

APPENDIX III.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

AUCKLAND, MONDAY, 18TH APRIL, 1910.

The Chairman.—I will first ask the Secretary to read the commission.
Commission read.

The Chairman.—Who is represented here?

Mr. Myers.—The Auckland Electric Tramways Company is represented here. I appear on behalf of the company.

Mr. Rosser.—As secretary of the Auckland Tramways Union I am authorised to represent the union at this inquiry, and along with me are three motormen, Paul Richardson, Henry Carter, and John Willis.

Mr. Wyllie.—I represent the Auckland City Council.

The Chairman.—As the commission states, some doubts have arisen as to the efficiency of the brakes on the Auckland tramways. A previous Commission sat on the subject, and a certain amount of evidence was given before a Committee of the House of Representatives. I have to call on Mr. Myers to explain the position he will now take up.

Mr. Myers.—I would first say a word as to the procedure I suggest should be adopted. I have mentioned the matter to Mr. Rosser. I propose first of all to outline the history of this matter, relating to the Auckland brakes. Mr. Rosser, after I have done, would like to say a few words to the Commission, and suggest that he would then like to call certain evidence before the company calls its evidence. I think that is the most suitable course to adopt.

The Chairman.—I see no objection to the course.

Mr. Myers.—Then I will briefly outline the position, and in doing so I will indicate the position that the Auckland Tramways Company takes up. I do not propose to go into matters in detail now, because I assume that if necessary the opportunity will be given to me later on, after evidence has been given, to address the Commissioners with regard to that evidence.

Now, so far as the terms of the commission are concerned, I suggest that the proceedings may be shortened to some extent. I notice that one of the questions the Commissioners are asked to answer is this: "Whether, having regard to the grades of the said tramways, to the speeds at which cars travel thereon, to the congested street traffic, to the safety of the public, and also to the provisions of clause 48, Part III, of the Second Schedule of the Tramways Act, 1908, the system of brakes already adopted or any of them are suitable, efficient, and sufficient for use on the said tramways." It is necessary that I should say a few words with regard to that particular question. To clear away any misunderstanding that may exist in the minds of the Commissioners or in the minds of the public generally, I may say that the Auckland Electric Tramways Company commenced business here about eight years ago. It installed upon its cars a certain system of brakes, which were approved, and which had to be approved under the Government Orders in Council by the Engineer of the Public Works Department. With that system of brakes there was a hand-brake operating on the wheels; a track brake, also operated by hand, and an electric emergency brake. The company has always consistently taken up the position, and it still says, that those brakes are perfectly safe and efficient; but it is unnecessary, I think, if I may respectfully make the suggestion, that the Commissioners should enter into an inquiry with regard to that first question, because, for reasons I will indicate, although the company is satisfied that those brakes are efficient and safe, the company, ever since this brake question has arisen, was always prepared, and is now prepared, to do what it considers the right thing. In other words, it has been prepared to alter its braking system, because, while it considers that that system is perfectly safe, it recognises that, for reasons I will indicate, it is desirable, if not necessary, in order to work harmoniously with the Government and with the employees of the Tramway Company, to alter the system. It is important to bear in mind the origin of this difficulty in regard to the brakes. I may say that the objection to the brakes did not arise in the first place from the Government Department. It arose in consequence of the complaints made by the motormen; and the reason of the complaints was that the application of this brake operating on the wheels involved a considerable amount of hard work. That is the origin of the whole difficulty. The company admits that that hand-brake does involve a considerable amount of hard work, and, as I have stated, it recognises that it is necessary, in order to work harmoniously with the men and the Government, to alter the system, and it is prepared to do so when necessary. I suggest, therefore, that it would be sufficient not to take any evidence with regard to the present position at all, because we are prepared to alter our brake system in the direction I will mention. I suggest that it will be sufficient, therefore, not to answer that question, but to point out in the report that it is unnecessary to do so because of the position the company takes up—namely, that it is prepared and has been always prepared to install a different system of brakes. This is a question that may be at issue. We are prepared to put in a system of brakes, though perhaps we may say that the system is not more safe and efficient than the system we have in vogue now. Still, we are prepared to put in a different system of brakes if necessary, and therefore suggest that there is no necessity to waste time in taking evidence in regard to the first question.