

632. I think it is a fair question?—I should say I did not know enough about the through route to be quite certain.

633. Which is the "through route"?—From Stratford. I have not been over certain parts of that country at all from Stratford.

634. From what you saw, what conclusions did you arrive at?—From what I saw I thought the central route from Marton round by Ruapehu would eventually be the most valuable line, because it opens up the country more, and opens up more land than the other; part of the Patea District would be opened up by it too. On the other route, as far as I can judge, there would be no feeders at all. It would only open up the land adjacent to the line itself, and, from descriptions given, it is very poor birch country for about forty or fifty miles; and, another thing, the central route would prevent any further trouble with the Natives.

635. *The Chairman.*] Will you tell us to what extent you have examined the country between Te Awamutu and Stratford?—I went along with the Engineers who were investigating a route along part of the country from Te Awamutu down to the Mokauiti. We travelled down the Stratford line to about the fifth mile, as it is marked on the map.

636. Did you not travel over any other portion of the line?—No.

637. What was the nature of the piece of country to which you have alluded?—It is very good country; limestone country a great deal of it.

638. Is it open country or bush?—It is mostly open fern country. It is easy country. A portion of it is the same as on the central route; the construction is easy too.

639. It is mostly open country?—Yes.

640. But is it fit for settlement?—Yes.

641. Would you call any of it agricultural land?—I should think it would be almost all agricultural land.

642. Are you aware what amount of survey has been made on that line?—I believe there has only been a reconnaissance survey made with the aneroid.

643. Do you know if there have been any cross-sections?—No instrument-work at all.

644. And the line was not marked out on the ground?—No.

645. Have you seen the sections that have been plotted?—I have seen those that you have on the plan.

646. The forty miles that you have travelled along you say is easy land: is it easier than a similar length on the central route?—It is the same kind of country.

647. You cannot tell us anything about the lower portion of the Stratford route?—Not from personal knowledge. I have been several times in Stratford during the construction of the main through line, but not on the new line.

648. *Mr. Montgomery.*] I wish to know if you can tell from memory, or knowledge of the matter, how much of inferior or comparatively-worthless land there is on the central line: how many miles of it does the line run through?—I can only speak from what I have seen, of course. The inferior land is near Waimarino.

649. What distance is that from Marton?—For several miles there seems to be poor pumice land there; and then at Waimiha, near where there would have to be a tunnel, it is also poor land. There would be quite ten miles of poor land there.

650. To the north of Murimotu. To the south-westward of Ruapehu I have not been over.

651. *Mr. Fulton.*] Did you take out any estimates of the Stratford route?—No.

652. *Mr. Larnach.*] Did you make full and particular notes of your journey?—Yes.

653. I suppose you have possession of those now?—Yes; I have some notes that I made.

654. *The Chairman.*] Are the surveys sufficiently far advanced on the Stratford line to enable you to make as good and reliable an estimate as on the Marton line?—Not sufficiently advanced at all, because there is no instrument-work.

655. They are not sufficiently advanced: you could only make an estimate with the assistance of the Engineers who were on it. I did make an approximate estimate of that too, but this was simply for Mr. Holmes's statement, and he would be able to give you information on that point.

656. *Mr. Larnach.*] Could you form any opinion from what you saw of the Stratford line what it would cost per mile in comparison with the central line?—The estimate was £7,000 per mile.

657. *The Chairman.*] That is £1,000 per mile more than the other?—Yes.

658. Do the plans, as you have examined them on that reconnaissance survey, indicate steeper gradients and sharper curves, or the reverse?—The grades seem to be steeper—1 in 50.

659. And what about the curves?—The curves were not shown.

660. The survey is not sufficiently advanced?—No. What we did was to take the rises and falls and see what grades could be obtained.

661. Will you tell us generally what is the nature of the land through which the coast route goes?—I went down the Mokau; there I saw a great many high hills covered with black birch, and it seemed to be pretty rough country, and poor land on the hills. And along the coast the ranges come close up to the coast; about a mile or half a mile only of some fair land, but no extent of it.

662. Did you in the course of your travels over that country come across any minerals?—We saw some coal cropping out in the Wanganui, to the west of Ruapehu; some coal was shown us near Tamaranui.

663. You did not see the seam yourself?—No; but I saw it on one of the tributaries of the Wanganui, and to the west of Ruapehu, on the way from Tokano.

Mr. E. MITCHELSON, M.H.R., examined.

664. *The Chairman.*] Of course you are thoroughly acquainted, Mr. Mitchelson, with the object of this Committee, and therefore I will at once simply ask you whether you have examined the proposed routes of railway personally?—Three of them.