

upon it, than the other line would open up. Then, I think, looking at the general financial position of the colony, that if we can get a main trunk line for £1,000,000 we should get it, rather than spend £1,400,000 upon it. In regard to the opening-up of land, one line will, in proportion to the expenditure, open up as much as the other; but I consider that, other things being anything like equal, the settled population should always be considered in constructing a line. Now, practically, the Marton line will cut off the whole of the people north of Wanganui from a practicable market in Auckland. At present Auckland is the chief market of the Hawera District, and I understand, from inquiries that I have made, that we can send by rail everything that we now send under great disadvantages by sea if the Stratford route were adopted; whereas, if we sent it the other way, taking Hawera as the centre, we should have a distance of about one hundred and thirty miles more to go, which would practically render the line useless to us. Then again, the Stratford route would also enable the Government to make a much greater profit on the hundred miles of railway already open between Stratford and Marton. That seems to me very pertinent to the question. If the Marton line should be chosen, it would, as I have just said, practically cut off the whole of the people north of Patea from its natural market. And as for the thirty miles difference between Auckland and Wellington—or thirty-six miles I think the supposed distance is—I fancy that when the Stratford line comes to be properly surveyed it would be found to be shorter than that; but, to my mind, that has no weight whatever. What I want to do is to make our lines productive and open up the country with them, and give the present population an opportunity of convenient markets, and, as far as I can see, the argument is entirely in favour of the Stratford line in that respect. That is the substance of what I have to say, Mr. Chairman.

1477. *Mr. Larnach.*] Would you kindly supplement that statement by giving your opinion of the proposed lines in regard to the Native difficulty?—Well, I do not think either of the lines would do very much. They both run wide of the real Native difficulty, except where they both run practically together. Of course the upper Wanganui Natives have always been more or less troublesome, and the central line goes through or near settlements of some rather turbulent Natives. Then, on the other hand, so does the Stratford line; and it seems to me we should get at the troublesome Natives practically as well by one line as by the other. The real difficulty with the Natives has always been either in the Waikato or Taranaki Districts.

1478. *Mr. Fergus.*] You say that if the line were constructed from Marton to Auckland it would practically cut off the Hawera traffic?—Yes, all north of Patea. There is a difference of one hundred and thirty miles between the two routes.

1479. From Hawera?—Yes.

1480. Would not a similar objection apply to the construction of the Stratford line, inasmuch as it would very materially increase the distance to Auckland from the Foxton end?—That would not affect the Foxton District at all, because their natural market is Wellington, and never would be Auckland, no matter which line was constructed. But our outlet is naturally Auckland.

1481. There is another point to which I should like to refer. For instance, the Napier people wish to go through by rail to Auckland; the Stratford line would cut them off entirely, would it not?—If I thought that a line was practicable from Napier, that would cause me to alter my opinion. But, as far as I understand, no line will ever be made that way; Napier traffic will have to go where it does now—to Palmerston—or it will ultimately have to take a line of its own up the other coast.

1482. Do you mean to say that the trade which at present goes by steamer from Waitara and New Plymouth would, if the Stratford line were constructed, go by railway instead?—I think it would; nearly all of it.

1483. Do you think it would be cheaper to carry it by rail all the distance from Opunake and Stratford than to ship it?—They never ship cattle at Opunake; they ship at Wanganui or New Plymouth. All the cattle traffic is now driven up from Patea, but you would be able to send a beast at per head just as cheap from Stratford by rail—or rather cheaper I believe—than you could send it up to Waitara and then by sea to Auckland. Of course you would never send cattle by sea if you could send them by land.

1484. *Mr. Montgomery.*] You think that the Stratford line would be of great value to the country between Hawera and Wanganui right down to New Plymouth?—Yes; it opens up that country.

1485. Would you consider the Marton line of any value at all?—No; it would be of no value at all as a means of getting to market. Of course we could go to Auckland from our district that way, but it would be at a tremendous expense. I do not think you would get either passengers or cattle; these would go by steam.

1486. You value that line considerably for stock?—Yes.

1487. *Mr. Larnach.*] Do you know anything of the country through which the proposed lines pass of your own personal knowledge?—No; except the Taranaki District generally.

1488. *The Chairman.*] You stated just now that you took Hawera as a centre, and that if the Marton line were made it would practically cut off the Hawera people from their natural market of Auckland: are you aware that, supposing the line were made *via* Stratford to Te Awamutu, it would be sixty miles farther from Hawera to Auckland than from Hawera to Wellington by rail?—Yes; I do not know whether I understand your question to mean that when Wellington is joined with Taranaki it will be nearer by rail than to Auckland, and that circumstance will cause us to change our market.

1489. That is the drift of my question?—That is possible, of course; but it is difficult to change trade.

1490. Do you think the large difference will be overcome?—I think it would be. The demand for our produce in Auckland is greater than in Wellington.

1491. *Mr. Fergus.*] Do you believe that the Stratford line could be constructed for £1,000,000?—I can only go by the estimates. I should say it could.