

1740. As regards the question of wagons, which I understand are in fact ordered to be provided for the next grain season, do you remember Mr. Lawson's evidence on that question?—Yes.

1741. Do you generally agree with that evidence?—The subject is one on which I can only give my opinion, not founded on any experience; but what I should say is that Mr. Lawson's evidence is at variance with the other evidence I have had at my disposal.

1742. Do you agree with Mr. Conyer's evidence?—As far as I remember, yes, and the other officers whose opinion you asked. I should further say that I think Mr. Lawson's opinion was not a sound one. I have arrived at the conclusion that it is not a sound opinion.

1743. The question was raised yesterday in the Legislative Council as to the pulling up of the broad-gauge lines, and thereby throwing out of employment a certain number of broad-gauge trucks, the inference being that the value of the use of those trucks would be lost, and we should be so much the worse off?—So far as I am advised, instead of being a loss, the railway could, with the stock it has, do more work than if it had a division of gauge, and those trucks at work. I am told that the narrow gauge could, with its present stock, get through in the busy season more work than it could with the broad-gauge plant and the narrow-gauge plant working together. The opinion expressed by Mr. Conyers and Mr. Carruthers was that nearly one-third more work could be done without the break of gauge.

1744. I believe 300 wagons have been ordered from England?—More.

1745. When will they arrive?—They were ordered by telegram at the beginning of July, and the order was urgent for the wheels and axles to be sent out at once.

1746. Will they arrive before the 1st of January?—The Agent-General is directed to have them in the colony by the end of December.

1747. How long will it take to get them up in the colony?—Steps were taken at the same time to obtain in the colony a supply of timber for wagons. A good deal of it has been got from Auckland. As soon as we are advised, which we shall probably be by next mail, of these wheels and axles being on their way, we shall call for tenders in advance. As far as possible, I have endeavoured to arrange so that these wagons will be constructed and ready at all events by the 1st of March. These have been my instructions in the matter. There are more than 300 wagons; 300 was the first order. An order also went for fifty, and we are getting up in the colony as many as we have spare wheels and axles to devote to the purpose. I think that probably seventy or eighty more will be got.

1748. I want to ask you a question about leasing the lines. Do you believe that lines on any extensive scale could be leased without involving the colony in complications as regards extensions of these lines and the working?—My opinion is that generally the colony will not find it advisable to lease her railways. I do think there would be considerable complication, especially when, as we shall for many years to come, have to connect feeders with our railways.

1749. On the question of leasing, would you state what you think would be a judicious thing to do?—I have said to the House that the Government propose to try an experiment by leasing one of their lines in the colony. We have selected the Auckland to Waikato line, which will be a fair instance and will not interfere with the general system in the colony.

1750. On the question of depreciation, is there a large amount of depreciation represented in the annual Estimates now before the House—I mean in the way of maintenance?—I should say that the depreciation has not yet come to account, if I may so put it. The lines have not been completed long enough to require depreciation to be provided for in the Estimates. I ought also to say, in justification of the Engineer-in-Chief, that he has strongly expressed his opinion that a depreciation fund ought to be established, but the Government have not considered that desirable yet.

1751. Did you observe that Mr. Carruthers stated, in answer to myself, that the depreciation in his opinion should begin after about two years of the opening of constructed lines?—I do not remember his saying that.

1752. Do you know that Mr. Conyers expressed the opinion that we should begin at once?—I should have thought, if I had heard that evidence, that they thought provision ought to be made in advance. I can scarcely see that on the estimates themselves you would have to provide in a year or two years for depreciation.

1753. Is there a depreciation now going on in permanent way and rolling-stock not provided for now?—No doubt of that.

1754. I should like to ask what is your opinion as to provision for accidents which may occur on the lines. First, in regard to passengers, is there any provision for compensation?—I believe, so far as I know, that the Government is responsible like any other public carrier. That is my opinion only.

1755. As regards accidents which may occur to employés on the railways, of course not caused by their own negligence, are you of opinion that provision should be made for meeting those cases?—Yes. For any cases that have come under our notice we have made special provision.

1756. Do you think it would be good for the public service if regular provision were made?—Yes, it would be better if there were some special fund, or a society formed of the people themselves.

1757. Did you notice that steel rails some months ago were being sold at £7 10s.?—I cannot name the exact amount, but I had it brought to my notice, I think just before the session, or at the time the session commenced, in a report sent out by the Agent-General. It contains the opinions as well of the consulting engineers at Home upon the subject of steel rails.

1758. Was it favourable?—Their report was favourable, and that matter has been under consideration since. I have not taken action in the way of generally approving of it.

1759. Have any rails been ordered since?—Yes, some have been ordered since; but the ordinary rails are not steel. Steel rails have been ordered for points and sidings. When this letter of the Agent-General came, I referred the whole matter to the Engineer-in-Chief for his recommendation. Generally, his recommendation was that for the present we should not get steel rails.

1760. Is the Government at present being professionally advised in London in the matter of the purchase of railway material?—The whole is purchased under very careful supervision indeed; and I am bound to say that the detailed reports manifest the attention which is paid, and show that they

*Mr. Ormond.*

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