

2791. The total costs, then, for comparison, will be what?—(a) Coal-trucks, &c., £53,000; (b) staiths or river-bank, £30,000; (c) coal-bins, &c., £19,000. It will thus be seen that the coal-bins remain much the cheapest way of providing storage-capacity and loading-facilities together, as well as being much the cheapest way of providing storing-capacity alone. One common objection to both the coal-staiths and the coal-bin system is the alleged breakage of coal, which is said to amount to as much as 2s. per ton on certain kinds of coal, though I would submit that this point requires careful inquiry, both as to the loss per ton and as to the number of tons which are thus deteriorated.

2792. *Mr. Brown.*] Can you give the percentage as regards quantity as to this 2s. per ton?—It applies, I believe, only to household coal, and the question has arisen whether it need apply to this if the coal were screened at the port of consumption instead of at the port of shipment. And it is also a question to what extent the breakage is really due to the fall from the coal-staiths or bins alone, or whether much of it does not take place in the trimming in the ships and in the process of unloading, both of which causes of damage will remain, however the coal were handled here. Assuming, however, that the loss is caused by the fall from the bins or staiths, the only way to avoid it under the alternatives I have named would be to provide coal-truck storage at the cost of £34,000 above the cost of bins. This would require an additional income of £1,700, or about 3d. on every ton of coal exported to meet it. Whether coal-owners would be willing to submit to this extra rate for the sake of saving the breakage is, I should think, very doubtful. That is all the information I have upon it. I have no personal knowledge of the prices obtained for coal in other places. I understand that 2s. is what Mr. Kennedy has estimated is the loss by breakage on household coal.

2793. The 2s. a ton refers to the market-value rather than to the quantity lost?—I cannot give a percentage. All I mean is that the assertion is that, owing to the breakage, the coal, whatever its price in any port may be, is worth 2s. a ton less on account of the breakage.

2794. *The Chairman.*] Where should the funds come from to meet this extra storage-supply?—The source from which funds are obtainable to meet the more expensive method is not clear, as it would run very close up to the margin available from revenue to meet interest on further borrowing; and, although it may be said that this might be provided by an additional rate if shippers were willing, still it would, in the first place, need some existent or fairly-certain prospective revenue to borrow upon, while all pressure hitherto has been towards a reduction of rates. In the case of the coal-bins the actual outlay now required would only be £5,500, as, although for purposes of comparison the cost of the wharves, &c., is added in, they would probably not be required until an extension of trade takes place considerably beyond what has hitherto existed. It is also an important point to be remarked that the loss by the coal-bin system would probably be small in reality, as the mine-owners would take care to store only steam-coal in them, which is not injured by the breakage. This consideration seems to destroy the only justification for the more expensive methods of storage.

2795. What would be the cost of working the bin system?—The cost of lifting the coal-trucks and emptying them would, of course, add to the working-expenses of the railway, but it might not practically do so to any great extent, as the coal-bins would be filled at times when the staff attached to the hydraulic cranes might otherwise not be fully employed, and, being permanent employes, their pay would run on anyhow; consequently the working-expenses of this method would probably not be very heavy. There would, no doubt, be some time taken in moving the trucks to and fro on the top of the staging, but a small additional expenditure would probably provide a rope-haulage system which would make it much quicker; and I have no doubt 100 tons an hour could be filled by this means. Without rope-haulage probably 50 tons an hour would be about as much as could be tipped. The bins could, of course, be divided into compartments, so as to keep the coal of different companies separate, if that were required in the future. It will be a question for the railway management to decide what charge will be made for putting coal into these bins and taking it out again.

2796. You prefer the coal-bin system?—Yes. The coal-bin system seems to be the only one that is at present financially feasible. When the wooden bins are decayed, in twelve or fourteen years hence, the whole question can be considered again by the light of new developments, and everything remodelled to suit new conditions without the necessity of casting away any expensive appliances. I submit for the examination of the Commissioners drawings prepared some years ago by Mr. O'Connor for river-bank staiths similar to the Westport ones, also a sketch of the cheaper form of coal-bins suggested now. Coal-trucks would be similar to the ones with movable bodies of which there are a number now in use at Greymouth. [Drawings produced; sketch put in and marked "Exhibit No. 32."]

2797. Have you considered how the cost of the erection of such bins as you propose should be allotted?—Yes, I have; but it is rather a difficult thing to form an opinion upon.

2798. What would guide you in deciding at whose expense such bins should be erected?—Under ordinary circumstances I should think that the coal-owners would be the people who would have to erect bins for storing their own coal. But against that, of course, they now say it is the duty of the Harbour Board to do everything they can to keep the port open at all times.

2799. In the event of the Harbour Board doing it, would you consider that it would be reasonable to increase the rates for wharfrage so as to cover the interest?—That is a matter the Railway Department have the control of. I really do not care to express an opinion on the subject. The Commissioners will be better able to answer that themselves with all the facts before them. The whole matter is one on which I am rather reluctant to express any strong opinion; but it might be discussed from the different points of view I have just mentioned.

2800. Who, then, should bear the cost of putting up these coal-bins, in your opinion?—It is rather hard to say. On the one hand it may be said that, as the storage is required to meet the