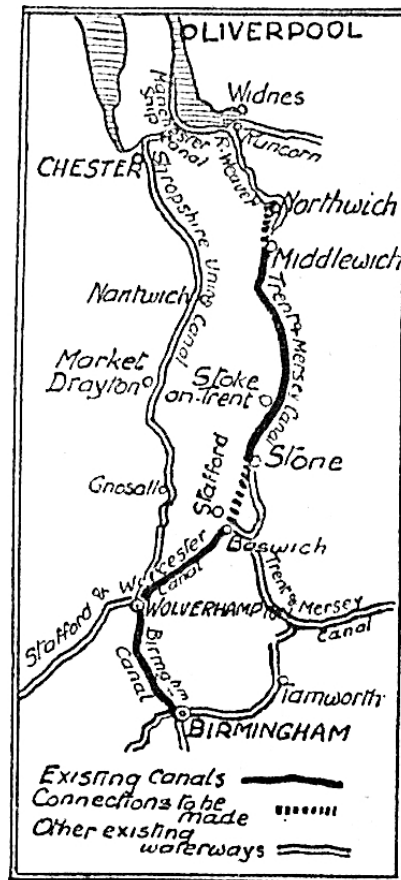


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## MERSEY-BIRMINGHAM WATERWAY

Sixty-year-old plan may now be revived



HOPES for the revival of an old scheme to construct a waterway taking 100-ton barges between Liverpool and Birmingham, have been raised by a statement made by the Minister of Transport, Mr. Alfred Barnes, in London on Saturday. He told a special conference of the London Labour party, that the Transport Commission would be empowered to issue stock borrowing up to £250,000,000 capital, and that among other developments, the prospects of providing this waterway were being investigated.

The scheme for mammoth barges of 100 tons; compared with the usual 24-ton canal barges. to carry raw materials from the Mersey to the Potteries and bring back manufactured goods. was first contemplated as long ago as 1008. It again came into prominence about twenty years ago, when it was described as the "greatest waterway undertaking ever projected in this country."

The estimated cost then was

£8,000,000, of which £6,500,000 was to be spent on constructional work, and the remainder on purchase of land, and legal and engineering costs.

Existing waterways

The whole of the eighty or so miles between Liverpool and Birmingham is already connected by waterways and, except for a distance of about fifteen miles, the original scheme proposed to adapt these for carrying the 100-ton barges. It was known that in places, the existing canals would have to be widened and that almost the whole length would need to be deepened to take the larger barges.

From Birmingham, it was proposed to use the Birmingham canal as far as Wolverhampton and the Stafford and Worcester canal on to Baswick. From here, a completely new section, about seven miles long, would be cut across country to Stone, and from Stone to Middlewich, the Trent and Mersey canal would be used. From Middlewich, it was intended to cut another new canal, this time about three miles in length, to link up with the River Weaver east of Northwich.

One of the most interesting features of the scheme was the proposal to use electric lifts in place of the usual locks and it was anticipated that the construction would find employment for a large number of men for four or five year's.

100-ton barges tested

The River Weaver is navigable from Runcorn to Northwich, and the most important part of the scheme would be the construction of the linking canal to Middlewich to join with the existing system to Stone. Further excavation would be necessary to link Stone with Baswick.

An official of the Weaver Navigation Trust, which is responsible for the maintenance of the River Weaver waterway, told the Daily Post that the whole scheme was ready. Plans had been submitted to the Ministry of Transport many years ago, but these were shelved until after the war. Standard 100-ton barges for use on the canal had already been tested.

It is believed that at present costs, the scheme may involve an expenditure of about £20.000.000.