

113. You still adhere to that?—Yes.

114. I think you said, roughly speaking, that one-half was uncultivable?—About that, on the company's line.

115. Assuming the Government to adopt a light system of railways and the company's line met the Government requirements, would you recommend it as applied to light railways?—I do not think I should advocate such sharp curves as have been adopted in this case.

116. *Mr. Buick.*] What is your opinion of Wairakei as a tourist resort?—I think it will always be a very great attraction.

117. Do you not think it is one of the greatest thermal attractions in New Zealand?—I think so: there is greater variety there.

118. *The Chairman.*] I find here in Mr. Coom's report the estimated cost of the alterations and additions to the company's line: "Widening cuttings, Lichfield-Kopokoraki, £25; widening banks, Lichfield-Mokai, £400; accommodation at stopping-places, £200; providing stop-blocks and point-locks at sidings, say, £50: total, £675." He does not say anything about the curves. Could that be done, in your opinion?—I do not think he could do it for that.

THOMAS RONAYNE sworn and examined. (No. 22.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your profession?—General Manager of the New Zealand Railways.

2. We have asked you to come here to-day to give us any information you can that will help us in framing our report and in advising the Government in connection with the prayer of the petitioners. We would like you to tell us anything you know about the line run by the Taupo Totara Timber Company?—With regard to the line itself, my personal knowledge is practically limited to an inspection of that portion of it adjoining Putaruru, which really counts for nothing. I have knowledge of the history of the line, having from time to time been consulted by Mr. Fulton, who was engineer for it. The original intention, I understand, was to lay the line with timber rails, and it was sleepered to suit the timber rails; consequently the sleepers are more closely spaced than they would be under ordinary conditions. Ultimately it was decided to put down 30 lb. steel rails. The sleepers are 7 ft. by 7 in. by 5 in., and the standard of the Government lines is 7 ft. long by 8 in. by 5 in., which means that the company's sleepers are 1 in. narrower. That is the position with regard to the line. I was consulted about the rolling-stock, and strongly advised the company to build stock that would be interchangeable so that it could run over the Government lines, and thus save the very heavy cost of transferring the timber, which is an expensive item. To that end the engineer was supplied with the standard of the New Zealand railways, but for some motive best known to himself a different class of rolling-stock was built, and it is not of a sufficiently strong description to justify the Railway Department allowing it to run over the New Zealand railways. But from a personal inspection of some of the bogie wagons, I have come to the conclusion that these wagons could be altered without incurring a very large expense and made suitable for running over the Government railways. The wheels and axles are not up to our standard. You might like some information in regard to what revenue the Railway Department would receive—say the additional revenue—if it had been working the railway for the financial year ending 31st March last. I got the figures wired in a hurry from Auckland, and it is just possible they may not be quite correct, but I should consider them approximately so. There were 1,728 tons of posts. I understand the company debit their mill account with freight on these posts, £900, for the use of their railway, the Government getting a revenue of £657. The through rate in accordance with the present railway tariff would be £818—that is, the Government would receive £161, for which the company debit themselves at the present time £900. These are the figures I have. The same deduction applies to timber. There were 7,452,000 ft. of timber sent by the company's timber mill; revenue, £15,218. The through rate would be £14,594, and the railway rate £11,178, so that the Government would receive £3,416. On merchandise there was only 319 tons outwards; I have not got the inwards. There were 93 tons outwards from the company, whose rate was £168. The Railway got £276, and the through rate would be £310; so that the additional sum the Government would receive on account of the 93 tons from company's line to Putaruru would be £34, as against £168 which the company received for the same service. There are other items. There were 960 tons of minerals—I presume that would be coal—for which the company received £1,224 and the Railway got £460. The through rate would be £552. The minerals would be carried at the lowest rate in the tariff—that is, Class Q—so that the company got £1,224 for freight on the 960 tons, whereas on a through mileage basis the Government would only get an extra £92 from their terminus to Auckland—from Mokai to Auckland in each case. It goes to show that the Government would get very much less out of the line than the timber company are getting at the present time, which is the reason why I produce the figures. Now, there is the question of rolling-stock: If the line were to be worked as a passenger line cars would have to be built for it with suitable bogies to work $1\frac{1}{2}$ -chain curves. I am assuming that the Government could work the line the same as the company is doing at present, without any alterations at all. But not for a moment would I advocate working round $1\frac{1}{2}$ -chain curves, because the wear-and-tear on the rolling-stock and the increased haulage are very serious matters. The cost of a second-class car suitable to work on the present line would be £750, and the cost of a first-class car would be about £925. The cost of a U truck would be £280. The U truck has a carrying-capacity of 16 tons, and it is a bogie truck. You must understand that I am of opinion that that line can only be worked with bogie rolling-stock. It is quite out of the question to think of running four-wheeled stock on a long wheel base round curves of that description. It would be quite feasible to haul them round if the track were in good condition, but the wear-and-tear would be altogether out of the question. So that it is possible on the present 30 lb. steel track to work any traffic that might be required to go on or off that line with certain classes of the existing