

newly appointed Engineer-in-Chief, Mr. R. W. Holmes, was sent to the locality to personally look into the matter. Mr. Holmes went carefully over the whole route in company with Mr. Vickerman, the then District Engineer, and he entirely supports the view taken by Mr. Hales. Mr. Holmes points out that immediately to the northwards of Maungaturoto there is a ridge several hundred feet in height which the line must cross, and to do this with the greatest ease it is necessary to keep at a good elevation, and this object is secured by locating it as proposed—viz., through Kaiwaka and close to Mount Pukekaroro. To deviate *via* Bickerstaffe would entail the line crossing navigable water close to Maungaturoto, and would locate it in a basin from which the only outlet would be by a long tunnel. As all the engineering authorities agree that the central route is the most direct and the best, it has been finally decided to adopt that route. It will be quite possible to connect by this route with the navigable waters of the Kaipara Harbour—namely, at Te Hana, Topuni Bridge, and Kaiwaka.” This report was made after full inquiry, as stated here. It has been stated, I know, by the other side, that the Engineer viewed the country from the top of a hill, and did not thoroughly examine the position; but this report, if it is true—and I presume it is—states that after full inquiry and examination the engineers had decided on the authorised route; and I have every confidence in the engineers, because they are the best that the country can produce, and they are all honourable men, and men who would not make a report of this kind unless they had made full inquiry and made sure that it was absolutely correct. Now, in 1908 we have the proclamation of this line, definitely fixing it to a certain point. The proclamation says, “Whereas the extension of the Helensville Northwards Railway from a point on the southern boundary of Section 8, Block XVI, Otamatea Survey District, to Maungaturoto (hereinafter termed ‘the said railway’) is a railway the construction of which is authorised by ‘The Public Works Act, 1908’: And whereas the said railway has been partly constructed, and it has been determined to construct and maintain a further portion of the same (part of Maungaturoto Section): Now, therefore, I, William Lee, Baron Plunket, the Governor of the Dominion of New Zealand, in exercise and pursuance of the powers and authorities conferred by ‘The Public Works Act, 1908,’ and in exercise of every other power and authority in anywise enabling me in this behalf, do hereby proclaim and declare that the middle line of the said further portion of the said railway shall be that defined and set forth in the schedule hereto.” And this is the schedule: “Commencing at a point in Block III, Otamatea Survey District, marked 81 miles 40 chains, which point is about one chain due south of the northern boundary and about 106 chains due east of the western boundary of the said block, and is also the terminating-point of the railway described in a Proclamation dated the 20th day of May, 1908, and published in the *New Zealand Gazette* No. 42, of the 28th day of May, 1908; proceeding thence generally in a northern direction for a distance of about 3 miles 40 chains, and passing in, into, through, or over the following lands—viz., south-west portion of Section 59, Block III, Otamatea Survey District; Sections 59, 61, 68, north-east portion of 76, south-west portion of 76, 113, south-east portion of 78, middle portion of 78, north-west portion of 79, 86, south-east portion of 105, northern portion of 105, north-west portion of 104, eastern portion of 103, all in Block XIV, Waipu Survey District—and terminating at a point marked 85 miles, about 34 chains due south of the northern boundary and about 26½ chains due east of the western boundary of the said Block XIV, Waipu Survey District.” Well, this is the 85-mile place [indicated on plan]; so this deviation does not go anywhere near that point. We contend that if, after all this evidence, and after the House authorising a railway in that direction and it being fixed by Proclamation to go in that direction—if a Minister or any one else can go through that country on a flying visit and upset the authorisations and the Proclamations and say that the line is to go in some other way, the authorisation of the House is altogether valueless. If the House decided to authorise the East Coast Railway round by Waihi, for instance, any Minister in power might, for reasons of his own, say, “I am going to have this railway taken round by way of Rotorua.” The positions are absolutely parallel. I think this Committee should demand of the Minister some reasons for making this very great change and compel him to show some compensating benefits from it. So far, we have not had any evidence to that effect at all, but, on the contrary, we have had a report from Mr. Stewart, engineer, of Auckland, and he says that this deviation—I am speaking of the first deviation now—will cost the country about £93,000 more than the route round the other way. That is a very strong reason why it should not go in that direction, unless it can be shown that there are very strong compensating benefits to be obtained by the western route; and we say that this cannot be shown. I will put in Mr. Stewart’s report, dated 30th September, 1909. [Document put in.] Then I have Mr. Mitchelson’s letter. It has been circulated among members, so it will not be necessary for me to read that, but there is another letter from Mr. Mitchelson, which he has sent because he cannot get here to-day, and it reads as follows: “For the reasons stated to you in my letter, I regret my inability to attend the meeting of the Committee for the purpose of giving evidence in connection with the Northern Railway Extension and route. I have not much to add to my previous letter on the subject which was addressed to the Minister of Public Works further than to protest against the statement made by some members of the deputation that recently waited on the Minister, which was to the effect that I was personally interested inasmuch as I was chairman of directors of the Kaipara Steamship Company. I am not, nor was I ever, chairman of directors of the company. I am a large shareholder and a director of the company, and, further, I have been a shareholder and a director for most of the time, extending for a period of over thirty-five years, during which time the shareholders have received three dividends, two each of 4 per cent. and one of 2½ per cent.; so there is not much to fight for in connection with the Kaipara Steamship Company; and, furthermore, having been connected with the company for so long a time, my interest in the company, had I been selfish, would have tempted me to make a different recommendation to the Stout-Vogel Government to that which I did—namely, fixing the route on the course which I have always maintained to be that on the east side of the Tangihua and to the west of the Maungatapere Moun-