

30. Where are the largest number of settlers?—At the present time the largest number are on the east.

31. What is the average distance between the eastern and western routes?—About four or five miles.

32. As regards the settlers from Mangakahia, where the line junctions to the northwards, would not the settlers to the northwards be equally served no matter which route was taken?—I dare say they would. I would just like to say that it has always been understood that no matter which way the line went, lower down the Main Trunk must go through the Mangakahia Gorge.

33. It does not affect the settlers beyond which line is adopted?—The western line is shorter than the east, and that would affect freights.

34. Supposing there was a deviation of the eastern line arranged that made the eastern line shorter than the western, would not that then be an argument in favour of carrying out the eastern line as serving the back country north of Mangakahia?—No, because the eastern route, as I have shown, goes within six miles of deep water.

35. There has been a deviation surveyed on the eastern line in the neighbourhood of the Houto which will make the eastern route shorter than the western: would not that be an argument in favour of adopting the eastern as against the western route?—No. One of my arguments is that the western is the shorter line. If you make the east shorter than the west that will take that part of my argument away, and of course would affect the settlers beyond Mangakahia.

36. *Mr. Becroft.*] What distance do you think the trade of the Wairoa would come to the railway?—I think the whole of the stock of the river would find its way to the railway.

37. *The Chairman.*] The Wairoa River runs north and south, and the head of the river is about midway?—Practically.

38. Is the rough water of the heads in the course of the river?—In crossing you get the full swell of the ocean. It is almost impossible to cross even at the calmest time without feeling the swell. If it is a west or south-west wind it is extremely rough, and in punting cattle near the heads there is always grave danger.

THOMAS FREDERICK DOWNS examined. (No. 24.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a farmer, residing at Tokatoka.

2. Will you kindly make a statement to the Commission?—I have been requested to represent that portion of the country lying between the Tangihua Range and the Wairoa River, comprising the Tokatoka Riding of the Otamatea County, and the Okahu Riding of the Hobson County, and also that portion of the Hobson County lying between the Mangonui River and the Tangihua Range. I advocate the most central Main Trunk line for the benefit of the whole of the country. The outlet from my district will be by the Tokatoka-Mangapai Road to the Main Trunk, wherever it goes. Taking that fact into consideration, the western route will be by far the nearer and best for our country. The distance between the two routes where they cross the Mangapai Road is, I believe, eight to ten miles. Our port for everything we produce on our land is Auckland, and, as already said, the railway direct is a great deal more advantageous than the present mode of punting and transshipping. Most of our stock at present is sold in the local market, and bought by dealers, who drive or ship it to Auckland, where they again sell it. If we have direct railway communication with Auckland we do away with the middleman as far as our produce is concerned. Our country, taking it all round, is good average country. Much of it is ploughable, and responds to cultivation wherever it has been tried. The trouble is that where land is capable of being ploughed we require manures, &c., which, owing to present high freights, are impossible for the ordinary settler to procure. The whole of this portion of the land, practically from the Tangihua Range to the Wairoa River, contains, roughly speaking, 100,000 to 130,000 acres, and at present is carrying about 40,000 sheep, 17,000 cattle, and about 900 horses. That is our present stock, without pigs or other animals. In the Tokatoka Riding there are at the present time over 600 pigs, and the fattening of pigs is becoming a great industry in this portion of the country, and will be more so when we get direct railway communication, for the simple reason that the settlers will then know that their pork will arrive in Auckland in good condition. All this country is well adapted for fattening early lambs for the Auckland market, and also for the growing of oats and chaff, which, with direct communication with Auckland, would be delivered into the Auckland market before any of the southern or even the Wai-kato chaff or oats could get there. We could ripen the oats so that the chaff could be cut and delivered into Auckland by the end of November, and all other produce, such as potatoes and that sort of thing, we can grow practically all the year round. A large part of the country is at present sparsely populated. As already stated by Mr. Hammond, part of the land is held in large areas. If this country were fully developed it could easily carry, without any trouble, double its present quantity of stock. Almost all the open country is suitable for and will grow rape, turnips, oats, or any other produce that the settler desires to grow, provided that it has the necessary manure, which, as I have already stated, with railway connection we would be able to get. As regards the waterways of the Kaipara Harbour and Wairoa River—starting at the Kaipara Harbour, it is bar-bound, and therefore is of no use to us as a seaport for exporting produce. Therefore all our stock and produce must go to Auckland. Our nearest river-ports are Ruawai, Raupo, Tokatoka, and Mititai. If we take the average distance to any of these ports—say, Tokatoka, as the central port—it is practically six miles to the proposed western route and ten miles to the proposed eastern route. We already have good roads from these ports north, all formed by the Government, which give direct communication with the railway. If