

Mr Francis A. Bowen, 3, Tokenham Buildings, Kings' Arms Yard, London, sends a proposal, dated 20th October, 1894. This gentleman, for himself and his associates, offers to construct and submerge a cable on any route which may be selected for £200 per knot of 6,082·66ft. The offer presents itself to me as being in an exceedingly ambiguous form, as there is nothing to show what the total cost may be on any route, and there is no explanation as to how the total cost is to be ascertained, whether the number of knots shall be reckoned on the actual distance between stations, or on the length of cable paid out, nor is it clear that the price stated includes the cost of buildings, instruments, &c., moreover, and, to my mind, the most serious objection to this offer is the specification of the core to be used. The weight of copper and gutta-percha appears to be designed to be the same throughout, without reference to the length of sections to be spanned. As specified the core would be too light for the long section, and unnecessarily heavy for the shorter sections. Mr Bowen places the additional charge for maintenance at £237,000 for the three years.

The India Rubber, Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Company refer to the invitation for proposals under Form C—that is, on the basis of a traffic guarantee. This company is unable to make a firm offer under this form they, however, submit an estimate in the following words: “For your guidance we may state that in our opinion a twenty-five years’ annual guarantee, payable quarterly, of the following amounts, as placed against the respective routes, should suffice for the effective establishment and maintenance of the cable:—

	£
“Route No. 1	226,000
“Route No. 2	217,000
“Route No. 3	215,000
“Route No. 4	153,000
“Route No. 5	202,000
“Route No. 6..	199,000
“Route No. 7	184,000
“Route No. 8	197,000.”

There is no other reference in any of the replies received to the establishment of the trans-Pacific telegraph under a Government traffic guarantee (Form C), and none whatever to the formation of a company to carry out the undertaking under a Government subsidy (Form B)

With respect to the matter of soundings, referred to in the first, second, and third communications above noticed, I would only remark that it would require soundings to be taken in a very comprehensive manner to give even an approach to a full knowledge of the sea-bed, and that it would involve much cost and prolonged delay. However valuable such a survey would undoubtedly prove in a scientific point of view it is by no means indispensable to the laying of a cable or to its effectual maintenance. Cables have been laid and successfully laid when no such comprehensive surveys have been effected, indeed the best information goes to show that a large proportion of cables at present submerged have been laid without any precise and detailed knowledge of the sea-floor. The majority of such cables are, I believe, in good working-order, and few of them have ever required any great expenditure for repairs. Be all that as it may, the Government is now in possession of definite offers, from firms of the highest standing and widest experience, to lay the Pacific cable on any one of the eight routes specified. All the soundings required for securely and successfully laying the cable are to be made by the contractors themselves during the time occupied in manufacturing it, and so satisfied are they on this and all other points that they are quite ready to enter into contract to complete the undertaking and guarantee its maintenance for three years, for a definite sum.

There are four regular tenders according to Form A, accompanied by ample details and full information on all essential points. After carefully and critically examining and comparing them, I beg leave to submit the following abstract:—

Regular Tenders.

Form A.—The cable to be owned and controlled by the Government, to be worked under Government authority, and to be kept in repair by the contractor for three years. No. 1, from Siemens Brothers and Company, 12, Queen Ann’s Gate, Westminster, London, No. 2, from the Fowler-Waring Cable Company, North Woolwich, London, No. 3, from the W T Henley Telegraph Works Company, 27, Martin’s Lane, Cannon Street, London, and North Woolwich, No. 4, from the India Rubber, Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Company, 106, Cannon Street, London, and Silvertown.

These tenders are based on the general conditions prescribed, they include in each case the manufacture and laying of the cable, the providing of station-buildings and instruments for the use of the operating staff, likewise the maintenance and repair of the entire length of the cable for a period of three years after the whole line shall have been completed and put in operation.

The parties tendering are prepared to enter into contract for the sums placed opposite the names of the firms in each case, as follow:—

Route No. 1.—Commencing at Vancouver Island, with mid-stations at Fanning Island, Fiji, and Norfolk Island, and with branches from Norfolk Island to New Zealand and New South Wales—complete, including maintenance for three years, in each case. No. 4, the India Rubber, Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Company, £1,517,000, No. 3, The W T Henley’s Telegraph Works Company, £1,826,000, No. 1, Siemens Brothers and Company, £2,170,000, No. 2, Fowler-Waring Cable Company, £2,350,000.

Route No. 2.—Commencing at Vancouver Island, with mid-stations at Necker Island, Fiji, and Norfolk Island, and with branches to New Zealand and New South Wales—complete, including maintenance for three years, in each case. No. 4, The India Rubber, Gutta Percha, and Telegraph Works Company, £1,316,000, No. 3, The W T Henley’s Telegraph Works Company, £1,743,000, No. 1, Siemens Brothers and Co., £2,140,000, No. 2, Fowler-Waring Cable Company, £2,210,000.