

From Brunnerton to Greymouth, as members are aware, there is now a railway in operation, and we propose to continue it to Hokitika, a distance of 26 miles.

In accordance with a resolution of this House last Session, a reserve of land was made in the Aorere Valley in the Nelson District with a view of the proceeds being applied to railway construction. A flying survey of proposed line is now being completed. The Government is, however, of opinion that, before any expenditure in this direction is incurred, it is desirable that the river should be bridged, and the district rendered accessible by road, for which purpose £4,700 has been placed on the Estimates.

It will be recollected that last Session the House, on the motion of the honorable member for Akaroa, Mr. Montgomery, directed that surveys should be made, and estimates prepared, for a number of branch railways, as feeders to the main line. Those plans have been made, and the estimates are ready; but it has been suggested that the general interests of settlement would be better served, and the resources of Canterbury be developed to a much greater extent, if, instead of those branches, we obtained authority to construct an Interior Main Line, of about 85 miles in length, by means of which a very large area of available country would be opened up and made productive. The Engineer, in his report on this subject, says:—

“Of the eight branch railways named in ‘The Canterbury Railways Land Reservation Bill, 1877,’ one is provided for in the general Estimates, and two are taken up by companies, leaving five for which provision has not yet been made, viz.:—

Oxford to Malvern line	...	...	...	...	11 miles.
White Cliffs to Rakaia Gorge	...	...	...	...	22 „
Ashburton to Alford Forest	...	...	...	...	20 „
Albury to Fairlie Creek	...	...	...	...	10 „
Orari to Hilton	...	...	...	...	13 „
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Total	...	...	...	...	76 miles.

“The estimated cost of the whole, in working order and fully equipped with rolling-stock, is in round numbers, £330,000.

“The scheme of the Canterbury branch railways, as above laid down, is open to several objections. Some of the lines run a short distance up a valley and there stop, it being impossible to extend them, while possibly another valley close by leads to good country beyond the immediate terminus. Again, some of them are branches, not only off-branches, but off-subsidiary branches—a very objectionable feature in working. Every one of the “dead ends” beyond the last junction will require a separate plant, no matter how light the traffic may be.

“Instead of having a number of branch railways on the Canterbury Plains running at right angles to the main line, as the present system will inevitably lead to, I would propose to construct a subsidiary main line, commencing at Oxford and skirting the foot of the range *via* Malvern Hills, Ashburton Forks, and Geraldine, to a junction with the main line at Orari, Winchester, or Temuka, together with one connecting branch between South Ashburton and the Ashburton Forks. The subsidiary main line above described would be about 85 miles long, and its cost about £380,000. Except at the riverbeds, it presents no engineering difficulties, and several of the road bridges now erected over the larger rivers could be utilized. Its adoption would save the two lines at the Ashburton Forks and the Orari-Hilton Branch now proposed, and several more of the same kind that are sure to follow.”

I agree with this view, and now submit proposals for the Interior Main Line—Oxford to Temuka—accordingly. The South Ashburton to Ashburton Forks and the Albury Extension Lines will facilitate the beneficial occupation of upwards of 200,000 acres of land, which must add largely to the exports of Canterbury, and to the revenue of the main line; of this land 30,000 acres are in the hands of the Crown.

Some honorable members may be disposed to think that, having regard to the length of the railways which Canterbury already possesses, she is allowed an undue share in our proposals: but slight reflection will show that such an objection cannot be fairly sustained. When we consider the large amount which the coffers of the colony have derived from the Land Revenue of Canterbury, and the amount which, it is hoped, will for some time to come continue to be derived from the same source, I maintain that the district is entitled to even more than is now proposed. We are, in fact, only intending to confer upon the people of Canterbury benefits derivable from applying to a colonial purpose their own money—only proposing to expend a portion of Land Revenue for the benefit of those upon the land from which that revenue has been derived, by devoting it to purposes to which not only is it legitimately applicable, but for which it ought always to have been