



TRANSFORMED BY WAR 1939 - 1945

Use the west coast ports and create a new one in the Clyde

In late 1940, deep sea shipping was diverted to the west coast. Generally no vessel over 1600 tons was allowed up the English channel or into the North Sea and no motor vessel to come south of the Forth. Supplies for the east and south coast were restricted to small steam coasters, mainly travelling in convoy.

Although West coast cities also suffered heavy bombing (Bristol and Avonmouth, Cardiff, Swansea, Liverpool and Glasgow), in most cases port operations recovered quickly, handling in total around 75% of imports (with London reduced from 50% to around 16%).

New oil pipelines from Avonmouth relieving pressure on the road and rail network were one of the most successful innovations of the war and are still in use today.



Destroyer takes on stores
Image: IWM A5682



Clyde, liner discharging
Image: IWM A9435

An emergency port in the Clyde anchorages was a key element in the diversion of shipping – Atlantic convoy ships would discharge overside to coasters or to smaller craft. To deliver this the Port of London (PLA) and the Ministry of Transport organised a wholesale mobilisation, with around 400 vessels moving to the Clyde - cranes, tugs, lighters, as well as Thames sailing barges and Dutch schuyts, chartered after the low countries were overrun. Scruttons, the London stevedores, brought London docks and equipment and the project was managed by the Assistant PLA General Manager, Robert Letch.