Ireland will surpass 1.2 million TEU's for the first time on an annual basis.

This trajectory has been evident for several quarters. On a seasonally adjusted basis, LoLo traffic has averaged 4% growth per quarter since Q4 2023. The long term trend for this market predicts a quarterly total of approximately 296,000 TEU's. Volumes are currently outperforming this trend by 8% as the market undergoes a clear period of growth.

This upward trend is a welcome sign, as container traffic has struggled with the high inflation levels that characterised much of 2022 and 2023. Throughout 2023, Irish container markets underperformed relative to their long term trend by approximately 6%. The growth that has been evident in 2024 will therefore help to recover much of these losses from the previous year.

Figure 3 illustrates the share of the Irish LoLo market held by its three constituent ports: Cork, Dublin and Waterford Ports.

Figure 3: ROI LoLo Volume, Port Shares, 2017 – 2024:



Source: IMDO

The key takeaway from Figure 3 is that port shares in this market have remained relatively steady during the recent uplift in LoLo traffic, meaning all three ports have benefitted from the recent increase in volumes.

However, Dublin Port has performed marginally better than both Cork and Waterford during this period, with its share rising by 0.5% in compared to 2023. As mentioned in the IMDO’s H1 2024 report³, this was largely driven by a modal shift within the unitised traffic sector. New LoLo services were introduced at Dublin Port in the second quarter of 2024, prompting a shift from existing RoRo traffic on direct routes to mainland European ports towards these new LoLo services. Although both RoRo and LoLo modes possess unique competencies and competitive advantages in different areas, their cargoes often include similar categories, such as manufactured goods. As effective substitutes, operators in each market compete for similar business. Given that most LoLo services operate directly to mainland EU ports, there is a high level of substitutability with ROI–EU RoRo services. This trend is common in the Irish unitised shipping market and became more pronounced in the post-Brexit era, when demand for direct services to mainland EU ports increased sharply.

³ [IMDO Unitised Traffic Report, H1 2024](#)

Passenger Market

Ferry Passengers

Table 6 illustrates the volume of RoRo ferry passengers that travelled through Irish and Northern Irish ports. In the Irish RoRo ferry market, many operators employ a RoPax model, meaning they carry not only freight traffic but passengers and passenger vehicles.

Table 6:

Passenger No.	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
	No.	No.	%	No.
Cork	59,311	55,722	-6%	-3,589
Dublin	666,344	651,690	-2%	-14,654
Rosslare-Europort	280,091	285,668	2%	5,577
Republic of Ireland	1,005,746	993,080	-1%	-12,666
Belfast	592,421	589,540	0%	-2,881
Larne	166,966	154,212	-8%	-12,754
Northern Ireland	759,387	743,752	-2%	-15,635
All-Island	1,765,133	1,736,832	-2%	-28,301

Source: IMDO

Passenger Vehicles

The term ‘passengers’ refers to the volume of people travelling on RoRo ferries. The volume of passenger ‘vehicles’ is also an important consideration for shipping companies. Although many maritime passengers travel on foot, the majority travel on, or with, a domestic vehicle, such as a car, bus, trailer, caravan, etc. Such vehicles share RoRo capacity with freight traffic i.e., HGV’s and unaccompanied containers. Monitoring the level of demand for these vehicles is important for tracking available shipping capacity at Irish ports, which can fluctuate throughout the year.

Table 7 illustrates the volume of passenger vehicles - which includes cars, coaches, caravans, and similar tourist vehicles – that travelled through Irish and Northern Irish ports.

Table 7:

Passenger Vehicles	Q3 2023	Q3 2024	% Ch	Diff
Port	No.	No.	%	No.
Cork	19,428	18,532	-5%	-896
Dublin	158,894	149,254	-6%	-9,640
Rosslare-Europort	100,788	103,726	3%	2,938
Republic of Ireland	279,110	271,512	-3%	-7,598
Belfast	146,077	142,146	-3%	-3,931
Larne	52,330	48,498	-7%	-3,832
Northern Ireland	198,407	190,644	-4%	-7,763
All-Island	477,517	462,156	-3%	-15,361

