

the Committee?—No; I only know those in the Survey Department. [Names of proposed witnesses were here read by the Secretary.]

25. Can you suggest any one else?—No, I can think of no one else.

26. You have mentioned two proposed routes, but I understand there are three routes?—There are four lines that have been proposed.

27. Have you any idea which runs through most Native lands?—The Marton line, because it is the longer of the two.

28. Can you gather, from your experiences, which comprises the best land?—With regard to the Stratford and Marton lines, starting from the Te Awamutu end, these run in common: it is the same land for a considerable distance, and that common line opens up, so far as my information goes, good and available land at the north end.

29. That is the New Plymouth line?—Yes. It does not matter which you take—the Marton or the New Plymouth line; they both serve equally well. As to the opening-up of country, the question between the two lines narrows itself down to this: Which line opens up the best country from the south end? The Marton, decidedly.

30. That is the longest line?—Yes. It decidedly opens up the best country from the south end—all covered with bush, bare in parts, but all would do very well for grazing or dairying purposes. The soil is of good quality. It is the same character of country that there is behind Feilding.

31. Then, there is the Mokau line; what about that?—I may say, in a sentence, that you do not require to give that very much consideration, because it goes through such horrible country—cliffs, and engineering difficulties, and so on. As regards settlement, for the same reason, it is really unfit to support any large population. Just to show you how rough it is, I may mention that we are conducting a survey just now of a block of land north of Mokau, and it is so rough that the usual way of laying off rectangular sections is impossible. We have laid the country off into pretty large areas. Then, there is the No. 4 line, if you wish to refer to that. It is a line running from Te Awamutu, north of Lake Taupo, down the Repia Valley, to Hastings.

32. You can call that the Taupo line?—Yes. That would be a good name for distinguishing it. With regard to that line I can speak with a little more assurance, because I know the country. It is a very poor country, and not worth making a line through.

Mr. R. J. GILL, Under-Secretary, Native Land Purchase Department, examined.

33. *The Chairman.*] The Committee has summoned you, Mr. Gill, with a view of ascertaining to what extent the Government have become possessed of land along the various routes proposed for the North Island Trunk Railway. Mr. McKerrow has submitted this plan [producing plan], which shows all the land now in the hands of the Government, marked in white. Can you give us anything like the area of that land?—This plan is on too small a scale for that purpose. I understand that Mr. McKerrow is preparing a plan for the Committee. I saw him this morning, and I suggested that on the plan which he is preparing the whole of the lands that have been purchased, or are under purchase, might be coloured. I am not sufficiently conversant with the proposed routes of railway at present to speak positively as to what lands have been purchased contiguous to them.

34. Have you personally traversed these lines?—No. I may mention that I can give information as to the cost of the blocks of land which have been purchased or are being purchased.

35. Who, among your officers, could give us anything like a detailed description of the various blocks of land, as to whether the land is fit for settlement or not?—I think that Captain Gilbert Mair would be as good and reliable a man as is obtainable, with regard to the land between Wanganui and Taupo. I do not know that he is conversant with the land between Mokau and the Waikato. I am conversant with the country between Waikato and Taupo.

36. What is the general nature of the country along the proposed Napier route?—The land from Napier to Taupo is very indifferent land. It is nearly all pumice country.

37. *Mr. Larnach.*] With regard to the Mokau line?—I cannot speak as to that.

38. *Mr. Fergus.*] I would like to ask whether Mr. Gill knows the number or area of any blocks which are at present under negotiation to purchase; or, in the first place, if the Government has really any land on either of those routes?—A large area is at present under negotiation, but is not completed.

39. Is there any land really purchased there?—The plan is so small that I can hardly speak positively as to that.

40. There have been some purchases?—Yes.

41. You do not know the total area?—I do not know the locality or direction of the line positively. At Wanganui, a fortnight ago, the Murimotu-Rangipo lands were leased for twenty-one years. This is contiguous to it. Previous to that—four months ago—102,000 acres of land were purchased at no great distance from the line—I may say about twenty-five miles of the line. It is this side of Wanganui considerably. But I could indicate this on the plan which Mr. McKerrow is compiling.

42. Do you know if there is any Native land purchased on the Stratford route?—Yes.

43. At which end?—Bordering on the confiscation line.

44. That is at this end?—Yes; both inside the line and outside the line.

45. Is there much of it?—Yes, a good deal.

46. You could not give us any idea of the quantity of land at present held by the Government on the Stratford route?—No. My evidence would be much more complete if I could see a plan.

*Mr. Fergus:* It will be necessary to have a plan, I think.

*The Chairman:* Yes; and we can call Mr. Gill again; and in the meantime he can prepare a schedule of the lands in question.

47. *Mr. Larnach* (to witness).] In speaking of land purchases, do you allude to purchases simply by the Government or by other individuals?—Simply by the Government—that is all.