

5. *Mr. Wilson.*] What did the manure cost you there?—I think the manure was bought in Hamilton, and it cost £4 17s. 6d. The railage to Putaruru is about 8s. or 9s.; then there is the company's charge of £1 2s. 6d. for the short line, and from there we have to cart it about fifty miles to get it on to the station.

6. At what cost for cartage?—We use our own teams, so I have not reckoned the cost.

7. What would you consider the total cost?—Of course, we have to load up with other stuff, but I should say the cost would be £2 per ton from Mokai over to the station, so that the manure would cost us by the time we got it on to the ground about £8 a ton.

8. *Mr. Buchanan.*] What is your experience, Mr. Russell, of farming in that class of country?—Well, I have not had any experience until I took up Runanga.

9. The phrase you used in the opening part of your remarks that there was a large area of land admirably adapted for settlement could only be used by knowledge obtained second-hand?—Well, one can form one's opinion. If you go over country and you see here and there red and white clover springing up you can form an opinion as to what the country is capable of. I have a photograph of the country here from which you can form your own opinion of what that class of country would do. [Photograph produced and put in.]

10. *Mr. Wilson.*] Of course, your country is nearly the farthest away, is it not?—Yes; I go right down to the foot of the hills. When you leave my place you start to go through the hilly country, and there are virtually then hills to Napier.

11. If the railway were completed it means that the settlers would be able to obtain manures at a much cheaper rate?—Yes, undoubtedly. My own opinion is this: that it would be a good thing if there was some plan devised by which a rate could be charged upon the whole country to which I have referred as a means of securing the State against loss, and I think it would pay all the people interested in that southern country to agree to a rate for the purpose of guaranteeing the cost.

12. *The Chairman.*] Would you carry the railway on with that rate?—I should like to see the line extended south from Taupo, but I would not even suggest that at present. So far as the southern country is concerned, give us a railway into Taupo.

13. *Mr. Raw.*] You say that the whole of this land to the south of Lake Taupo would be beneficially served by this railway?—Yes; one reason being that it would be very much shorter, because from Taupo to Putaruru you go along the base of a triangle, whereas on the Rotorua route you go along the two sides.

14. You have travelled over the railway from Rotorua to Putaruru, have you not?—Yes.

15. Taking into consideration the extra mileage from Putaruru to Rotorua, and supposing the Government built a railway from Rotorua to Taupo, that railway would serve all the land round Lake Taupo just as effectively as the Taupo Totara Timber Company's line?—Yes, the only thing being that it would be a more costly rate for us, because we would have a greater mileage.

16. I do not know whether you were here the other day when I quoted figures showing the enormous cost to settlers for manures from Auckland to Taupo by a State-owned line?—I want a State-owned line if I can get it.

17. The cost was considerably greater than could possibly be the case even charging rates over the Taupo Totara line?—I do not understand. Do you mean it is cheaper to go round Rotorua and *via* Waiotapu into Taupo?

18. Yes?—That means the company retains the ownership.

19. Yes; but the difference, of course, is considerable?—I say, in reply to that, that what I hope to see is that the line from Putaruru into Taupo will be a Government line.

20. Then the settlement of that country would be very much improved, and the opportunities for improvement would be greater because the settlers would be able to obtain their supplies at much less than by the present route?—There is no doubt of it.

21. You are satisfied of that?—Yes.

22. Then, assuming you had the choice between two lines—that is, over the present Taupo Totara line and a State line running from Auckland or from Tauranga, speaking as a settler you would certainly prefer the Rotorua-Taupo line?—It must be clear that the Government charge, say, from Auckland round by Rotorua and through to Taupo, would be cheaper than by the Taupo Company's line; I recognize that at once.

23. *Mr. Wilson.*] Do you suggest that this line charges more than a Government line?—They have to, there is no doubt about that. The position is this: that the company does not get the whole of the Taupo traffic now, because, of course, there are vehicles passing through to Taupo which do a certain amount of business that way; but if the line went through to Taupo they would get the whole of the traffic.

24. You suggest that it would be better to take over the line than go round?—Yes. As the company has now got the line as far as Mokai and within nineteen miles of Taupo, that line is far more likely to be made than is an entirely new line in the class of country between Rotorua and Taupo.

*Mr. Raw:* We were just speaking with reference to the fact that the Mokai Railway does not get the advantage of the whole of the traffic at present. I want to say this: that the company's line at the present time is getting practically all the traffic which goes to Taupo. The wagons carrying 3 tons have not for some time past gone at closer intervals than one wagon per month. My reason for saying that is this: for some years past practically the whole of the local purchases for Taupo were made through myself and my firm, and therefore I am competent to give an opinion in this direction. The point is this: that even now with the railway only to Oruanui, which is the nearest available point at present, the company at the present time is getting practically the whole of the Taupo traffic.