

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 20TH JULY, 1893.—(Mr. C. H. MILLS, Chairman.)

Mr. GEORGE FENWICK, Chairman of Directors of the Dunedin City and Suburban Tramway Company (Limited), attended and gave evidence.

Witness : Is it the wish of the Committee that I should make a statement, or that I should answer questions put to me by the Committee?

The Chairman : Perhaps it would be more convenient if you would first make a statement.

Witness : I wish to say, with regard to this petition, that the petitioners put forward their claim in as complete and exhaustive a manner as it was possible to do, as at the time it was drawn up there was no intention that I should come to give evidence before this Committee, or that any one should be sent here for that purpose. Practically it contains all the main arguments in favour of the conclusions at which we have arrived at, viz., that the single-trolley system is the best system, and the system we ought to adopt. On the general question of the right of electric traction companies to use the streets for the discharge of their return current, we know that decisions have been given in England and America establishing that right. There was a test case in England, which was brought by a telephone corporation—not a Government institution, but a private corporation—to restrain an electric tramway company from discharging their return current into the streets. This went against the telephone company. That was a case on all-fours with our own. The tramway companies were using the single-trolley system. They elected to use that system after having made exhaustive inquiry, as we have done, as to the other systems in vogue. We have been engaged with the investigation of this subject for the past three or four years. We have received a great deal of information from America, and other places. We have compared these reports, and as the result we have come to the conclusion that the single-trolley system is the best system, and indeed, the only system that ought to be adopted. The testimony in its favour, as regards its efficiency and the expense of working, is very great indeed as compared with the double-trolley system. It is the system which the English electric tramway companies have adopted. The engineers say that the double-trolley system does not work well, that it is more costly both in its introduction and its mode of working than the single system, and, in short, that there are greater drawbacks in working it as compared with the single-trolley system. For these reasons we have come to the decision to adopt the single system. The correctness of our decision is borne out by the experience of Messrs. Siemens Brothers and Company, the great electrical engineers and manufacturers. We have arranged, through intermediaries, to adopt it, and Messrs. Siemens and Company are to carry out the work. The basis of our negotiations for the transfer of our rights to the new company is upon the single-trolley system, and unless we are supported in our claim to the right to use the streets for our return current all our negotiations will have been fruitless, and our proposals will fall to the ground. Bearing on this subject, I should like to show the Committee one of the most recent publications showing the vast progress made in the use of the single-trolley system in America. The Committee will see that there are no less than 4,700 miles of electric tramways worked under that system in the United States. [Documents put in.] All the thriving American cities, after the most careful research, have adopted the single-trolley system. The double-trolley system has been, so we are informed, almost entirely discarded. I cannot give you more conclusive evidence that we ought to introduce this, the most perfect system that has been devised up to the present. I should like to say a word about the telephone system generally. We claim that it is an imperfect system, although a great deal of money has been spent upon it. It seems to me that tramway companies should not be also driven to use an imperfect system when a more perfect system can be obtained. It is open to the department to make their telephone system a perfect one.

1. *The Chairman*.] So that it would not conflict with the others?—Were the Telegraph Department to insulate their telephone system there would be no conflict. We know from experience that the telephone service is at present very imperfect, and that, owing to cross currents, private conversation is overheard, so that it is not safe to send an important message along the telephone. If I were engaged in any important negotiations I should certainly not use the telephone. We have all heard of messages overheard by persons for whom they were not intended. That cannot be avoided under the present system. The Telegraph Department makes a very handsome profit out of the public, to which the telephone no doubt largely contributes, so that I think a portion of this profit might be applied to making the telephone service more complete than it is at present. I may say, further, that I believe those who use the telephone would themselves not object to pay a small addition to their annual subscription to have a perfect system. I feel sure that subscribers would pay a pound or thirty shillings a year more if there were a perfect system at work. It would relieve them of the doubt they now have as to the privacy of their messages. Assuming that it would cost £10,000 to replace the present system with a new one in Dunedin, an increase of £1 per annum by the six or seven hundred subscribers there would give an ample interest upon the outlay.

2. *Mr. Earnshaw*.] I observe that there are a number of places mentioned in those papers which you have laid upon the table from which it appears that the route goes right through important centres of population?—Yes, through many of the principal cities in the United States.

3. *Hon. Mr. Reeves*.] Do you, Mr. Fenwick, base your preference for the single-trolley system on its relative cheapness?—Not entirely, but partly on that. We base our claim mainly on the