

Railway carloadings, March 2021

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Highlights

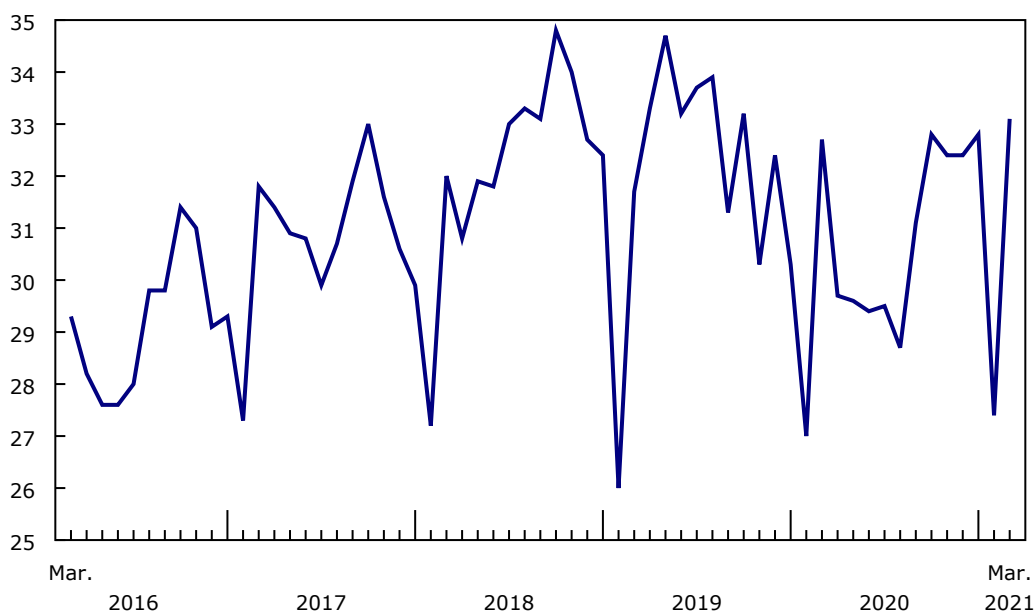
The volume of freight carried by Canadian railways reached 33.1 million tonnes in March, up 1.2% from March 2020. This marked the fifth consecutive month of year-over-year growth.

The overall tonnage was well above the five-year average for March, breaking the record of 32.7 million tonnes established in the same month in 2020.

To further explore current and historical data in an interactive format, please visit the [Monthly Railway Carloadings: Interactive Dashboard](#).

Chart 1 Railway carloadings, total tonnage

millions of tonnes



Source(s): Table 23-10-0216-01.

First quarter points to banner year

In the three months from January to March, the cumulative volume of goods moved by rail totalled 93.2 million tonnes, up 3.7% from the previous year and the highest cumulative total ever recorded for a first quarter.

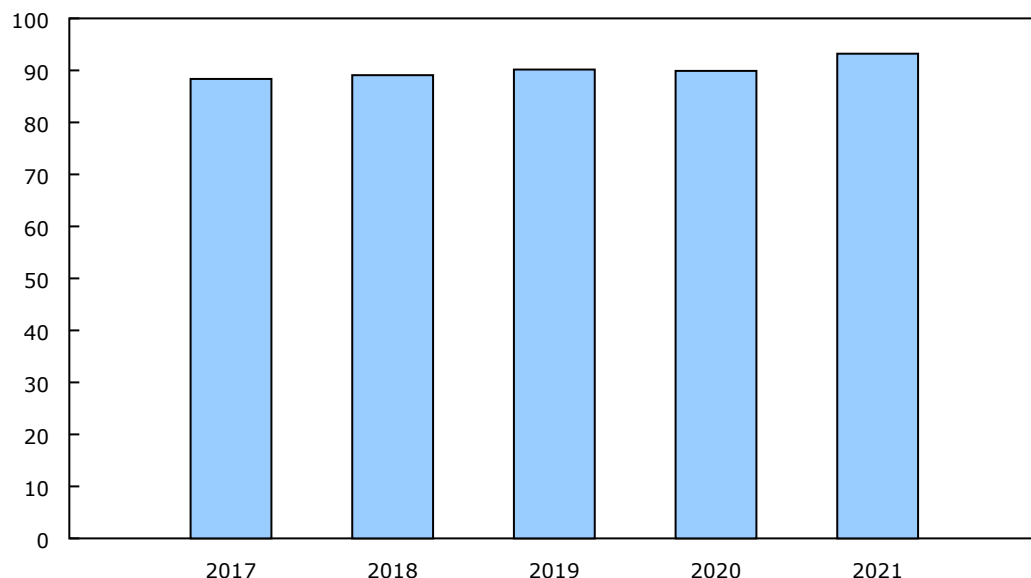


Statistics Canada
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Chart 2
Railway carloadings components, total tonnage, January to March, 2017 to 2021

millions of tonnes



Source(s): Table 23-10-0216-01.

Intermodal loadings continue to surge

Domestic intermodal shipments—mainly containers—drove the overall increase in freight transported by rail in March, rising by 37.4% year over year to reach 3.4 million tonnes. This was the highest volume recorded for March in 20 years and came on the heels of strong increases posted in February (+42.4%) and January (+20.2%).

