

VANCOUVER SERVICE.

This alternate line has to be considered in connection with the San Francisco service. While the steamers engaged have carried large cargoes and a fair proportion of passengers, yet the service is necessarily some three days longer, and, even with that margin, it has not always succeeded in being punctual. It seems also doubtful whether this service will be long continued, and in the event of its cessation, and a fortnightly service being still considered necessary, such a service to San Francisco could then be carried out by the employment of five steamers instead of six, as is now engaged in the two services.

COASTAL SERVICE.

The coastal distribution and collection of mails might be improved by the adoption or partial adoption of the recommendations of the Report on the Wellington-Lyttelton steam-service. By the arrival of the Invercargill mail at Dunedin overnight and its despatch so that the steamer might leave Lyttelton by 5 or 5.30, such a steamer as the "Rotomahana" could reach Wellington with the mails to be forwarded by train at, say, 8 a.m., arriving at Auckland the following morning. A return southward connection on the same lines is equally desirable.

Such a service would reduce the difficulties and expenses incurred over distribution of the English and American mails by express trains and otherwise.

Again, in the event of a discontinuance of the Vancouver service and substitution of a fortnightly service to San Francisco, and by the arrival of every alternate steamer at Wellington as the first port of call, twelve hours—both inwards and outwards—would be saved to all southern portions of the colony. Although Auckland would thus be placed at a disadvantage, yet, as by far the larger portion of population would benefit, your Committee recommends this course for such alternate service.

2nd November, 1898.

ROBERT McNAB, Chairman.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 27TH OCTOBER, 1898.—(Mr. McNAB, Chairman.)

Mr. W. GRAY, Secretary of the Post and Telegraph Department, examined.

1. *The Chairman*: Have you any evidence to give the Committee on the subject of the delays taking place in the forwarding of the mails from Auckland southwards; and will you make any suggestions as to how matters can be improved?—The first delay under discussion occurred in July last. The Manukau steamer with the southern mails was delayed at New Plymouth on account of the state of the tide. She arrived there late on the ebb-tide, touched on the way in, and was detained from about 2 a.m. till 8 a.m., with the result that, in the place of reaching here at 5 p.m., she did not arrive until after 11 p.m. The following month there was another delay, also owing to the state of the tide at New Plymouth. The succeeding steamer left San Francisco a day late, and it was assumed she would arrive a day late at Auckland, but she made an exceptionally fast run, and arrived on the Tuesday, time-table date. The "Takapuna" had left the Manukau the previous day, and the mails were sent on by the "Glenelg," which made an average trip to New Plymouth. She had, however, to wait outside about a couple of hours on account of the tide; but her mails, as well as the two previous mails, arrived here on Wednesday night.

2. It would be as well to deal with them separately. Have you any information to give to the Committee regarding the question of reducing the time-table of the service so as to enable the southern correspondents to reply by the outgoing mail, and obtain the same privileges as the Auckland people?—In a memorandum sent you I have sketched how this might be done—that with a 15-knot service it might be possible to give Dunedin a clear day and Invercargill about six hours for replies. This, however, would be running it very close, and were the mails a day late in arriving at Auckland, Invercargill would not be able to reply.

3. Have any delays taken place in delivering the Vancouver mail on its arrival here in Wellington?—A delay to the southern mails took place in August. The mail-steamer arrived here about 6 a.m., and the southern portion did not leave till 11 p.m. A steamer was to have left in the afternoon, but owing to boisterous weather on the West Coast she did not arrive here in time. The "Penguin," with the southern mails, met with a strong southerly gale, which delayed her arrival at Lyttelton, with the result that the Dunedin mails, instead of arriving early in the morning, were not delivered until nearly midday.

4. You have prepared a time-table to enable northern correspondents to reply by way of Vancouver?—Yes; but this really means a 16-knot service.

5. *Mr. Duthie*.] I have the papers that you sent in for me. Could you get a scheme prepared similar to what the Railway Department put before the Wellington-Lyttelton Steam-service Committee, where, by means of a diagram, they showed the different services proposed, enabling members at a glance to see what could be done by one and what by the other. Mr. Ronayne got a diagram of that sort prepared?—I should think that could be done if it is only a question of showing the lines.

6. And giving the dates opposite to them?—You mean the plan should be based on the figures I have given.

7. Yes?—Yes, that could be done.

8. I understand the wish of the House is to make the most of the mail-services for the benefit of the whole colony. In the meantime we have a fortnightly service, and it is the opinion that, by