LOGISTICS UK

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Nothing moves without logistics

The vital role of logistics in driving economic growth in Northern Ireland



Logistics: underpinning Northern Ireland's society and economy

Nothing moves without logistics. As the foundation of Northern Ireland's economy, the sector enables growth, supports communities and keeps businesses and public services functioning. Every day, logistics safely and efficiently delivers the goods that households and organisations rely on via road, sea and air.

The logistics sector is a major local employer and underpins economic growth:

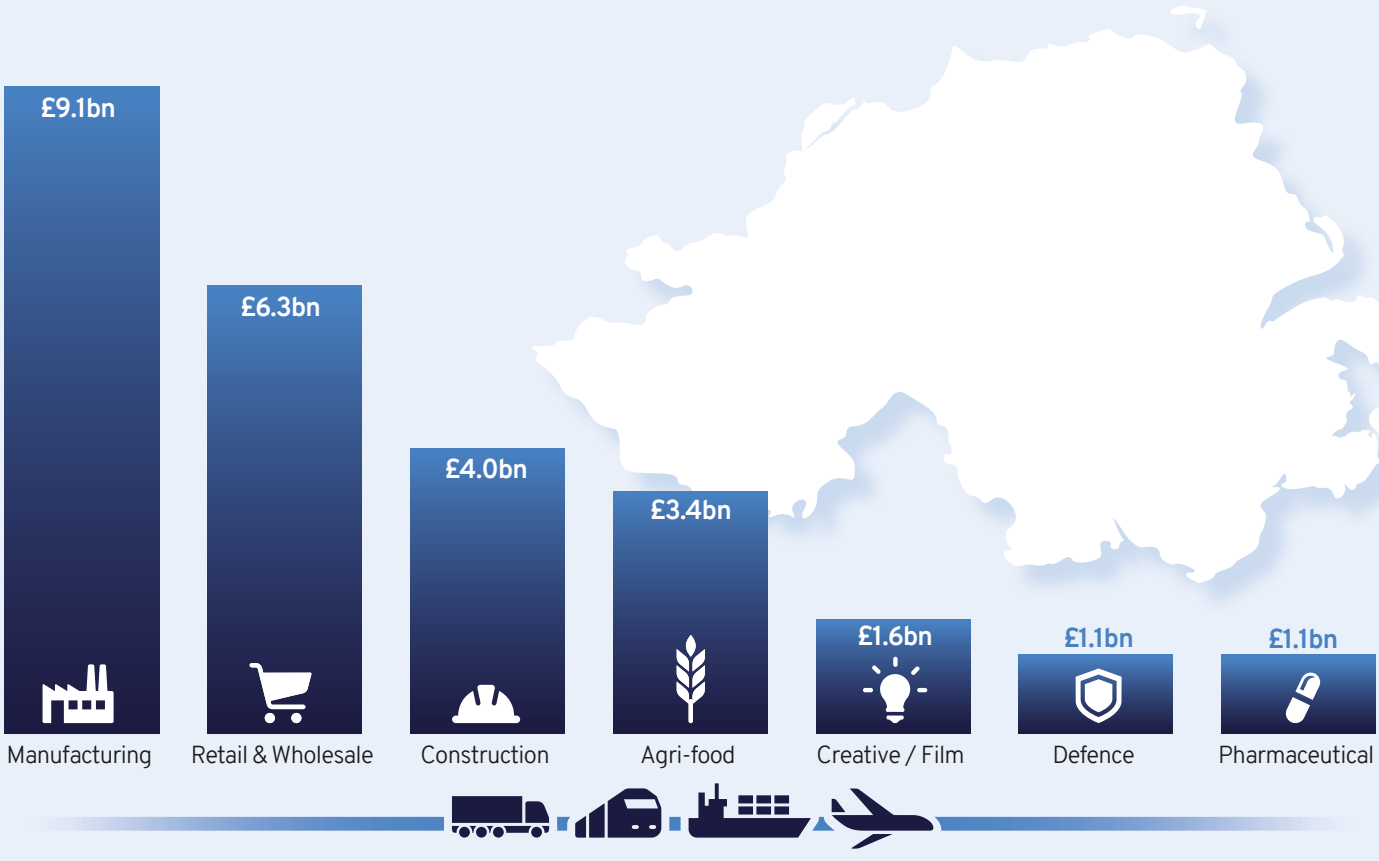
- In Northern Ireland there are **6,145** logistics businesses and **67,000+** employees in logistics roles.
- **8%** of the entire workforce is in logistics roles with the sector paying **21%** above the UK average.
- The Transport and Storage sector adds **£2.7 billion** in GVA, which is **6.2%** of the NI economy.

