

07/10/2023

The Impact on France's Geographical Detachment from Europe on Maritime & Rail International Trade

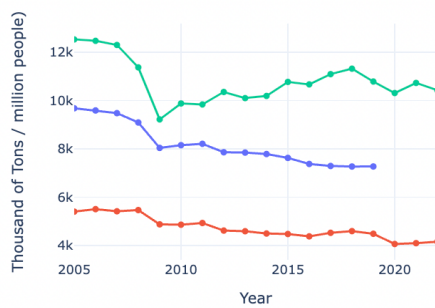
This report examines the hypothetical scenario where France becomes geographically detached from the continent, transforming into an island nation like the UK and Ireland. This analysis utilizes comparative data from the UK and Ireland, focusing on maritime and rail transport statistics to explore potential shifts in French trade dynamics and the transportation of goods. While Ireland remains within the EU and adheres to similar trade regulations as France, the UK shares closer economic and demographic similarities with France, providing a more straightforward comparison basis.

Economic and Demographic Overview 2023 (Source: [St. Louis Fed](#)):

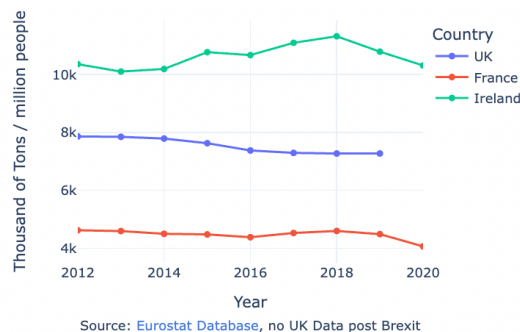
	GDP (trillion \$)	Population (million)	Exports (billion \$)	Imports (billion \$)
Country				
France	3.03	68.17	648.5	777.0
United Kingdom	3.34	68.35	519.4	684.0
Ireland	0.54	5.26	197.0	116.9

Merchant Fleet and Transport Modalities

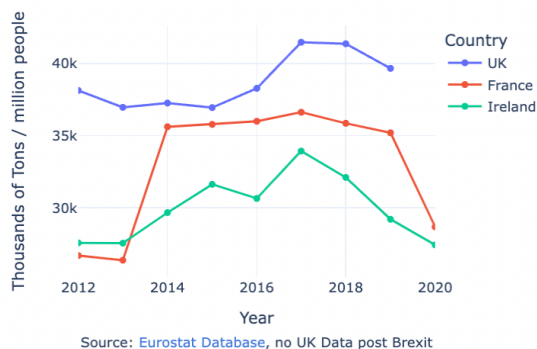
Gross Weight of Goods Handled at Ports (2010 to 2022)



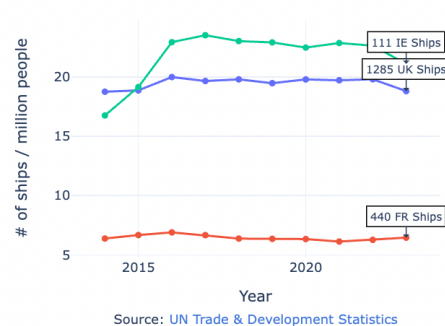
Amount of Goods Transported by Sea (2010 to 2022)



Amount of Goods Transported by Air



Ownership of Merchant Ships (2013-2023)



A key observation was the higher volume of goods transported by sea to the UK and Ireland compared to France, with the UK and Ireland owning more ships globally. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the volume of goods transported by air between France and the island nations. Also, despite being 13 times larger than Ireland, France has only 12 major ports, compared to the UK's 23 and Ireland's 5, highlighting a significant discrepancy in port infrastructure.

