

35. Taking your experience of detentions from various causes as between Auckland and Lyttelton, how often in the year would you expect detention—delaying the mails for a few hours, say, from tides, or “southerly busters,” and so on?—Well, I should say perhaps three or four times a year.

36. Three or four times out of twelve?—Out of thirteen. This does not apply to the service between here and the Manukau.

37. Mr. McLean suggests, could you give the Committee the difference in cost for the lines as between the Frisco and Vancouver on the one side, and Brindisi and other Australian mail routes on the other?—Yes.

38. Mr. McLean.] The net cost to the colony?—Yes. I have the information, and can refer to it.

Mr. JAMES MILLS, Managing Director of the Union Steamship Company, examined.

The Chairman read the questions on the Order Paper to the witness.

39. Mr. Duthie.] In this matter what I would like you to do (which is entirely voluntary on your part) would be for you to make a sort of sketch time-table, so as to show what would be necessary to be able to give a clear day at Invercargill between the arrival of the mail from San Francisco till it would leave again outwards: to allow that margin of time to show what would be required: and also an alternative between Auckland and Wellington as ports of call for distribution of the mails?—The speed required under the present contract for a nineteen-days service is an average of thirteen knots and a half. There is now an interval of four days between the arrival of the inward mail at Auckland and the departure of the outward mail. To enable correspondence to reach Invercargill and to give a reasonable time for reply by the outgoing mail would require an interval of at least eight days.

40. One day could be gained by delaying the departure of the San Francisco boat with the homeward mail. She would catch the White Star steamer for New York on Wednesday, whereas you now catch the German steamer on Tuesday?—We have now four days, and we require eight days. To gain these four additional days we need to accelerate the passage to and from San Francisco two days each way, which would involve the steamers maintaining a speed of fifteen knots all the way. To do this they must be capable of a good deal more, because you have sometimes persistent adverse weather the whole way between New Zealand and San Francisco, and to maintain a speed of fifteen knots under such circumstances requires a large reserve power.

41. What is in the minds of members of the House is, that a longer contract should be given to get the necessary class of steamers to accomplish this. You know that the passengers carried by way of the San Francisco route are not so numerous as what they might be if boats that were more equal to the Peninsular and Oriental and Orient liners were put on, and that a larger traffic would be developed if there was a better class of steamer and a faster service?—That is no doubt so.

42. Of course, the Atlantic service is the best in the world, and ought to be in a country like America, and it ought to be the shortest route; and it is a question whether the San Francisco service should not be made a better one. Members of the House are sitting here to try and get better services for the colony, and to, if possible, further build up this line. We want your assistance to accomplish this object, but it is felt that the present time-table does not fit in, owing to the delays and difficulties that are met. We want a sketch given us by you showing what is the best line to recommend to the House?—I understand you, and shall be pleased to supply such a sketch.

43. Could you get it done before you leave Wellington, because we shall probably be dealing with the matter before Monday?—I shall endeavour to do so.

44. We desire to meet the wants of the business people, and so we want you to put this matter lucidly before us. We are getting a similar sketch prepared by the Postal Department for us, but we would like you to give us your views independently as an expert in shipping matters?—If you want a contract speed of fifteen knots you must be prepared to pay a very heavy subsidy, because it would require not only much faster but much larger steamers.

45. Mr. Buchanan.] As a matter of information as to the mails, the Committee was asking Mr. Gray whether it would not accelerate the service if a special train was available at New Plymouth and at Lyttelton to expedite delivery to the extreme south, and his answer was not very conclusive. He said that it generally would. It would be well, however, that you should take it into consideration in making your proposals or suggestions?—Yes. As a rule, the steamer brings the mails on to Wellington, because she makes the voyage in less time than the train.

46. In good weather?—Yes.

47. There is another question I asked Mr. Gray, and that was, Taking the year round, what were the chances of detention through missing tides and bad weather between this and Lyttelton generally? What would be your idea?—Steamers are not often detained at Manukau; while between Wellington and Lyttelton I do not suppose that detention through bad weather averages more than once or twice a year.

47. With the steamers at present in use?—Yes. The chance is very much against it happening on the particular occasion when the mail is being conveyed.

49. The Chairman.] Do I understand you to say that very few, if any, of the delays that have taken place in Auckland have been in connection with the tide? I will put it in this way: Have any delays taken place in Auckland in getting the Frisco mail away for distribution in the south through the tide?—Not many. It happened recently. The mail was not completely loaded on the “Takapuna” until a quarter of an hour or so after the tide had turned, and the captain did not think it wise to leave. It does not often happen so close as that. To-day, for instance, the mail arrived at from 9 to 10 o'clock, and, I believe, it is to leave at noon. The difficulty in forming a close connection with either the Frisco or Vancouver mails is the uncertainty about their arrival. There being no cable across the Pacific, we cannot hear of their progress from stage to stage. The length