

Monthly barometer

TRENDS IN ROAD FREIGHT PRICES IN FRANCE



March 2026 | 

upply

FRENCH ROAD TRANSPORT CONFRONTED BY THE SHOCK OF THE WAR IN IRAN

French road transport is on the brink of collapse, hit hard by the surge in diesel prices caused by the conflict in the Middle East. The emergency aid is considered derisory by carriers.

Unsurprisingly, in March 2026, France was hit by the shock of the war between the United States, Israel and Iran. This war, which began at the end of February, immediately caused energy prices to skyrocket, shaking up an already fragile French economy, as well as the entire European ecosystem.

- For the eurozone, [in its interim report](#) the OECD has revised its growth forecast downwards, now at 0.8% in 2026 instead of the 1.2% announced in December, while inflation is expected to reach 2.6%, compared to the 1.9% initially forecast.
- In France, in its baseline scenario, [The Banque de France has also slightly revised downwards its GDP growth forecast for France](#), now projected at 0.9%. Inflation is expected to rise by 1.7% in 2026, due to energy prices, after an average annual increase of 0.9% in 2025. However, the Banque de France is also considering two more unfavourable scenarios. GDP growth would remain positive in all scenarios, but inflation would jump to 3.3% in the most pessimistic scenario.

A NEW PERIOD OF GREAT UNCERTAINTY

March 2026 therefore marks a real turning point, the consequences of which are already considerable for the economy in general and road transport in particular. The sharp rise in oil and gas prices, directly linked to persistent tensions in the Middle East, is putting considerable pressure on the purchasing power of the French. This situation contributes to a resurgence of inflation, which is severely affecting households. Already inclined to caution, they see their level of confidence deteriorate: in March, household confidence fell slightly. “At 89, the indicator that summarises it has dropped by two points and has moved further away from its long-term average,” indicates INSEE. The proportion of people anticipating a price increase has reached its highest level since 2022.

In this context, consumption, traditionally the motor for economic growth in France, remains weak. At the same time, business investment is hampered by a climate of prolonged uncertainty, illustrating the difficulty of committing to expenditures in such an unstable environment. Although the Banque de France forecasts a slight increase in GDP in the first quarter (between 0.2% and 0.3%), this growth will not be enough to stop the rise in unemployment, which is expected to reach 8.1% in the spring. The conflict in the Middle East is exacerbating tensions over production costs and disrupting supply chains, limiting companies’ capacity to take on new staff.

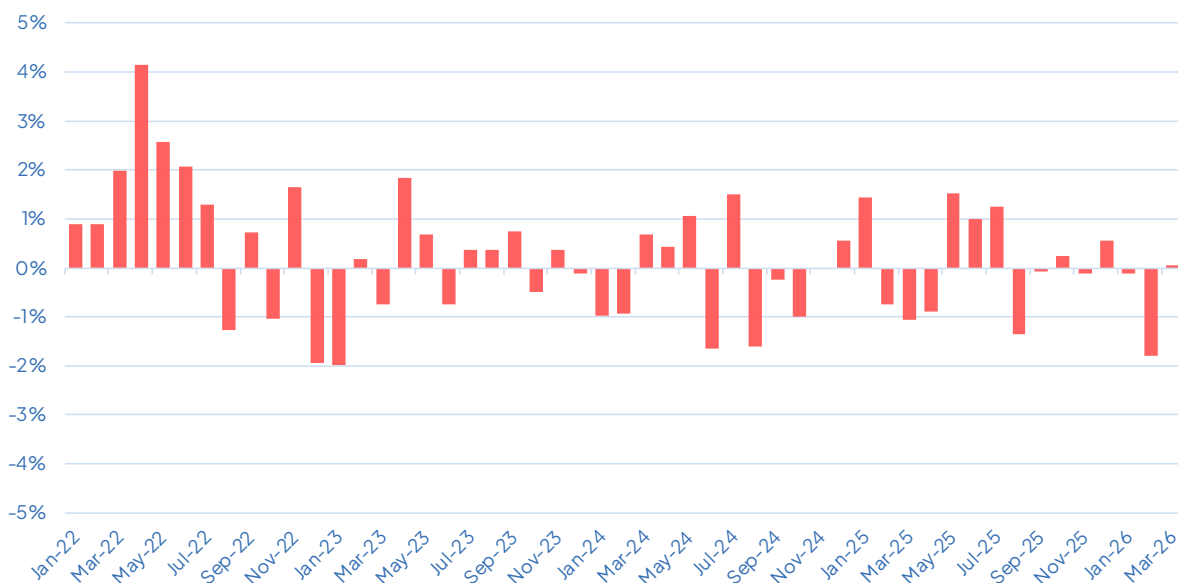
France, like Europe in general, is suffering the full force of the repercussions of a conflict whose outcome remains uncertain despite the precarious truce between the belligerents announced on April 7. Although the ECB is ruling out a further increase in key interest rates for the time being, vigilance remains essential. The ability of the French economy to absorb this shock will depend on the duration of the conflict and the reaction of the public authorities. The government, facing a persistent public deficit exceeding 5% of GDP, is maintaining its austerity policy for the time being, but its room for manoeuvre is shrinking in the face of the deteriorating international context.