The logistics sector keeps goods moving in and out of Northern Ireland. The industry:

- Imports goods worth **£60 million** every day.
- Exports NI goods worth **£67 million** every day.

Northern Ireland's key industries rely on a strong and resilient logistics sector

Almost half of Northern Ireland's economic activity comes from sectors that are heavily dependent on the movement of goods, materials, components and products through ports, airports, warehouses and road freight networks.



Source: Invest NI https://www.investni.com/international-business/our-sectors

Investment in interconnected infrastructure

To unlock economic growth, Northern Ireland needs investment in its transport infrastructure to enable the delivery of goods in the most safe, sustainable and efficient way, and to better connect Northern Ireland to Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, EU and global markets.

While most goods are moved via road haulage, Northern Ireland's ports play a key role in the logistics sector.

Metric (per year)	Latest figure
Freight through NI ports	28.4 million tonnes
Road goods vehicles through NI ports	938,784 vehicles
Belfast Port share of all NI port traffic	63.8%
Larne share of all NI port traffic	14.7%
Warrenpoint share of all NI port traffic	11.6%

Source: NISRA Ports Traffic 2024

Investing in Northern Ireland's logistics network will improve connectivity and competitiveness

Vital infrastructure upgrades are urgently needed including the York Street Interchange in Belfast and delivery of the A5 to improve journey efficiency and reliability and reduce emissions.

Delivering in difficult circumstances

The logistics sector has a strong track record of delivering when it matters.

Through weather disruptions, labour shortages, global pandemics and soaring fuel costs, the logistics sector keeps supply chains moving and supports local businesses to export their goods across the world.

But now the logistics sector faces a convergence of pressures that requires urgent action to ensure the industry can continue to deliver for today and the future.

- Complex, costly and time-consuming customs & trading regulations
- An ageing workforce and labour shortages
- Rising fuel costs
- Sea freight capacity issues
- Dependency on congested and dated road network
- Increasing climate-related disruption
- Emerging emissions regimes



Unlocking growth through a Freight and Logistics Strategy

Logistics is an enabler for our whole society and has the potential to unlock significant economic growth for Northern Ireland by boosting connectivity and trade across these islands and beyond. To realise this opportunity, Northern Ireland needs a dedicated Freight and Logistics Strategy.

The sector operates within a complex policy landscape, with responsibility for key issues spanning multiple government departments, agencies and stakeholders. Addressing these challenges and capitalising on future opportunities requires a coordinated, long-term and partnership-based approach.

A Freight and Logistics Strategy would provide the vision, leadership and coordination required to unlock the full potential of Northern Ireland's freight and logistics sector.

By bringing together government and industry around a shared set of priorities, it would strengthen supply chains, improve connectivity, attract investment and support sustainable economic growth across Northern Ireland. A strategy would:

- **Provide strategic leadership** through a dedicated cross-sector working group, drawing on best practice from other jurisdictions and ensuring a coordinated approach to addressing shared challenges and opportunities.
- **Recognise freight and logistics as a critical economic enabler**, supporting economic growth, productivity, competitiveness, resilience and the transition to a more sustainable economy.
- **Establish a strong public-private partnership** to align policy, investment and delivery, unlocking the infrastructure, innovation and skills needed to maximise the sector's contribution to Northern Ireland.
- **Strengthen the resilience and efficiency of Northern Ireland's supply chains** by addressing key infrastructure constraints, including port and sea freight capacity, strategic road network improvements and opportunities for modal shift to more sustainable transport solutions.



A logistics strategy should focus on four key priorities

Infrastructure for growth

Long-term investment in the infrastructure that supports growth and enables the efficient movement of goods, including strategic road, port and rail connections.

Skills for the future

Logistics offers rewarding and well-paid careers across driving, warehousing, engineering, technology and supply chain management. Decision-makers, educators and industry should work together to attract talent, build skills and meet future workforce needs.

Trade and economic resilience

The Strategy should set out specific actions for the Executive to take with the UK Government, Irish Government and international partners to maximise Northern Ireland's economic opportunities, strengthen supply chain resilience and keep goods moving efficiently between Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and international markets.

A fair transition to a green economy

The logistics sector is committed to cutting emissions and supporting climate goals, but the transition must be backed by the infrastructure, energy, technology, and investment needed to keep supply chains affordable, reliable and resilient.



Logistics led development

We can learn from successful models elsewhere and create a logistics hub for Belfast, connecting Belfast Harbour, Belfast City Airport and an upgraded York Street Interchange to grow Belfast's logistics capacity and warehousing space.