It appears that higher imports of consumer goods for inventory replenishment and to meet demand for online shopping have fostered growing demand for intermodal transport. As reported earlier, Canada's imports of consumer goods posted a sharp increase of 9.1% in March, according to data on [Canadian international merchandise trade](#).

Energy products dampen volumes

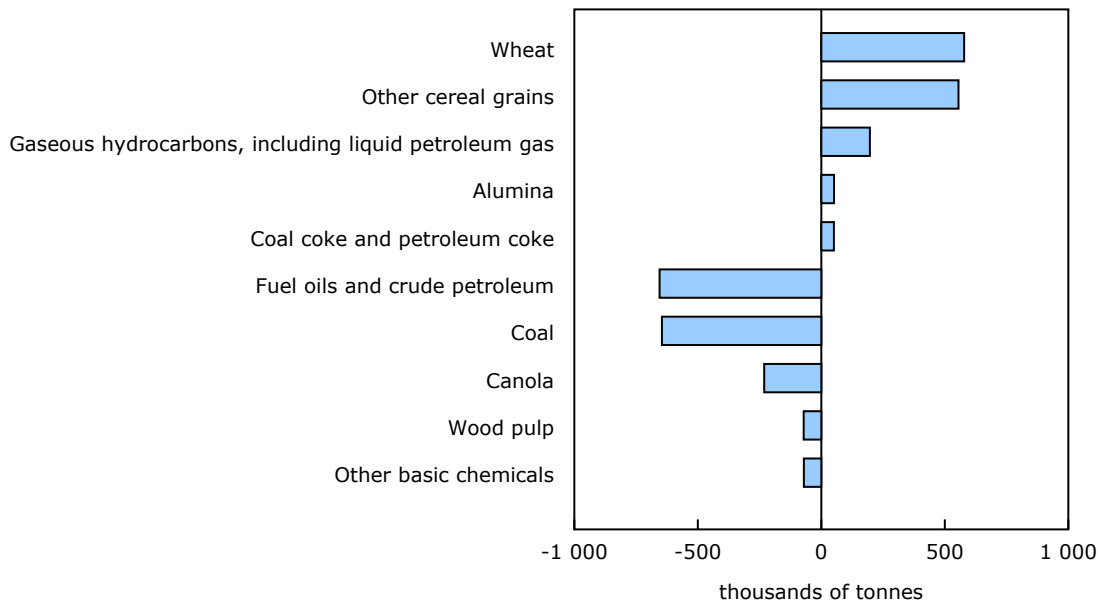
Domestic non-intermodal freight loadings decreased for the second month in a row, down 1.1% year over year to 26.2 million tonnes in March, led by ongoing large declines in some hydrocarbon-based commodities.

Loadings of fuel oils and crude petroleum posted a year-over-year decline for a 12th straight month, falling 34.1% (-655 000 tonnes) from March 2020. This was the smallest decline observed since April 2020, reflecting weak demand for fuels because of ongoing travel restrictions and limited air travel.

Similarly, loadings of coal dipped for a second consecutive month, down 18.3% (-645 000 tonnes) year over year in March, the largest drop since December 2020.

Loadings of canola declined for the first time in more than a year in March, down 19.7% (-231 000 tonnes) from the same month a year earlier. Wood pulp loadings fell for the second month in a row, down 10.9% (-71 000 tonnes) year over year, while loadings of other basic chemicals were down 10.7% (-71 000 tonnes).

Chart 3
Railway carloadings, by product, difference from March 2020 to March 2021



Source(s): Table 23-10-0216-02.

Agricultural and food product loadings remain strong

Offsetting the declines in non-intermodal loadings were large tonnage increases for some agricultural and food products. For example, carloadings of wheat rose for the 11th straight month in March, up 25.3% (+578 000 tonnes) year over year. Likewise, loadings of other cereal grains surged by 194.3% (+555 000 tonnes), the strongest gain since April—marking the 12th consecutive year-over-year monthly increase in tonnage.

In addition, other increases were reported for liquid petroleum gas, with loadings rising 31.0% (+197 000 tonnes) in March from the same month in 2020. This followed large year-over-increases in January (+21.1%) and February (+39.0%). Loadings of alumina also increased, up 16.4% (+51 000 tonnes) year over year, while loadings of coal coke and petroleum coke were up 23.6% (+51 000 tonnes).

American freight continues to wane

In March, freight traffic arriving from the United States remained well below the volume of the previous year for the 12th consecutive month, down 6.5% to 3.4 million tonnes.

Note to readers

Data are subject to revisions. The monthly railway carloadings data are revised, on a monthly basis, for the month immediately prior to the current reference month being published to reflect new information provided by respondents. The data in this release are not seasonally adjusted.

The Monthly Railway Carloadings Survey collects data on the number of rail cars, tonnage, units and 20-foot equivalent units from railway transporters operating in Canada that provide for-hire freight services.

The [Transportation Data and Information Hub](#), a web portal developed jointly by Statistics Canada and Transport Canada, provides Canadians with online access to comprehensive statistics and measures on the country's transportation sector.

Available tables: table [23-10-0216-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2732](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).