A reduction in geopolitical tensions could allow a rebound in the second half of the year, but the scenario of prolonged stagnation, or even a recession if the conflict becomes bogged down, is not to be ruled out.

SOARING DIESEL PRICES: VERY STRONG IMPACTS... WITH SLOW REPERCUSSIONS

In this context, road transport prices in France have surprisingly stagnated. They showed a very slight increase of 0.1% in March 2026 compared to the previous month. Despite the panic in oil prices, and their almost immediate impact on diesel at the pump, the impact on road transport prices is apparently slow to materialise.

UFI Road France
Month-on-Month Evolution (%)



Source | Uply Freight Index - Road France

Variations in road transport costs are closely linked to changes in the price of professional diesel fuel. At the request of the Minister of Transport, Philippe Tabarot, and the professional road transport organisations, The National Road Committee (CNR), which usually publishes professional diesel indices on a monthly basis, has switched to a twice-monthly periodicity. This monitoring illustrates the magnitude and abruptness of the rise in diesel prices. For the first half of March, the professional diesel index rose by more than 23%, from 193 to 238. For the second half of the month, the index increased by more than 8%, climbing to 258. Over the whole month, the index recorded a rise of 28% ([see indicators p.9](#)).

The CNR also continues its weekly survey of diesel prices at the tank purchased by road carriers, noting an increase of 31% between the 4th week of February and the 3rd week of March. The CNR specifies the impact of this increase in the cost of professional diesel at the tank on March 19th on the total cost of ownership of a vehicle:

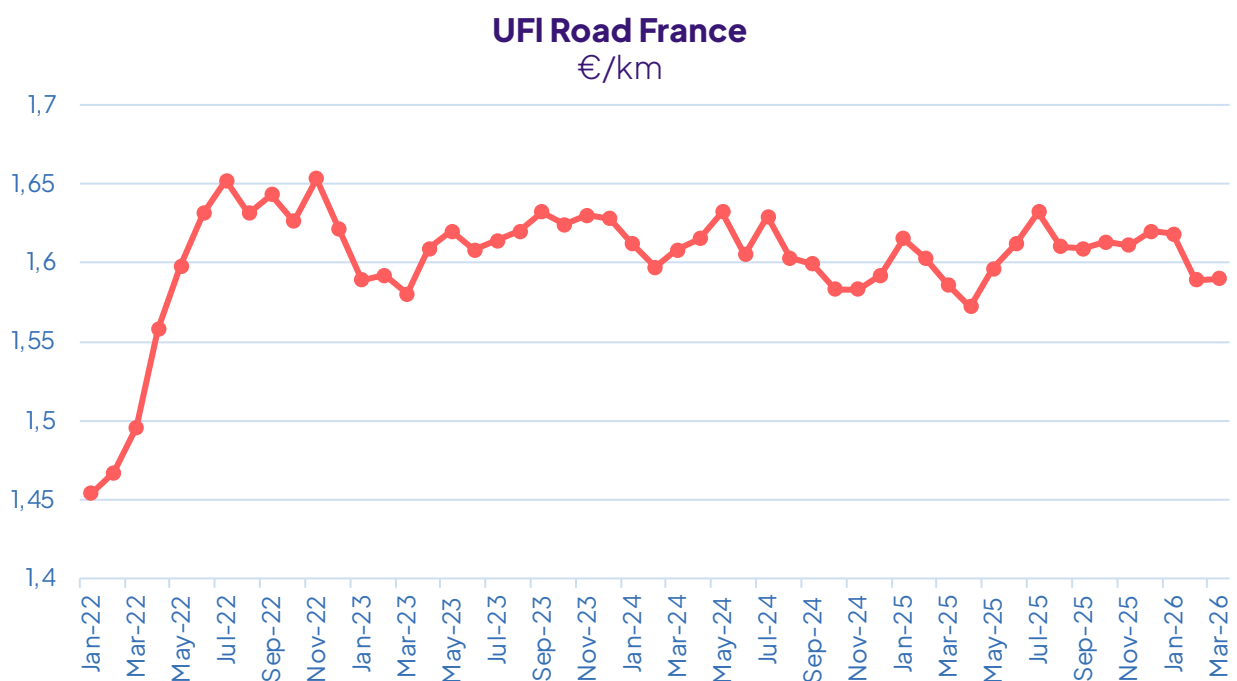
- Long Haul Semi-Trailer Truck: +7,6 %
- Short Haul Semi-Trailer Truck: +7 %
- Short Haul rigids: +6%

For the National Road Committee, “these indices are intended to facilitate more frequent invoicing of road transport services in a context where carriers’ cash flow is being depleted by the crisis.” But today, the multiple increases in diesel fuel prices observed since the beginning of 2026 (+37%) do not seem to have any impact on transport prices. On the contrary, at the same time, prices fell by almost 2% while transport costs soared by 9%. So that’s 11 points of margin that have disappeared.

The impact of the surge in fuel costs experienced in March will most certainly be reflected in prices in April, but it is highly likely that it will not cover the entire increase and margin points will be permanently lost for carriers.

GOVERNMENT AID DEEMED “DERISORY IN THE FACE OF THE EMERGENCY”

In March 2026, the average transport price per kilometre travelled in France was €1.590, a price virtually identical to that of February which stood at €1.589. This price stagnation in the face of soaring costs has put a heavy strain on the cash flow of carriers, already weakened by narrow margins. “Many carriers will not be able to hold out until the end of the month to implement the indexation stipulated in their contracts,” warned Florence Berthelot, General Delegate of the National Road Transport Federation.



