

Engineer, after a personal inspection of the several proposed routes, as the best in an engineering and economical point of view; and Mr. Blair's opinions are fully sustained by the evidence given before your Committee by the Surveyor-General, Mr. Thomson, the Assistant Surveyor-General, Mr. McKerrow, Mr. Roberts, merchant, of Dunedin, the Hon. the Minister of Lands, and the Hon. Sir Francis Dillon Bell. The highest summit level on this line would be 1,500 feet, and it is worthy of remark that, from Cromwell to the West Coast at Jackson's and Open Bay, the highest point to be surmounted is only 1,700 feet above the sea-level—namely, in the Haast Pass; and the continuation of this line to the West Coast is only a question of time. It has been stated in evidence that a public company could be formed in Dunedin to construct the Strath Taieri line, under Government supervision, provided a concession were made to them of 300,000 acres of land, being about one-fourth the area of the unsold land which would be tapped by the said railway.

Route No. 5 is condemned on all hands as impracticable.

Route No. 6, *via* Shag Valley, would have the advantage of giving immediate traffic returns, but the summit level at the highest point is 2,100 feet as against 1,500 feet on the Strath-Taieri line; and, although this line would, equally with Route No. 4, tap the Maniototo Plains and the interior, it would not open the same quantity of land for settlement. It seems, however, desirable that a branch line should be constructed from Palmerston to Waihemo, a distance of about fifteen miles.

Route No. 7.—This route would connect the interior with Oamaru; and, equally with the Shag Valley route, would tap the interior from the Maniototo Plains, but the nature of the country through which it would pass, and the altitude of the mountain ranges, 2,500 to 3,000 feet, which it would traverse, preclude it from favourable consideration at present.

Your Committee have therefore agreed to report—

That the route to Cromwell *via* Strath-Taieri is unquestionably that which opens up the largest area of unsold land available for pastoral and agricultural settlement.

That the respective County Councils of Taieri, Maniototo, and Vincent, failing the Colonial Government undertaking the work, are prepared to do so, on condition of a given area of land being placed at their disposal, and to hand over the line when completed to the Government.

That the Committee recommend the construction of this line to the favourable consideration of the Government; and, failing the Government undertaking its construction, it is absolutely necessary, in the interest of settlement, that the work should be forthwith proceeded with, either by the counties concerned or by a private company; and that, in either case, with a view to accelerate the progress of the work, and of diffusing employment throughout the district, the work of construction should be commenced at each end of the line, and at one or more points in the centre, simultaneously.

And your Committee further recommend,—

That a Bill should be introduced into Parliament during the present session, so as to give effect to their report without delay or loss of time, which, in the present condition of the labour market, would, in the opinion of your Committee, be injurious, if not disastrous, to the best interests of the country.

7th September, 1877.

VINCENT PYKE,
Chairman.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

TUESDAY, 28TH AUGUST, 1877.

The Committee met pursuant to notice.

PRESENT :

Mr. Bunny,
Mr. Carrington,
Mr. Fisher,

Mr. Macandrew,
Mr. Pyke.

Order of reference of 23rd August read.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Macandrew, That Mr. Pyke be appointed Chairman.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Macandrew, That Mr. J. T. Thomson, Mr. J. McKerrow, and the Hon. Donald Reid be summoned to attend to give evidence.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Carrington, That the very best map of Otago procurable be obtained for the use of the members of this Committee.

The Committee then adjourned until Wednesday, the 29th August, at 10 o'clock.

WEDNESDAY, 29TH AUGUST, 1877.

The Committee met pursuant to adjournment at 10 o'clock.

PRESENT :

Mr. Pyke in the chair.

Mr. Bunny,
Mr. Carrington,
Mr. De Lautour,

Mr. Fisher.
Mr. Hislop,
Mr. Macandrew.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

Mr. J. T. Thomson attended and gave evidence, which was duly taken down by the reporter in attendance.

Resolved, on motion of Mr. Macandrew, That Mr. John Roberts be summoned to attend the Committee, to give evidence at the next meeting.

The Hon. Donald Reid attended and gave evidence, which was taken down by the reporter.

Mr. J. McKerrow attended and gave evidence, which was taken down by the reporter.

The Committee then adjourned until Thursday, 30th August, at 10.30 o'clock.