

Note produced for Ramsgate Regeneration Alliance 4-7-23 (revised 27/02/24)

The demand forecasts by Infrata assume an upward change in trend between 2021 and 2022 and growth thereafter. These are not justified by the data and other assumptions are questionable.

Faulty demand forecast:

On page 4 of the Infrata report demand for ferry services is forecast to bounce back some 120% between 2021 and 2022 and grow by 1.7% annually thereafter.

Lorry traffic through The Port of Dover (according to their own website) was down 23% by 2022 from 2017, on a steadily downward trend **including 2022**. Passenger numbers are even more reduced (44%), with a recent blip attributable to the relaxation of Covid restrictions. It is reported that ferry companies right now plan cutting sailings from Dover due to excess capacity. So no 120% bounce-back is evidenced.

More recent and clear evidence of reduced traffic comes from P&O current scheduled sailings from Dover. In 2016 all P&O ships did 5 round trips a day, 4 ships, 20 trips. In the last 24 hours at date of writing they managed just 12. Furthermore, on 21st July, when schools break up (traditionally one of the busiest days of the year) they're only advertising 14 crossings.

Overall the 1.7% growth trend is not being realised. Government figures comparing Q1 2023 with the same quarter in 2022 show total freight tonnage decreased by 2% with unitised traffic flat. The final [port freight annual statistics for 2002](#) were published by the government on 19th July 2023. Here is a snip. No sign of the significant gains forecast by Infrata.

[Port freight trends by cargo type](#)

[Liquid bulk](#)

[Dry Bulk](#)

[Other General Cargo](#)

[Containers \(Lo-Lo\)](#)

[Ro-Ro](#)

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Table 1: UK major port tonnage by cargo group in 2022, with percentage changes from 2021 and 2019

Cargo Group	2022 tonnage (million tonnes)	% change from 2021	% change from 2019
Liquid Bulk	180.0	↑ 11%	↓ -6%
Ro-Ro	99.1	↑ 4%	↓ -5%
Dry Bulk	93.3	↓ -3%	↑ 1%
Lo-Lo	61.8	↓ -3%	↓ -7%
Other General Cargo	15.4	↓ -16%	↓ -9%

While tonnage increased 3% overall in 2022, the trend differs between cargo groups. **Chart 5** shows liquid bulk, dry bulk, roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) and container (Lo-Lo) tonnage traffic from 2012 to 2022. Liquid bulk, which accounts for the most tonnage traffic of all cargo groups, has seen a downward trend since 2012, and a substantial increase in 2022 (up 11% on 2021). Ro-Ro tonnage increased by 4%, after a 3-year

Regarding underlying economic trends, given the stickiness of inflation in the UK, the Treasury were reported to be expecting recession in the near future, which has now come to pass. No upturn soon.

Other risky assumptions:

In the TDC cabinet meeting of 25th January 24, TDC leader Cllr Rick Everitt stated that he is confident demand will emerge for Ro-Ro in Ramsgate because “The World has changed.” When asked to clarify what those changes were (31st January 24: Place Plan Event) Cllr Everitt said that obstacles to trade with the EU, resulting from Brexit compliance border controls, would create demand for Port Ramsgate to help deal with the extra processing required.

That may be so, but it would be unacceptably risky to base long term investment decisions on such a gap in the market. This is because it is the desire of a potential Labour government to reform the relationship with the EU to reduce the friction cause by our “hard Brexit”.

“Sir Keir Starmer has argued, it is not enough to secure a deal for Northern Ireland - the whole of the UK deserves the opportunities [that] access to the single market, a customs union and working with Europe offers.” (Labour Policy Forum)

It is difficult to imagine Labour achieving the headline policy goal of fastest growth in the G7 without recovering at least some of the 20% lost trade with the EU post Brexit.

It is therefore significantly possible that the Brexit transition problems underpinning the observation that “The World has changed” will go away and with that any competitive advantage to Ro-Ro out of Ramsgate. Thus wasting the expected £10-12m investment planned to upgrade Port Ramsgate.