

required are already on the ground, and contracts are let for the remainder, and all the rails are stored in Wellington and ready to be sent up at a moment's notice as soon as the road between Mangaonoho and the flat beyond Makohine is hard enough for heavy carting. The line can be laid through to Mangaweka by the time the Makohine Viaduct is finished.

40. So that there may not be any difficulty in forwarding the material for the Mangaweka Viaduct?—Just so. The district would also have the benefit of this eleven miles of line as soon as it is completed.

41. Can the rails be taken across the Makohine Ravine on a wire?—We have gone into that, and we find the cartage a little cheaper. There would also be considerable risk in slinging material over in mid-air with numbers of workmen employed underneath. We can cart them for 7s. a ton.

42. I would like to know whether it is usual to charge for roads to give access to lines as against a railway loan. I see there is only £564,000 of this railway loan devoted to construction, while the rest is made up of roads, departmental expenses, and purchase of land, &c.?

43. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] That was done in the amending Act?—The £1,000,000 was borrowed exclusively for railway construction. The loan was raised for the purpose of the North Island Main Trunk line, but the Loan Act, or subsequent amending Acts, stated that the money was available for the construction of roads to give access to the line and the purchase of blocks of land it would pass over.

44. *The Chairman.*] With respect to this £17,581, which you say has been received as rent from the land purchased, is that the total amount of the rent accrued up to the present time from the time the land was let?—I have no information upon that subject. The lands purchased out of the North Island Railway Loan are administered by the Lands Department. This amount has been received from the Department of Lands as rent, but I am not in a position to say whether that is the whole amount of rent that has been derived from the land purchased, but the officers of the Lands Department can give you the information.

45. You have no information whether this is the total rent accrued as rent, or whether it is only a portion?—No; I have no information on the subject, but the Secretary of the Lands Department can furnish you with full particulars.

46. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Is it not a fact that some of this money was spent in snagging the Wanganui River?—The Act, I think, provided that the Wanganui River should be deemed to be a road to give access to the railway; and as a matter of fact it will probably be the best road for our purposes by-and-by. It gives access to the upper portion of the railway, and when our construction works are further advanced I believe we shall use it.

47. But you take your materials along the railway?—Whatever we take over the railway we have to pay freight on. If we find the carriage by land is much more than the carriage by river, it is probable we should take the river carriage.

48. *The Chairman.*] Do you contemplate proceeding by co-operative labour or contract?—That is a question of policy which should be addressed to the Minister of the day.

49. But, so far as you are aware, you have no intention of altering the system that has been carried out from the commencement of the work?—We have no instructions to depart from that system.

50. *Mr. Hogg.*] Can you give us an idea of the amount that this Makohine Viaduct is likely to cost by the time it is finished?—I did not come prepared with figures of that kind; but the original estimate of the cost was £40,000, and as the price of iron and steel has gone up about 50 per cent. since the estimate was made, probably the total will now be over that estimate.

51. But you do not think it will much exceed the original estimate?—Not very much, considering all the circumstances.

52. You invited tenders for the work?—Yes.

53. What was the lowest tender as far as you can recollect?—I can get you the exact figures, if you like. I think it was something over £48,000.

54. Then the costly co-operative labour only very slightly exceeded the amount of the lowest tender?—The amount of the lowest tender was to carry out the work according to the plans; but when we came to make the excavations for the foundation, we found the ground more treacherous than we had imagined, and we had to make the foundations many feet below the depth shown on the plans. The contractor would have had to be paid for all this extra depth, so that the extras would have amounted to not less than £4,000 or £5,000. Allowing for that and the greatly increased cost of the iron and steel, I do not think the cost of carrying out the work by the department will very materially exceed the amount of the lowest tender.

55. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] You practically paid for most of your iron before the rise took place?—No, our order for the machinery reached England just before the great strike took place, and the orders for the material followed the order for the machinery at suitable intervals. But a great rise in prices had taken place, and there has been a considerable further rise since.

56. But, as a matter of fact, this is not carried out under the co-operative system?—It is carried out by day labour under the supervision of an experienced mechanical engineer and overseer.

57. *Mr. Field.*] An opinion has been expressed outside that the department would have done better by filling in the valley instead of constructing the viaduct, as they had sufficient material from the excavation of the tunnel, and it would have cost less money. Is there any engineering authority for that?—The material from the tunnel would not have formed 5 per cent. of the total required. There is no precedent in the world for the construction of a bank 250 ft. high, and the settlement that would have taken place with ordinary filling materials would have been such that we should not have got a solid bank for ten years, and with the materials available we should not have been able to make a bank at all. Some of the material from the tunnel was run into a spoil-bank. The water got into it, and it travelled a very considerable distance, overwhelming one or two houses, and the department was mulct in damages. The quantity of material in that spoil-bank would