

I think it is one of those branches which will most decidedly have to be made, but I think it is also one of those branches which can wait better than others until the Main Trunk line is either completed or pushed much farther north than it is at present, owing to the fact that when they get to Whangarei they get very cheap and quick water communication with Auckland. I think the freight is 7s. 6d. a ton now. They have shipping facilities at Whangarei and a good service of steamers, so that once they get down to Whangarei they have really got over the great part of the difficulties of transit. At the same time, I would not like it to be thought that we are in any way opposed to that link ultimately.

4. *Mr. Evans.*] Can you tell me what amount of Government land there is on the proposed western route?—I have not the detailed knowledge by me. I understand there is a great deal of Government land on that route. Of course, I have not said a word about the western or eastern route, because it is not the policy of the Railway League to enter into the question of the rival routes at all. We want to leave that to the Government and to the Government engineers. Of course, I have my own individual opinion.

5. You believe the best land is on the west?—I think there is a larger amount of good land to be opened up on the west than on the east. There is a great deal of fine country on the banks of the Wairoa River, on the western side of the Tangihuas, up to Tangiteroria. There are big river-flats of magnificent land, and some of the hill country, I should say, will take grass very well.

6. Are these flats owned by the Government or by Maoris?—The most of it is private land. It was originally the Walton Block, belonging to the Kauri Timber Company.

7. Are you a landowner in that district yourself?—No, I do not own an acre of land north of Auckland.

8. You mentioned that the people on the east had good water communication: have they not also good water communication on the west with the Wairoa and its tributaries?—They have good water communication on the Wairoa from Tangiteroria downwards, but for many of the purposes of settlement or industries which the settlers would have it is not to be compared in usefulness with railway communication, because of its uncertainty and also of its cost so far as stock is concerned.

9. Do you not think that good main roads through the district will also be required before the railway comes in?—My experience is that the railway usually drags roads after it, because the roads are then made in order to feed the railway. Of course, I think roads are better than nothing. In many ways a railway through a new district is more useful than roads, because the settlers have great difficulty in maintaining roads.

10. You have often been through this country?—I have been through it.

11. Did it strike you that there is very little land carrying sheep through that country?—Sheep-farming has not extended to any great extent as yet.

12. Most of the country is still covered with bush and fern?—A very large proportion of it is.

13. Do you consider that this land, if it was cleared of scrub and fern and so on and laid down in grass, would keep two sheep to the acre?—I think a very large proportion of the land is two-sheep-to-the-acre country when brought into grass—much of it more.

14. And the poorer country?—The gum lands I would not consider as sheep country at all, though in time even they can carry sheep and also dairy cattle.

15. With your experience, what do you consider it would cost per acre to put that bush country down in grass?—I should say that to bring the land into absolute carrying-capacity you might spend from £2 10s. to £3 per acre. You might spend more money than that quite profitably if you had it. If I was in an assessment Court I would allow a man £3 per acre as the value of his improvements in regard to any land that was down in good grass.

16. *Mr. Ronayne.*] With reference to branch lines, you mention that it would be desirable later on, when the Main Trunk was completed from McCarroll's Gap, say, to Kaikohe, to have a connection with Whangarei, but you do not say anything about a connection between the Main Trunk line and Dargaville. Would your league be in favour of such a connection?—Oh, yes; that is one reason I meant to have given you why I think the Main Trunk line should be continued—that it would give a far better opportunity for connection with the Kaihu line and the Dargaville district than you could get if the Whangarei line were the Main Trunk line. It is simply a coastal line, and was never intended for the Main Trunk line. The Main Trunk line was always supposed to be somewhere near where the flying survey was made through the Mangakahia, and the settlers have always understood that, and have built up their future plans and hopes on the fact of it going through there. Geographically, it seems to me it would be impossible to make the Whangarei-Kawakawa line the Main Trunk. One thing that ought to be taken into account is the national defence question. That surely would point to the fact that the line should go through the centre of the country as much as possible and as direct as possible to the far north, where there is a cable-station. Of course, these are all considerations of another kind.

17. Is the league of opinion that the Main Trunk line, say, from Auckland to Kaikohe will be a profitable proposition for the Dominion?—Yes, they hold that opinion, and personally I feel absolutely certain it will be. There is quite enough good country to warrant it going through.

18. Can you give the Commission an idea as to the nature of the probable traffic and the sources of revenue, speaking generally?—I think, generally speaking, it will be the produce of the farmers—fruit-growers, dairy-farmers, sheep-growers, and cattle-raisers—proprietors of timber-mills, and possibly coal. I do not know what developments there may be in the mineral resources of that part of the country. Many scientific men tell us that there are all sorts of things there. One can, of course, guess at these, but the main thing will be the produce sent to market by the settlers in the country and the goods they will require from the big centres of population in the south.