

Wairoa River there is ample opportunity for as much opposition to the railway as any one cares to take advantage of. As regards the trade in cattle, and the trouble there is in getting them out of Kaipara Harbour, I sympathize with the people who are engaged in that trade, because we have the same difficulty on the east coast in a more aggravated form; but as soon as the line crosses at Young's Point that difficulty will be overcome. On the eastern side we ship at Mangapai, and on several occasions cattle have had to wait a week or more, and then have had to be driven back to the paddocks because they could not be taken by sea to their destination. That is a positive hindrance to growing beef or going in for fattening of any kind. Should the line go to the west, and cross at Kirikopuni on the Whangarei-Dargaville Road, according to the evidence given on the west, a connection from Kirikopuni to Dargaville could be made with a length of thirteen miles only. It would leave Whangarei on that same route about twenty-five miles to the east, and if a connection could be made for thirteen miles the settlers half-way between these two lines would be only six miles and a half either way from the railway. Should the eastern line be adopted it crosses the same route about seventeen or eighteen miles from Whangarei, as it is nearly half-way between Whangarei and Dargaville. The distance between Whangarei and Dargaville is, I think, about thirty-eight miles. Taking the country alongside the Tangihua Ranges, east and west, there is no comparison as regards the population and the number of cattle carried between the east and west, the greatest number being on the east. It is acknowledged by western people that on the eastern side of the Tangihuas are valleys which form ideal country for fruit-growing, and with cheap freights on the railway this industry would have a chance of being successfully started. I see no reason why in a few years' time there should not be ten miles of orchards on this warm side of the range, but the southern side could not do it. As regards the connection with Whangarei, if the Main Trunk line is run through here, the shortest possible connection should then be made with Whangarei and the Main Trunk. Whangarei, being a distributing centre, could then send its goods by the Main Trunk for distribution up and down the line, north or south, east and west. You can now buy goods in Whangarei as cheaply as you can buy them in Auckland. The land to the west, from Waikiekie northwards, as far as the Tauraroa, is occupied by people who live on the eastern side, who hold those sections as a back run. There is no new land to take up there. The sections are all on the west, and if the western line were deviated I own nearly 600 acres that would be available for settlement within 50 chains of the line. I am not belittling any of the western land, but I can only say it is good grazing-land, and can only be used for that purpose, as stock can always be fattened for a market when general agricultural produce could not be grown. A great deal has been said about freight. Now, a ton of coal costs £1 8s. in Auckland, but by the time it reaches the blacksmith here it costs him £3 10s. 6d.—12s. 6d. freight to Mangapai, and £1 10s. a ton cartage to here. To give you an idea of what our roads are like, a carter told me on one occasion that it was impossible for him to convey a crate of six fowls to Mangapai. As to timber, we look forward to the time when the timber will be all gone from both the eastern and the western sides; but while it is being disposed of it will continue to be transported, as hitherto, by water. As to the statement that the eastern route traverses poor gum lands, I will leave the Commission to consider what they have seen for themselves regarding that point. A lot has been said about floods being greater on the eastern side than on the western, but the eastern line crosses land of the same character as the western route; the water runs from the east to the west, and in my timber-rafting experience I have always found more water towards the mouth of the rivers. I think the floods have been exaggerated.

3. *Mr. Coom.*] You say you own 600 acres at Kirikopuni: what condition is that land in?—About 150 acres in grass, and the rest standing bush. The 150 acres has been in grass about six years, and the grass has not died out. It is good grazing-land, and I have seventy head of cattle running on the whole area.

4. What is your opinion of the value of the country on the western route?—It is very good pastoral country, of a sandy nature.

5. Will the grass hold on it?—Yes; but the worst trouble is the fern, and unless you stock it very closely you will not keep the fern down. The land on the west is rather too rough to ever become agricultural land.

6. Have you any suggestion to make as to a branch line to Dargaville from either the eastern or the western route?—The best way to serve Dargaville would be to run a branch line through Waikiekie—a little south—to Dargaville; but I have my doubts as to the Dargaville people using the railway at all while they have the waterway to Helensville.

7. You would not propose to cross the Wairoa?—No.

8. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] How many acres have you in grass in this district?—About 400.

9. What do you carry on it?—About 170 to 180 head of stock.

10. And at Kirikopuni you are holding 150 acres?—Yes, with 450 acres of bush land besides.

11. Is that very steep land?—Some of it is.

12. Do you not think that land compares fairly well with the carrying-capacity of this district?—Yes, it is good grazing-land. I do not belittle the western side for grazing.

13. How long have you held the Kirikopuni land?—About six years, and I value it now at £6 an acre as it stands.

14. What do you value property in this district at?—It varies in amount up to £20 an acre.

15. Can you give the Commission any idea of the value of your 400 acres in this district?—It is not valued by the Government as high as that.

16. You have made rather an extraordinary statement to the effect that floods are more likely to take place towards the mouth of a river than a long way up the river, where it is narrower: can you support that statement with facts?—I know that we can raft better the nearer we get to the mouth of a river than we can farther up towards the back: we can follow the logs down better.

17. You mean, follow the water down?—Yes.