

TUESDAY, 22ND JUNE, 1886.

*Present:* The Chairman, Hon. Major Atkinson, Messrs. Gore, Hatch, Macandrew, O'Connor, Walker, Whyte, and Hon. Mr. Richardson.

Mr. A. GRANT, District Traffic Manager, Dunedin, examined.

173. *The Chairman.*] If you are acquainted with Mr. Vaile's scheme, will you give the Committee your opinion about it?—So far as I see, I do not think the scheme is workable at all. From my experience a great proportion of our passengers are carried short distances only, and in this respect Mr. Vaile's system does not offer much advantage over our system. Up to three miles our scale is under Mr. Vaile's; up to five miles I do not think there is so much advantage as would increase our traffic at all; and up to ten miles I think the increase would be small. In my district, also, there are a great many season-ticket holders—about three thousand—many of whom live in the suburbs of Dunedin, because they can get land cheaper there, and for the sake of health. They are carried at a very low rate, and if they had to pay 6d. or 4d. for each journey I am quite certain they would not go. I think Mr. Vaile's proposals would abolish that traffic. Then, again, there is a large number of labouring-men working in quarries, foundries, &c., who are anxious to acquire a home, and cannot get it in town: they go to the suburbs, and are carried backwards and forwards at very low rates indeed. When I went to Dunedin some twelve years ago there were very few suburban residences: there are several flourishing townships now; and I am quite satisfied that if the proposed rates were charged this would not have been the case.

174. *Mr. Vaile.*] How far do you mean?—Within four or five miles.

175. *Mr. Macandrew.*] What are the fares to Ravensbourne now?—A season-ticket costs £3 first-class and £2 5s. second. For family-tickets four passengers are charged as three.

176. *Mr. Whyte.*] What does that come to per diem?—I think it is about 2d. a day.

177. *Mr. Macandrew.*] What is the number of people now travelling between Ravensbourne and Dunedin?—I cannot say. We have about three thousand season-ticket holders, many within a short distance of Dunedin.

178. *Mr. Whyte.*] Do passengers generally travel more than an average of once a day?—Some travel six times a day. On the South and Port lines many of them come into town in the morning, go out to lunch and back, and then go out again in the afternoon; then a number of business men and others come in again to attend meetings, &c., and we run them home at night.

179. And you think they average more than a daily trip?—Yes. I am quite sure they average at least three trips a day.

180. *Mr. Maxwell.*] You have had experience in England or Scotland?—Yes. Twelve years in Scotland.

181. Were you in the neighbourhood of any large cities, and acquainted with the suburban traffic there?—Yes, one or two large cities—Aberdeen, for instance.

182. What is the population of Aberdeen?—I cannot say just now.

183. Do you recognize any difference in the nature of suburban passenger-traffic and the long-distance passenger-traffic?—Yes, I think they are widely different. There is no comparison between them.

184. And do you think the suburban traffic could be opened up for long distances, such as thirty, forty, or fifty miles?—No; not the same class of traffic at all.

185. Do you know any cases in which specially low fares have been tried in New Zealand?—Yes; I can give one case, which occurred last Boxing Day, on the occasion of a regatta which was held at Port Chalmers. Boxing Day is the principal holiday in the South, and everybody is free. On that occasion the people of Port Chalmers were very anxious to make the regatta a success, and came to me asking for cheaper rates than the ordinary excursion fares. After consulting with you we determined to make the fare 1s., irrespective of class: we had not sufficient rolling-stock to separate the classes. We advertised the cheap fares very largely. The consequence was that we carried about seven hundred passengers more than on the previous year, and the receipts were £38 less. The numbers were 3,700, as against 3,000 the year before. The fare was 1s., or 6d. each way; the distance eight miles. It was a beautiful day, and one of our chief holidays.

186. *The Chairman.*] Was the cost of haulage greater than on the previous year?—Yes; I think we had one or two extra special trains—that would make the cost greater.

187. *Mr. Maxwell.*] Do you know of any other case in which low fares have been tried?—There was the line from Kaitangata to Stirling, a private company's line. It is between four and five miles long, and the return-fare was 3s. At my suggestion this was lowered to half the rate. At the end of the year it was found there were the same number of passengers, and only half the receipts.

188. Was there a large population there?—Yes, a large mining-population.

189. Do you think that, supposing, under Mr. Vaile's system, two passengers were carried for one carried now, we could perform the service for anything like what it costs now?—No; I am very sure we could not do so. On the suburban lines our single lines are sometimes taxed to the utmost now, and if we were to double the traffic we must have a special service altogether. At present we run mixed trains, and if we were to increase the passenger-traffic to a great degree we should have to run passenger-trains and goods-trains separately, which would nearly double the cost of the service.

190. Do you think that, between country stations, this lowering of the fares would have any perceptible effect in making the people travel?—It would, I have no doubt, increase it in some measure, but not to the extent that Mr. Vaile seems to anticipate.

191. Do you think, for example, that the traffic between Titri and Millburn would be much increased?—I do not think it would be much affected there, or in districts of that class, because the people there are mostly labouring-men, and time to them is money.