Railways for International Exports & Imports

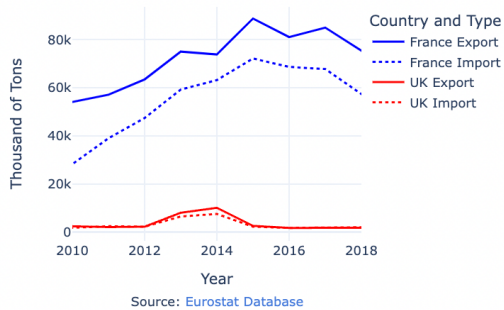
Given the similar GDPs and trade volumes of the UK and France, I sought to understand why their reliance on maritime transportation differs significantly. France heavily utilizes its rail network for international

trade, with key routes extending into Spain and Germany. These rail connections are crucial for the European supply chain, enabling the transport of a diverse array of goods such as agricultural products and industrial machinery. In 2023, France's rail trade was significant, with exports amounting to 60,000 thousand tons and imports at 50,000 thousand tons.

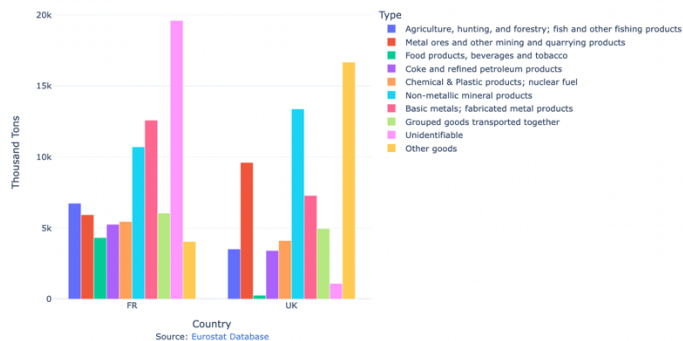
Contrary to my initial assumption that the UK might primarily use rail for agricultural transport, it turns out that the rail network is heavily employed for a broad spectrum of robust trading activities, particularly for transporting metals and mineral products, which are among the most transported commodities by rail in both the UK and France.

This analysis indicates that if France were to become an island nation, it would still rely on its rail network for domestic freight transport but would no longer be able to use rail for direct international trade. Ireland was not included in this comparison as its rail network is predominantly geared towards passenger transport, not freight.

International Goods Exported & Imported By Rail



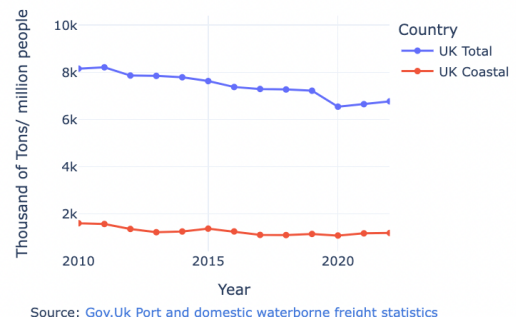
Top 10 Groups of Goods Transported by Rail in 2020



Coastal Freight Transportation of Goods

In the UK, coastal shipping plays a significant role, accounting for 17.4% of all freight traffic and transporting 80.5 million tons of goods in 2022. In contrast, this mode of transport is less prominent in France but has the potential for considerable expansion should France become an island nation. Such a transformation would greatly enhance the strategic importance of coastal shipping in France's freight logistics, shifting it from a relatively minor to a major component of the nation's transport infrastructure.

UK Coastal Port Traffic of Goods (2010-2022)



Takeaways:

Comparative Analysis: The UK provides a closer demographic and economic comparison to France than Ireland, making it a more relevant benchmark in this analysis.

Maritime Infrastructure: Given the geographic shift, France will experience a significant boost in merchant ships and maritime ports, reflecting a major expansion in its maritime capabilities.

Rail and Maritime Interaction: While international trade via rail may decrease, rail transport will not be eliminated; it remains vital in the UK for moving goods to ports for export and import, suggesting a similar potential pathway for France.

Growth in Coastal Shipping: Coastal shipping has experienced significant growth in the UK, accounting for a substantial part of freight movements, which could be a strategic focus for France if it were to become an island nation.

Key Datasets:

[UN Trade & Development: Merchant Fleet by Country](#), [Euro Statistics](#), [Gov.uk Transportation Statistics](#), [French Maritime Economic Data 2021](#)