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By Fred Searle

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Driverless lorries 'could spark major RORO growth'



RORO predicted to secure 80 per cent market share by 2050 thanks to the anticipated roll-out of driverless vehicles

Driverless HGVs could replace much of the UK's conventional lorry and container traffic within a generation, transforming the UK's RORO market.

A new white paper published by the British Ports Association in collaboration with freight transport consultancy MDS Transmodal forecasts big growth in the market share (to 80 per cent) of 'driverless accompanied' RORO traffic, particularly through North Sea and Western English Channel ports.

Technical developments and commercial and environmental pressures are expected to encourage freight operators to look at new ways to move through the British ports of the future.

The study examines how freight traffic between the British Isles and continental Europe could change in the longer term after Brexit. It plots how a large proportion of the UK's maritime traffic will fare in 2050 under an 'autonomy and carbon reduction' scenario in which autonomous and ultra-low emission HGVs have been widely deployed.

This will have impacts on UK ports and shipping, but also UK roads and other national infrastructure such as rail links.

Chris Rowland, managing director at MDS Transmodal, said: "Technical, regulatory and economic barriers remain with regards to the deployment of autonomous HGVs on the British highways network by 2050.

"However, given the policy imperative of reducing emissions and the market-based need to increase the efficiency of road freight transport, particularly given rising HGV driver costs, we anticipate a significant industry-wide effort to overcome these barriers."

The British Ports Association's policy and economic analyst Phoebe Warneford-Thomson added that "with detailed analysis and forward-thinking" the UK ports sector could turn these changes into "lucrative opportunities."

The white paper is part of the BPA's Port Futures Programme which examines emerging trends in the maritime industries and explores the potential opportunities and challenges to British ports over the next 50 years.

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