Source | [UPLY Freight Index](#) - Road France

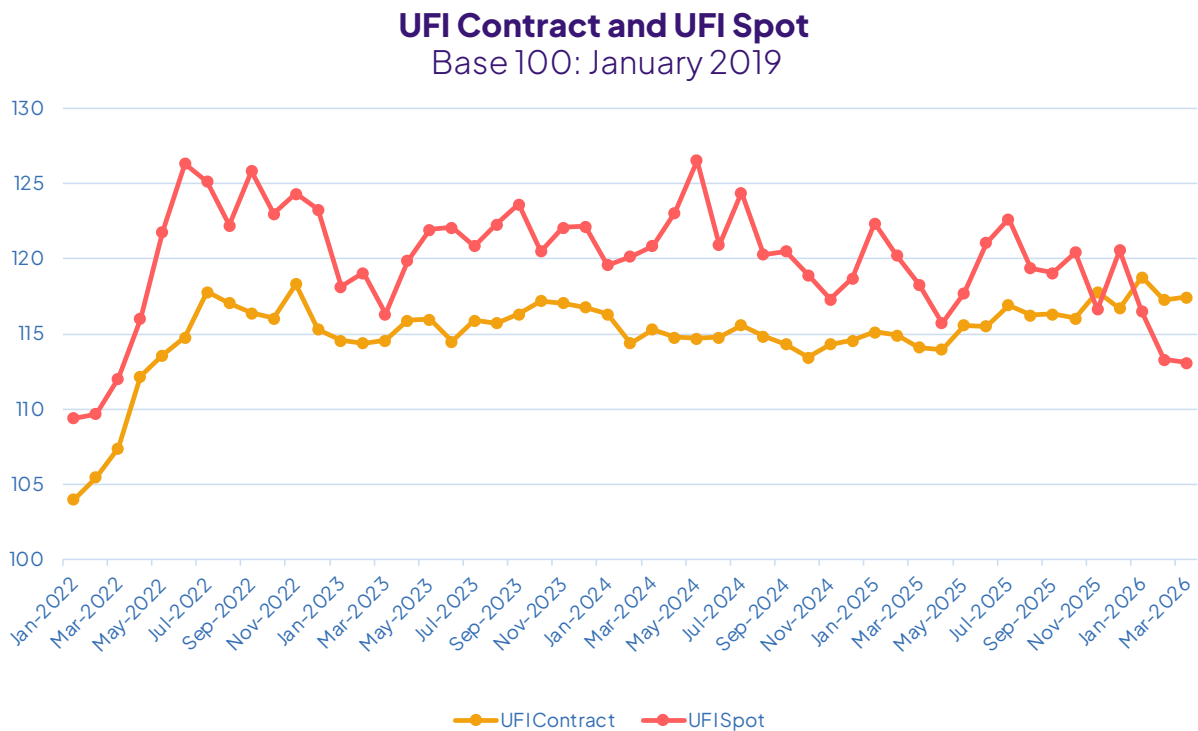
Professional organisations appealed to the government in mid-March to obtain support measures. Initially, the response was quite timid. “Deferring social security contributions, spreading out tax deadlines, or resorting to loans are a first step to address the cash flow difficulties of companies. However, these measures remain largely insufficient in light of the current crisis,” OTRE stressed in a statement on March 24.

Faced with the prolongation of the conflict, the government was forced to go further, despite its reduced room for manoeuvre in terms of budget. It put in place a targeted aid plan, including in particular exceptional lump-sum aid allocated to Very Small Enterprises (VSEs) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the road transport sector. This measure, the equivalent of an aid of 20 euro cents per litre of diesel, aims to alleviate the pressure on the cash flow of the companies most vulnerable to the crisis. However, its granting is conditional on the beneficiary companies demonstrating “major difficulties” directly attributable to the current crisis. The scheme represents a budget of 50 million euros for the month of April, and its renewal will depend on the evolution of the conflict.

The Ministries of Transport and SMEs have authorised carriers to integrate review clauses in their contracts in order to pass on part of the fuel price increase to their customers, particularly large retailers. Although this measure offers increased flexibility, it has been criticised for its lack of immediate effectiveness. Indeed, carriers have to wait several weeks, or even several months, before receiving payment for their invoices from their customers, which exacerbates their cash flow difficulties.

Despite the progress, the FNTR and the OTRE believe that the amounts allocated remain insufficient in view of the scale of the crisis, and that the eligibility criteria for aid remain excessively complex. Furthermore, the possibility of passing on price increases to customers is not a viable solution for companies engaged in fixed-price contracts or with already very low profit margins. Finally, the government ruled out any possibility of reducing fuel taxes or freezing prices, despite repeated requests from the sector’s players.

