

by stating that the country suitable for settlement is such that it might be subdivided into areas up to 2,000 acres. Any country which is suitable for subdivision into areas of 2,000 acres we consider to be settlement country, the rest of it will be pastoral country, which varies a good deal in its character; and none of it, in my opinion, is first-class, or rather very little of it is first-class. If you take the Stratford route, the Crown owns at the present time 256,100 acres of settlement country, 86,600 acres of pastoral country—a total of 342,700 acres. There are under negotiation for purchase by the Government for settlement 316,000 acres. There are Native lands—340,600 acres—suitable for settlement; for pastoral settlement, 12,000 acres; and already in the hands of private individuals, 137,000 acres. These figures when totalled up show that there will be for settlement purposes 1,050,500 acres; pastoral, 98,600 acres; and the total area which will be affected by the line will be 1,149,000 acres—that is, all with reference to the Stratford line. We now come to the central route. Of Crown lands suitable for settlement there are 281,900 acres, pastoral land 144,000 acres: total, 425,900 acres. Under negotiation for purchase under the head of settlement lands 247,000 acres, pastoral 335,000 acres: total, 582,000 acres. Native-owned land suitable for settlement 509,600 acres, Native-owned land suitable for pasturage 543,000 acres: total, 1,052,600 acres. In the hands of private individuals 414,000 acres of settlement country, 80,300 acres of pastoral country: total, 494,300 acres. The total quantity of land, pastoral and settlement country, affected by the central route will be, therefore, 2,554,800 acres. The quality of the soil varies a great deal in various parts. Speaking of my own knowledge, the southern end of the trunk line passes through some remarkably fine country as to the character of the soil, but it is very broken and all covered with forest—I allude more particularly to the Awarua Block. In the Rangitikei Valley there is as fine land as can be found anywhere in the inland districts of the North Island. When we come to the central part of the country, through the Waimarino, we still have good land, but inferior in character to the Awarua. A considerable portion of this block is very broken, and could only be occupied in good-sized areas—say up to 2,000 acres. Some of it, however, is more level than is usually found in the central district, and nearly the whole of it is covered with forest. With regard to the lands on the other route, I apprehend that you will have expert evidence as to their character. My evidence will be hearsay to a great extent, derived from various reports which have been received by me, sometimes in writing, sometimes verbally. This is the general character which I gather from these reports: the whole of the land right away through as suitable for settlement in somewhat large areas. The basis of the country is what is called papa soil, which invariably takes grass excellently. The country is forest right away through, and, as already referred to, is, generally speaking, of a broken character. There is a lot of open country on the north end of the line—perhaps some eighteen or twenty miles along the line down to the Ohura Valley. That country I can speak of personally, and I know that the land itself is very good indeed in the valley. I understand that in all cases the land in the valleys right away through is particularly good, but the hills are not so good. The whole country, however, is capable of taking grass, and there are here and there belts of shelly limestone, which, of course, makes most excellent grass-country.

30. *The Chairman.*] You refer to the land about the Ohura Valley being of excellent quality; would that land be opened up by the central line—would it be brought within reach for a workable distance over the central?—Yes, every part of the valley would.

31. Then, speaking in general terms, which of the two routes would carry the largest population, as far as your knowledge extends?—As I have not a personal knowledge of the Stratford route, my opinion on the subject is possibly not of very great weight, but my impression is that the central line would carry the largest population.

32. According to the figures you have given, it would render accessible a much larger area of land?—It would certainly render accessible a larger area of land.

33. *Mr. Carncross.*] It has been shown that there would be a much larger portion of land served by the central route, but, notwithstanding, it is quite possible that the land on the Stratford line would carry a much larger population?—If the land were superior on the Stratford route, no doubt it would carry a larger population notwithstanding the lesser area of land.

34. Were the calculations as to the land served by the central line included in land served by the line from Marton to Hunterville?—No.

Mr. WILLIAM H. HALES, sworn and examined.

35. *The Chairman.*] You are Engineer-in-Chief?—Yes.

36. Are you acquainted with much of the country through which the rival routes are proposed to run?—No; I know a part of the country that is common to both routes, and portions at each end of the central route.

37. Will you indicate to the Committee how much of it you are acquainted with below the point of divergence?—I have been along the line from Te Awamutu to Taumarunui.

37A. On the Ngaire line?—I have never been on that route.

38. Would you state what is the quality of the land between Mokau and Taumarunui—is it land fit for settlement?—It is land fit for settlement, but it is not good land—not what I would call first-class land.

39. Would you call it second-class land?—I should say it would make good grazing land when cleared. It is open country generally, and a portion of it is fair soil. A great deal of it is pumice sand, and some of the hills are trachyte formation, with clay at top. On the slope towards Taumarunui the soil is light, but tolerably good.

40. Leaving that part of the question, you are head of the Public Works Department—have any estimates been prepared as to the cost of the construction of the two routes?—Yes.

41. Can you state them?—I can supply them.

42. Are those estimates framed after detailed surveys have been made, or are they mere approxi-