

JAMES TROUNSON examined. (No. 61.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Where do you reside?—I reside at Northcote.

2. What is your occupation?—I am a timber-merchant and farmer. I formerly resided at Dargaville, where I lived for about twenty years, and before that I lived for about twenty years at Paparoa.

3. Would you make a statement to the Commission giving your views on the several matters we are considering?—I have known the northern district for very many years, having traded with Maungakaramaea, Waikiekie, Whangarei, and Mangapai—through all the districts affected by the eastern and western routes of the proposed railway. I used to buy fat cattle which were fed on the west of the Tangihuas, but almost without exception the owners of those cattle lived at Waikiekie and Maungakaramaea. At the end of the winter, when there are no turnips grown in the Waikato, it was no uncommon thing for cattle fattened on the western side of the Tangihuas to fetch £20 apiece in Auckland. Whilst the people lived on the eastern side of the Tangihua Range they fattened their cattle on the western side. When going through the districts on the eastern side we would go miles and miles without seeing a beast—that is, you would not be able to buy a fat beast on that side. All the stock had to be driven through there to the coast, for there were no roads on the other side. I find that where cattle will do well on rough country they will do better when the country is cleared. Only last year a gentleman who came up there to buy cattle told me he was informed in Auckland that it was no use going there to buy cattle, yet in one week he had bought seven hundred head. The western side has been a kauri-timber district, but there is a large quantity of mixed bush which the settlers could make use of, especially as the kauri is becoming scarce. I have a sample of teraire here which has been used for the outside wall of a building, and the Maori whose house it was in informs me that it is over thirty years since it was put in. It is in a perfectly sound condition, and had never been painted or oiled. Teraire is regarded as a very excellent timber for all purposes that first-class kauri is used for now, such as ceilings and floor-boards, and settlers could make use of the value of that timber whilst clearing their lands. There are hundreds of millions of feet of it in the north. I have orders from Sydney for teraire at a price as good as we used to get for first-class kauri. It would be profitable, and would open up a fine country. There is also matai and rimu and other timbers which cannot be floated.

4. *Mr. Evans.*] You reside in the western district?—Yes, in the Kailu Valley, and I am not at all concerned in the progress of the Main Trunk line by either route.

5. Are you a large landowner?—I have about 6,000 or 7,000 acres of kauri bush land and other land.

6. You think the central route should go to the west of the Tangihua Mountains?—Yes, because of the great proportion of good land.

7. Are you in favour of a branch line from Whangarei to the main line in the direction of Maungakaramaea?—I do not see what is the use of it.

8. There is a big population along there, is there not?—Not that I know of. The country is generally poor. There is no timber or many settlers on the route.

9. The railway would improve the value of your land, would it not?—Not in the least.

10. *Mr. Ronayne.*] You have a general knowledge of the land on the eastern and western routes?—Yes.

11. Supposing the railway were taken through the western route, do you think the revenue obtainable would be sufficient to pay working-expenses and interest?—I think so, especially if they could make use of the timber.

12. Supposing it were taken on the eastern route, what would be the position?—The traffic would have to come from the western side, as now. We have to drive our stock through by the eastern side, because we have no roads.

13. You mean that the eastern route would not produce so much revenue as the western route?—Not nearly so much.

14. Your opinion is that the line on the western route is far superior to that on the eastern route?—Yes. I consider that 90 per cent. of the traffic on the railway would come from the western side.

15. Some of the witnesses have stated that a railway connection would be desirable between the Main Trunk and Dargaville: are you in favour of that?—I think it would be possible to connect the Awakino Valley with the Main Trunk.

16. Do you think that that connection should be made as soon as the railway is completed to Kaikohe?—I think it is desirable.

17. Do you think it would pay?—It is good dairying-country, and I think the Government are now opening up the country. I think the connection would pay.

18. Now, with regard to the gum lands. The Commission passed through a portion of your lands and saw the results of your labours in bringing in the gum lands and converting them to good pasture: what is your experience in connection with that?—There is a great difference in gum land. There is some gum land which has sandy soil of which one can make something, but on the pipeclay land very little can be done.

19. The land you were breaking in was land of a sandy description?—Yes. Forest land on which there is not much gum. I have broken up a lot of that land in the last two years. I had kauri bushes right through, and bought more land than I really required, and as soon as I got the timber out I broke up the land, and off the land which I did not think was of much value at that time I sheared five thousand sheep last year.

20. Are there large areas of gum lands on the western route?—Not large areas where this line goes on the western route.

21. Is it capable of being cultivated and put into grass for dairying purposes?—All the land nearly on the western side is suitable for grazing, and could be made use of. It could be made to carry a sheep and a half to the acre.