

198. Do you mean to say that the Australian traffic with the West Coast is greater than the traffic between Wellington and the West Coast?—I do not say that; but the trade from Australia would be very much reduced. Wellington would still have its traffic.

199. Well, you agree that Wellington and Dunedin would suffer?—To a certain extent.

200. So that you must take that into consideration?—I have allowed for that. The total loss to the colony is much greater. I may say that I have not taken into consideration the coal and timber question at all. There is no doubt that there has been a great loss in this item, but I had not time to go into the calculation of the loss which the colony sustained in these two items. It must be very large, but I dare say evidence will be given in regard to it.

201. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] I understand, if the railway were constructed you would get your coal direct from the coalfields?—Yes.

202. And that would be a saving to the consumer in the quality of the coal he received?—Of course, we should be very large gainers if we could get the coal direct.

203. It would save so much handling, and consequent handling, and you would get a greater quantity for the same cost of carriage?—Yes. A great deal of the coal which comes to Christchurch goes from there by rail, and is taken up towards the West Coast, and that is waste of carriage. It is not only the coal which goes in that way from Christchurch, but other goods, which go to the settlers.

204. There is a loss of a large amount of coal through the handling and breakage, which would be blocked if the coal were put into trucks at the mine and sent straight on to its destination?—Yes. If there were a constant and reasonable supply of coal from the West Coast it would put a stop to this handling, and the coal would be reasonably cheap.

205. *Mr. J. Allen.*] What is reasonably cheap?—Well, even if we paid the same price as we do now for the carriage, we should save the handling and breakage.

206. *Dr. Findlay.*] Do you think the railway could compete with the water-carriage?—I think it could. But it is not only the competing with the water-carriage, but the condition in which the coal would be delivered.

207. *Rt. Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] Are not your principal supplies of timber from Southland now?—Yes.

208. There is a considerable loss on the timber?—Yes; there is a considerable loss. We get no timber from the portion of the West Coast where it is most plentiful, and which is lying idle. Both with regard to coal and timber loss is caused by the second handling.

SATURDAY, 8TH SEPTEMBER, 1900.

Mr. EDWARD WILLIAM ROPER, in attendance and examined on oath.

1. *Mr. Bell.*] What are you, Mr. Roper?—A merchant.

2. Living in Christchurch?—Yes.

3. You have lived in New Zealand for a great many years?—Yes; thirty-seven.

4. Do you know the West Coast?—Yes; I was there in 1855.

5. You have been president of the Chamber of Commerce in Christchurch?—Yes, for two years. My term of office expired two years ago.

6. As president of the Chamber of Commerce did you not make a speech in which you entered into certain details as to the benefits of the construction of the Midland Railway?—Yes.

7. That was about two years ago?—Yes.

8. Have you got an extract from that speech?—Yes.

9. Will you read it to the Committee?—Yes.

It is much to be regretted that the Otarama-Brunnerton section of this line has not yet been constructed, for there can be little doubt that a railway service between Westland and Canterbury would prove a vast benefit to both districts. The result of a through line would be a mutually advantageous exchange of products between Westland and Canterbury, and consequent upon the increase of trade there would necessarily be an extension of our industries, and probably an increase in the value of property. As the necessity for railway communication between the two coasts is greater to-day than it was at the time the public first agitated so energetically for its construction, and as all information in connection with the proposed line is of public interest, I furnish a few particulars and estimates that will convey a fair idea of the work to be done, and the probable traffic upon the line when completed. The length of the uncompleted portion between Jackson's and Otarama is 57 miles 44 chains, and it is calculated that to finish this section, for which the surveys in detail are prepared, would cost about £1,000,000, and would give occupation to twelve or fifteen hundred men for four and a half years. The following estimate of the traffic on the line was made by those who were specially qualified to form an opinion upon the subject:—East to west—General merchandise, 10,000 tons; grain, 6,000 tons; agricultural, 8,000 tons; cattle, 900 tons; sheep, 980 tons; parcels, 200 tons: total, 26,080 tons. Passengers—First class, through, 4,000; second class, through, 2,500; first class, local, 5,000; second class, local, 3,000. West to east—Coal (local consumption), 70,000 tons; coal (shipping companies), 45,000 tons; timber, 21,000 tons; sleepers, 1,400 tons; building stone, 2,000 tons; parcels (sundries), 200 tons: total, 139,600 tons. Passengers—First class, through, 4,000; second class, through, 2,500; first class, local, 5,000; second class, local, 3,000.

10. Can you give us the date of that speech?—Roughly speaking, it was about three years ago.

11. Of course, made with reference to this matter?—Yes.

12. You, I believe, were one of those who, in 1884 or 1885, agitated for the construction of this railway?—I was.

13. You were then of the opinion that the construction of the railway would be a great benefit to the district?—Very strongly of that opinion.

14. To the colony as well?—To the colony as a whole.

15. Have you seen any reason to alter your opinion?—My opinion in that direction has been very much strengthened.

16. The railway was to be completed by January, 1895?—Yes.