A strong example of successful logistics led development is East Midlands Gateway, a 700-acre multimodal logistics hub located alongside East Midlands Airport and the M1 motorway. The site combines direct motorway access, a dedicated rail freight terminal, and proximity to the UK's largest express air freight hub, supporting around six million square feet of warehousing and distribution space. It is a major employment centre, supporting approximately 7,000 jobs, generating significant economic value for the region, and attracting investment through its status as part of the East Midlands Freeport.

There is a strong case for exploring the development of a dedicated logistics hub in Northern Ireland, which would also help unlock the business case for investing in Northern Ireland's key logistics corridors. The most practical approach would be to build on existing strategic assets, particularly the area around Belfast Harbour and Belfast City Airport, where transport, freight, and aviation infrastructure are already concentrated.



Photo courtesy of Segro

Feedback from Logistics UK members in Northern Ireland helps inform our policy priorities and advocacy work

The following case studies highlight key sector challenges and the policy changes businesses believe would support growth and competitiveness.

Skills shortages

The average age of Northern Ireland's driver workforce is over 50, and logistics businesses report growing difficulties attracting new entrants due to high training costs, increasing regulatory requirements and the demands of the role.

A large dairy business highlighted recruitment challenges despite investing in driver training and increasing salaries. The business is calling for improved roadside facilities, promotion of logistics careers and a professional driving qualification in schools.

Businesses also report shortages across warehousing and logistics roles, including forklift operators, warehouse operatives, stock controllers and transport planners, alongside growing demand for digital and technical skills.

Increasing access and appeal

Many of Northern Ireland's logistics businesses are investing significantly in attracting and developing new talent through training programmes, skills academies and family-friendly working practices. However, these efforts come at a considerable cost. Despite contributing to the Apprenticeship Levy, businesses in Northern Ireland cannot access levy funding in the same way as employers in Great Britain, limiting investment in skills development and placing Northern Ireland firms at a competitive disadvantage. While some employers have responded by establishing their own in-house training academies, many believe reform of the Apprenticeship Levy is needed to provide fairer and more flexible access to apprenticeship and skills funding.

Launched in summer 2026, **TST Academy** was established to develop talent, create career opportunities and build a sustainable pipeline of skills for the future. The Academy has already supported six individuals through apprenticeships and training programmes, including HGV licence qualifications, forklift training and a garage apprenticeship. Fully funded by **TST Group**, the initiative demonstrates a long-term commitment to investing in people and addressing skills shortages across the sector.

The business is calling for reform of the Apprenticeship Levy to ensure Northern Ireland employers have equitable access to the funds they contribute, enabling greater investment in training, skills development and the next generation of logistics professionals.

Unsustainable costs

A Transport Manager from a large Northern Ireland-founded food business reported that rising fuel costs, sea freight charges, emissions surcharges and complex regulatory requirements are undermining competitiveness. The business noted that some customers are moving shipments through GB depots, potentially putting Northern Ireland jobs at risk. It is calling for greater collaboration to maximise the benefits of dual market access, secure jobs and support growth.

Speed limits

Northern Ireland's speed limits for HGVs over 7.5 tonnes remain lower than those in England and Wales, with limits of 40 mph on single carriageways and 50 mph on dual carriageways, compared with 50 mph and 60 mph respectively.

A local cold storage business reports that these lower limits increase journey times, reduce productivity and efficiency, and add to operating costs. The business argues that harmonising HGV speed limits across the UK would improve freight efficiency, make better use of drivers' hours and strengthen the competitiveness of Northern Ireland's logistics sector.



To build the resilient supply chains and modern logistics network that Northern Ireland needs, Logistics UK is calling for:

- Recognition of freight and logistics as an enabler of Northern Ireland's economy, employing 8% of the workforce and enabling every sector to operate, grow and compete.
- A dedicated Freight and Logistics Strategy, developed in partnership with industry, that sets out a clear, long-term vision for growth, connectivity, resilience and sustainability.
- A genuine public-private partnership, bringing together government and industry to remove barriers to growth, strengthen supply chains and secure the sector's long-term future.

Logistics UK is the champion of the logistics sector, the backbone of the UK economy and global trade, providing a unique and authoritative voice for our members. As one of the country's biggest business groups, we represent one of its largest economic sectors.

We are the only trade association which represents all of logistics, with over 22,000 members, operating in road, rail, waterways, sea and air freight, in ports, airports and warehousing, as well as the customers of freight services such as retailers and manufacturers.

We deliver industry representation, services and thought leadership, helping members and policymakers to seize new opportunities for the sector and the economy as a whole, right across the country.

To discuss how logistics can drive growth across the whole economy, contact **publicaffairs@logistics.org.uk**

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