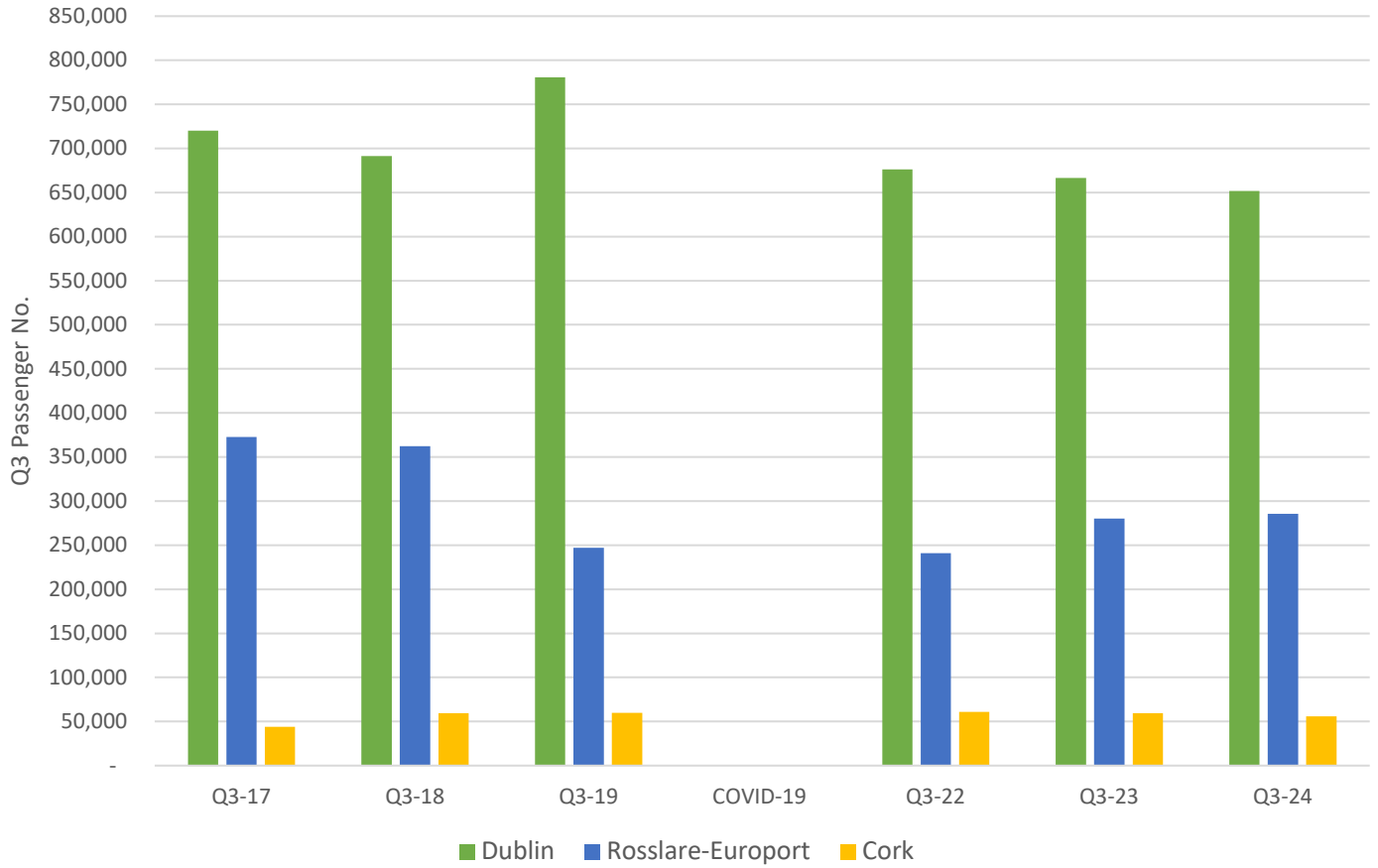
Source: IMDO

In the RoPax sector, the third quarter is consistently the busiest period for ferry passengers and passenger vehicles. In 2020 and 2021, no other Irish shipping sector was impacted more by COVID-19 restrictions than this one. By 2023, passenger numbers had largely returned to normal, though they still remain below pre-COVID levels.

In the ROI passenger market, Q3 passenger numbers averaged 1.1 million in the three summers before the onset of COVID-19, i.e. Q3 2017 – Q3 2019. In the post-COVID period, i.e. Q3 2022 – Q3 2024, average third quarter numbers have fallen by 11% to approximately 1 million. Similarly, the number of passenger vehicles in the post-COVID era is 4% below that of pre-COVID.

At the port level, Figure 4 below illustrates clearly the volumes of ferry passengers at each port in the years leading up to COVID-19 travel disruption, and the years following their removal. Figure 4 shows the number of ferry passengers through each port in the third quarters of 2017 – 2019, and 2022 – 2024. Only the Port of Cork has managed to outperform its pre-COVID average for ferry passenger numbers. In Dublin Port and Rosslare-Europort, numbers are yet to reach typical pre-COVID levels.

Figure 4: Ferry Passenger Numbers, ROI, Pre-COVID Vs Post-COVID:



Source: IMDO