SIMILAR EVOLUTION OF SPOT AND CONTRACT MARKETS



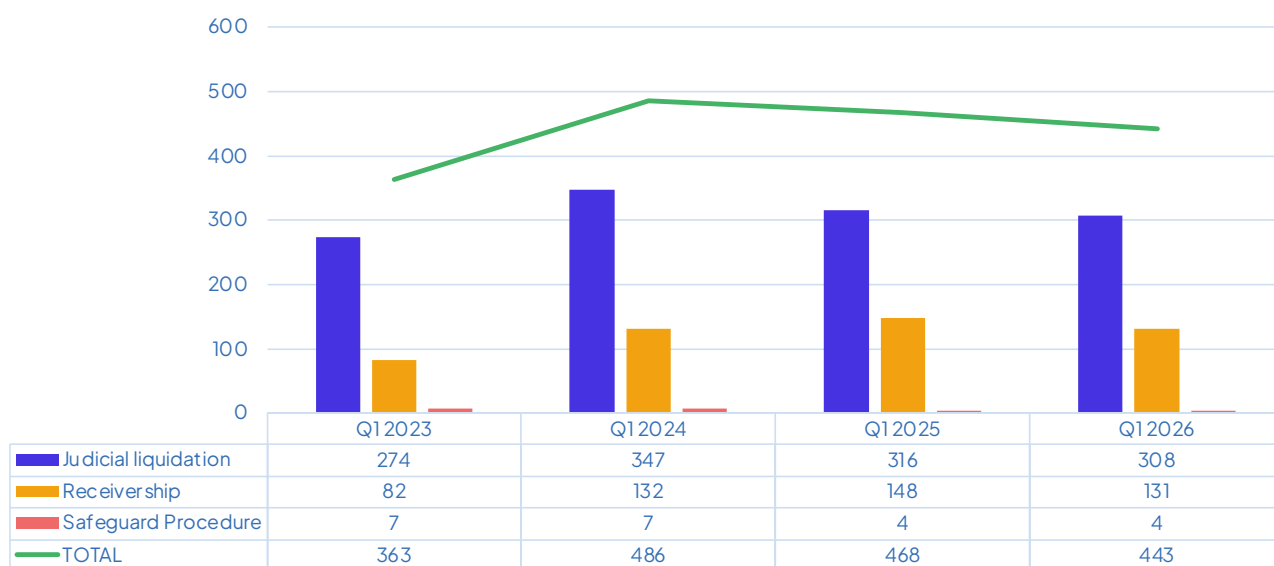
Source | [Uply Freight Index](#) – Road France

- **The CONTRACT index**, which measures contract prices between shippers and carriers on the French market, stagnated in March (+0.1%). The trend of steadily increasing prices since the end of 2024 therefore seems to be slowing down somewhat. We are in a period of contraction in the volumes to be transported, due to the economic slowdown. Already in 2025, road freight transport activity in France has declined by 2.3% compared to 2024, settling at 286.4 billion tonne-kilometres. As a reminder, the French flagged fleet now covers only 58% of the total goods transported domestically in France, which means that 42% is carried by the foreign fleets. In these conditions of contraction, shippers are demanding that prices be aligned with those of their large freight forwarders.

- **The SPOT index** represents the reference price index in France for non-regular transport. It continued to fall in March, although the erosion was limited to 0.2%, which seems surprising in the context of soaring diesel prices. In this market too, passing on the increased costs is proving difficult. The decline in international activity, particularly in Germany and the Nordic countries, has persisted since 2024. Consequently, fleets from Eastern European countries, which are very active in these markets, are seeking new outlets, which exacerbates competition in France and the impact of the energy shock on transport prices. It is possible that the decline in the indicator will continue, as no signs of recovery are announced in Germany.

As Jean-Thomas Schmitt, president of the TLF Union, indicates in an interview with the French business daily L'Opinion, French carriers are in an extremely fragile position because they have fallen behind competitively in the face of international competition: the market share of the French fleet has fallen from 90% to 58% in thirty years. They are torn between immediate survival and the massive investments needed to decarbonise the sector. Under these conditions, it is clear that the balance of power with the shippers is currently working against them. Some road carriers will not hesitate to leave their trucks in the garage, rather than drive at a loss. But the situation is obviously not sustainable in the long term. After peaking in 2024, business failures in road freight transport started to decline again in 2025, but remained at a high level.

