

79. They might as well break the journey somewhere on the route and travel at their leisure?—Certainly; but you would desire to give moderately rapid transit to people coming from the southern part of the Island going north, and *vice versa*. The more tedious you make their journey the less likely you are to be able to compete with the steamers.

80. From that point of view you think fourteen hours has a decided advantage over the eighteen hours and a half?—Yes, very materially. When we get to eighteen hours and a half we should be obliged to provide sleeping-accommodation; in the other case we should not require it.

80A. Then, a principal difficulty in the way of greater expedition by the Ngaire route is in the existing grades on the open line?—The existing grades and curves on the open line are the chief difficulty; but I also gather from the late Mr. Blair's report that this route—Eltham to Mokau—is going to be a very bad one, because he speaks of a succession of ridges, of no less than thirteen grades of 1 in 50. That shows that through that part of the country there would be a succession of ridges to cross, and that is the worst form in which we can have bad grades and curves—namely, distributed over all parts of the railway.

81. It is not to be anticipated that any material improvement can be effected on the open line between Marton and Eltham?—No, for two reasons: the first is the interference with vested interests, and the second is the great cost.

82. *Mr. Duncan.*] We have it in evidence that the central route is not likely to have any close population from about Kerioi to Taumaranui, on account of the land being unsuitable for settlement. How would that affect a paying line as regards traffic, seeing that it would have to travel such a distance through a poor district of country?—From Ohakune to Taumaranui, a distance of about sixty miles, if there is no population, naturally there would be no local traffic arising from this district.

83. Would that alter your opinion of the Ngaire route as against the central route?—No, it would not.

84. *Mr. Carnecross.*] In estimating the probable paying-properties of this line, you laid much stress upon the traffic that may be developed on either route from the terminal points?—The local traffic is of great importance, of course.

85. Then what is the nature of the traffic that would be along this line?—You have from Marton up to Ohakune, a distance of ninety miles, a fairly good country. There would be a great deal of local traffic on that portion of the line now.

86. The evidence so far has gone to show that for several years the traffic would be mainly pastoral: would that bring much local traffic?—No. Taking Mr. Duncan's question and Mr. Carnecross's question together, I would say from Eltham, on the Stratford route, to Ohura Valley, there are ninety miles of country which I am told is susceptible of settlement. I do not know myself that this is so. On the other hand, from Marton to Ohakune, there are seventy miles of country. There is not very much difference, when you consider that you have the advantage of getting access into the eastern part of the Island, which is by no means an inconsiderable gain, although it may be very light country.

87. You cannot say from your own knowledge which line would be likely to develop the largest amount of local traffic?—No, I do not know.

88. *The Chairman.*] As I understand it, your contention is that the facility afforded on the central line for generally developing tourist traffic and traffic to the eastward of that line would compensate for the disadvantage of carrying the line sixty or seventy miles through country unfit for settlement?—Yes; I think it would outweigh the slight advantage of the Eltham route in respect of local traffic, if there is any slight advantage. The central route carrying people from the south to Tokaanu and Taupo will offer very great attractions that the other route does not offer.

89. And would justify the additional expenditure of half a million in the construction of the central line, over and above the cost of Ngaire line?—Not alone. The attractions of the line would not alone justify that expenditure, but the joint advantages of the central line, quick transit, greater traffic capacity, access to the east coast from Auckland and Wellington, and access to Taupo for tourists, I think, would.

90. In your opinion the joint advantages offered by the central route for acquiring communication between Auckland and Wellington and between the northern and southern parts of the Island, and the greater encouragement it would give to tourist traffic, would compensate for the additional outlay of about half a million?—Yes, that is practically what it would be.

91. *Mr. Carnecross.*] Would it be good policy on the part of the Government to proceed with the construction of the line by either of the alternate routes before they have completed the purchase of the Native lands?—I do not think I am able to give an opinion about that. I do not know anything about the question of the purchase of Native lands. I may say generally that I think that the Government ought to possess the land on the routes, but I do not know enough of the Native land question to give any evidence of any value about it. All my evidence has been given on the supposition that the Government have the land.

92. *The Chairman.*] In deciding as to the preference to be given to the Ngaire route or the central route, should not the question of one or the other of them affording a supply of cheap coal have very considerable weight?—The central route will have a supply of the cheapest and best brown coal in New Zealand available in the Waikato, from which place our present supplies for the Auckland railways are drawn; and I do not therefore think that the prospect of opening out another mine on the Ngaire route should materially affect the question. The central route is a matter of colonial interest; the opening out of more brown-coal mines is one of mere local importance. I believe the Taranaki district could get supplies of brown coal by a short extension of the Waitara line; but I do not speak with any personal knowledge on this point.