

Christchurch is 34 miles from the northern terminus of the system (Amberley), and 455 miles from the southern terminus (Kingston), and cannot therefore be considered the centre of the system. Dunedin, on the other hand, is about 263 miles from Amberley in the north, and about 226 miles from Kingston in the south; and it is therefore indisputable that it is at present very centrally situated. A time may and probably will arrive when Christchurch will, by the extension of the railway system to the extreme north of the Island, assume a more central position in the system; but that is too remote a contingency to be a proper element in the consideration of the question at present. Taking the system as it exists, it is undeniable that Christchurch is at one extremity of the system. The other assertion made in this paragraph by the Chamber—namely, that the traffic on the Dunedin section, owing to the sharp curves and heavy gradients, requires vigilant supervision, does not admit of refutation; but it does not necessarily follow that this is a reason why the administration should be located in Dunedin.

Paragraph 3.—“That the creation of proper station accommodation at Dunedin and at Port Chalmers is one of the most important of the works at present requiring the attention of the Commissioner, and is one which is of vital moment both to the business community of this provincial district, and to the success of the railways themselves.” That increased and improved station accommodation is urgently wanted both in Dunedin and Port Chalmers, and that the question is of urgent importance to the business community of the Dunedin District, cannot be denied. It may also be admitted that the question has a more or less important bearing upon the working of the railways. But how far the presence of the Commissioner in Dunedin would tend to the promotion of those necessary works it is not for me to decide. When I first came to Canterbury, the Christchurch Station, in point of inconvenience of arrangement and scantiness of accommodation, was pretty much what Dunedin is now. In all these points Christchurch is at the present moment superior to anything of the kind in the colony, and equal, if not superior, to the best in the neighbouring colonies. The same thing may be said of Lyttelton in comparison with Port Chalmers.

Paragraph 4.—“That the lines now open for traffic in the Provincial District of Otago exceed 422 miles in length, whilst there are only 318 miles within the Provincial District of Canterbury; and it is therefore not proper that the head-quarters of administration should be so far removed from this district.” The statement that the mileage of the Southern Railways is in excess of the mileage of the northern system cannot be disputed, but I am not prepared to express an opinion upon the deduction which the Chamber of Commerce draws from this fact with reference to the location of the head-quarters of administration.

Paragraph 5.—“That the public feeling here in the matter is very strong, and has been intensified by the recent removal of the local paymasters, a step which seems to indicate a determination to centre all the management permanently in Christchurch.” It is no part of my duty to deal with the expression of “public opinion” in submitting to you my views upon a question of this nature. I would, however, state that the localization of the pay office in Christchurch was no part of a system of centralization. It had long been felt that the local paymasterships were unnecessary, and were simply a burden on the department, and advantage was taken of a favourable opportunity to abolish those appointments. The concentration of the pay business in Christchurch is the natural and inevitable outcome of existing circumstances, and it would have been effected long ago had I not felt a natural disinclination to take any step calculated to prejudice the interests of old servants of the department. As a fact, wherever the head-quarters of the administration are, there the Paymaster, the Accountant, and the Stores Manager, with their respective staffs, should be located; and any departure from this arrangement, as has been found in practice, is attended with grave inconvenience.

I have thus placed my views before you in reference to the allegations of the Chamber of Commerce in, I trust, an honest and impartial spirit, and it would not become me, I submit, in a question of this nature, to venture upon a recommendation; but I beg leave to assure you that, wherever the Government may be pleased to locate me, my best energies will be devoted to the business and interests of the department.

WM. CONYERS,
Commissioner of Railways, Middle Island.

No. 6.

The PRESIDENT, Canterbury Chamber of Commerce, to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,— Canterbury Chamber of Commerce, Christchurch, 8th September, 1879.

At the annual general meeting of the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce I was instructed to telegraph you as follows:—

“I have the honor to inform you that, at the annual general meeting of the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce, I was instructed to telegraph you—‘That this Chamber views with the gravest concern the efforts now being made by a section of the Dunedin community to remove the Commissioner of Railways from Christchurch to Dunedin. They respectfully urge that the enormous and increasing traffic, together with the proper and efficient management of the Middle Island Railways, demand the head-quarters of the chief of the department be retained here, where the bulk of the traffic is centred. They are also of opinion that immediate steps should be taken to complete and render efficient the Addington workshops.’”

Since despatching the above message, you are reported in the telegraph columns of the *Press* newspaper to have stated, in answer to a deputation of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce, that “The subject of the removal of the Commissioner of Railways should not be made an election cry.” With this view the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce thoroughly concur, and desire that the efficient working of the railway system of the Middle Island should be the first consideration, and that it should rest on its merits alone; at the same time, this Chamber is convinced that an unbiassed