Business insolvencies in road haulage in France (Q1 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026)



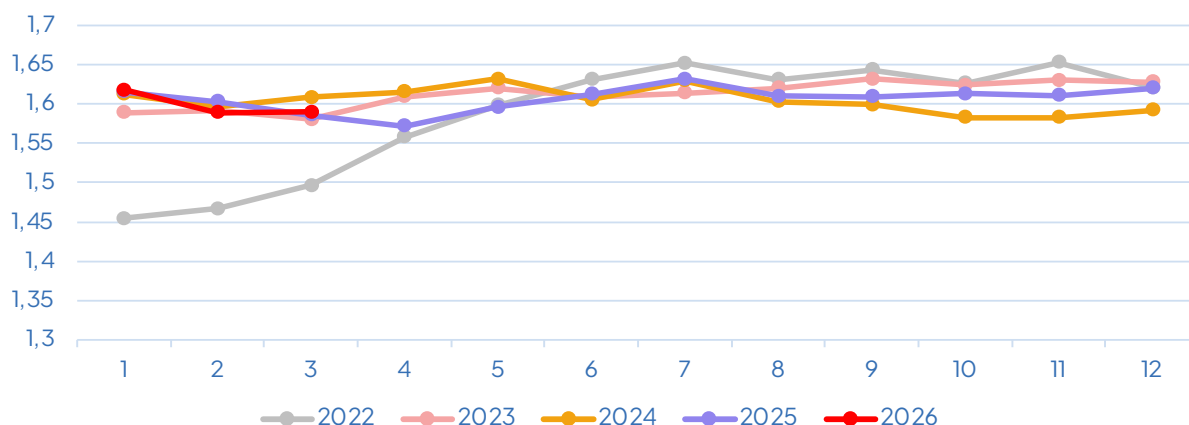
Source | [Altares](#)

The current crisis is likely to trigger a new wave of bankruptcies. No one is spared from difficulties. In March, two major players in the road freight transport sector underwent judicial liquidation: Pedretti Distribution and Ziegler France, with the loss of 390 and 1,500 jobs respectively. “The recent liquidation of the Ziegler transport group is a major shock to the entire transport and logistics sector. Beyond the direct impact on the company’s employees, this situation has dramatic consequences for hundreds of subcontractors, mainly very small and small businesses, already weakened by a very difficult economic context,” OTRE warned in a statement.

The annual comparison of transport prices between 2026 and 2025 shows an almost overlap of the curves in the first quarter, indicating a weak impact of the cost increase over the entire quarter.

Year-on-Year comparison

€/km



Source | Uply Freight Index - Road France

ELECTRIFICATION OF ROAD TRANSPORT: AN URGENT NEED BROUGHT TO THE FOREFRONT BY THE DIESEL CRISIS

The diesel crisis of March 2026 brought the issue of electrification of road freight transport back to the forefront of current events. Once perceived as an environmental constraint, it is now emerging as a pragmatic response to a dependence that has become unsustainable, in a context of continuous improvement of technologies which also allows for the expansion of uses. But several obstacles are still preventing a massive transition to electric vehicles. In a contribution to the road freight transport electrification plan published in March 2026, OTRE lists three major challenges:

- Vehicle financing
- Deployment of the charging network
- Cost-effectiveness of electric transport

Small and medium-sized transport businesses that are already struggling to survive will need substantial financial support to get through this. The current crisis could, however, serve as a catalyst: faced with the unpredictability of oil prices, electrification is no longer a green option, but an economic necessity.

However, this will not happen without a clear and massive political will. The draft framework law on transport, currently being discussed in Parliament, still seems quite timid compared to the scale of the challenges.

KEY INDICATORS

Sources | INSEE (base 100 = long-term average), CNR (base 100: December 2000)

INDICATORS	March 2026	February 2025	Evolution M / M-1	March 2025	Evolution over 12 months
Insee Business climate Index	96.9	97.5	-0.6%	96.7	+0.2%
CNR Commercial Diesel Index	248.08	193.34	+28.3%	186.93	+32.7%
CNR's Long Haul semi trailer truck Index	177.55	166.29	+6.7%	163.62	+8.5%



Author

William Béguerie

Road Transport Expert for Upply



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