

43. *The Chairman.*] By contract?—No; it is being carried out under the co-operative system.
 44. Have you made any estimate of the average cost of construction per mile on the Ngaire route?—Yes; full quantities and estimates for culverts, bridges, everything, even detailed estimates, have been prepared. A survey almost equal to a working survey was made.

45. *Mr. Rhodes.*] On this four miles that will be opened for traffic at Christmas there is a big gorge, is there not, that will require an expensive bridge?—Yes; it is estimated at about £30,000. It is about a mile and a half beyond where the line will be opened for traffic at Christmas.

46. Do you know much about the adjoining country on the Ngaire route?—Yes; I have been over it to the coast.

47. That is a similar country in respect of character?—Yes; it gets rougher as you go to the coast.

48. Did you ever see coal in that country?—Yes, at Tangarakau.

49. How far up the Mokau River is there coal found from the coast?—About twenty-five miles. I have seen coal in several places between Tangarakau and the place where it is being worked on the Mokau River.

50. What is your knowledge of the country east of the line—that is, between the line and the Wanganui River?—I have not been very far that way; not more than a couple of miles. We had no object in going in that direction.

51. Seeing that estimates are being prepared relating to various subjects in connection with this line, would you furnish the Committee with those you have made?—Yes; they are all in the Public Works Department.

Mr. E. M. SMITH, M.H.R., sworn and examined.

52. *The Chairman.*] You are the member for New Plymouth?—Yes.

53. Will you make a statement as to what you know of the relative merits of the Stratford proposed route and the central route. Be good enough to tell the Committee what personal knowledge you have regarding the Ngaire route—that is, of the land it will serve between Eltham and the point of junction?—This is a question that I have taken a great deal of interest in. I brought the question before the Government, and the Government agreed to have a track cut over the proposed route which we propose. The fact is that the people of New Plymouth object to the line being made from Stratford at all. We say that any person living in Waitara or New Plymouth—these being the two chief ports in the district—would have to come thirty miles to Eltham towards Wellington before he could branch off for Auckland. The shortest route, opening up the best country and tapping the coalfields, would be to connect the railway half-way between Sentry Hill and Waitara. Mr. Donkin, the Engineer, can give you all the estimates in connection with this proposal. He gave evidence to the Committee which sat in 1884.

54. You are not opposing the central line or the Ngaire line, but you are advocating a convergent line?—We say the people of Auckland are wrong. If they want to connect with us they can do so better by the route we now propose than by a line from Stratford. We want the Committee to take this into consideration. We say this proposal of ours will be the shortest, will tap the coalfield, and be the most convenient.

55. You are not advocating a line from Taumarunui in opposition to the central route, but as a sequence to it?—We say we can, if our proposal were carried out, get coals to Waitara for 10s. a ton; that we could get coals to other ports at 10s. a ton; that we could get them to Palmerston at 12s. a ton. You have simply to ask the coal engineer, who will be able to give you every information as to distances and cost of conveyance.

56. Putting your new proposal aside for the present, what information can you give us respecting the land along the Ngaire route?—I have never been over the line. I have no opinion to offer on that subject, but I can give you the opinion of experts.

57. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Have you been over this newly-proposed line?—No, I have only been along it some little distance.

58. Do you know whether there has been any official report made on the subject?—No.

59. I should like to know the feeling of the people of New Plymouth and Waitara: whether they are in favour of the Ngaire line?—All the district admits that the Ngaire line is no good to us; it will be simply madness to have to go to Eltham before going on to Auckland.

60. *The Chairman.*] Putting aside the question of reaching Auckland, would a line from Taumarunui to Waitara open as good a class of country as effectually as the Ngaire line would do?—I only know that it is all good country. It would be the shortest distance. We say that if this proposal were carried out nothing further would be required. It would serve the Stratford people quite as well. Except a good metal road of about six miles, the Stratford route will merely skirt the coalfield. The Stratford people will get quite as much accommodation by our proposal. Mr. Donkin was engaged to conduct the survey right through. He says there is but one small tunnel to make to get into the actual coalfield. The fact of there being a coalfield there requires a railway.

THURSDAY, 15TH SEPTEMBER, 1892.

Mr. BRUCE, M.H.R., further examined.

Mr. Bruce: It may be remembered that yesterday I stated that a great deal of misapprehension existed in reference to the quality of the land immediately contiguous to, and on the west side of, the line in the vicinity of Ruapehu—immediately west of Ruapehu. I yesterday alleged that, to the best of my belief, for reasons which I then gave, the line merely skirted a pumice country—I mean the central line between Kerioi and Waimarino. As a proof of the validity of my contention, I have brought this map [produced] here to-day for the members of the Committee to look at. They will there see that the small-farm associations to which I alluded yesterday, and experts going over