

32. *The Chairman.*] You are against light lines, or railways costing £2,500 a mile?—I look upon this as a tramway more than a railway.

33. Are you in favour of or against such a system, to act as feeders to the main lines?—There are feeders now in certain districts, or short lines of railway acting as spurs off the main lines. If worked for slow traffic they are certainly worthy of consideration, but I certainly would not put down a 30 lb. rail. The maintenance of a 30 lb. track is excessive in cost as compared with that of a track carrying a heavy rail, and the price you have to pay for labour at the present time is a very serious item.

34. We have been told that the line cost £2,500 per mile to construct, also that the company can carry goods and passengers as safely as you can carry them on the main lines, the only difference being that the trains would run slower. Do you think it would be proper policy for us to recommend the Government to purchase this line, or to fall in with the request of the petitioners and allow them to construct the line from Mokai to Taupo on the condition that it had to be purchased with land grants and all the other terms set out in the petition: do you think, in the interests of the country and from a railwayman's point of view, it is desirable we should do that?—It is a matter of public policy. I would prefer that the company should do it. As to the purchasing clause, I am not so sure about that. I do not agree with the evidence as to the amount of traffic to be carried. The maximum load we could allow would be 27 tons, weight of truck included; that would be our maximum axle-load if we worked the line. That would allow us what we consider a sufficient margin of safety.

*The Chairman:* A general statement was made that they carried as much as they were able to do on the other lines.

35. *Mr. Dalziel.*] I did not intend it to be understood in that way. The load on our timber-trucks is as great as the load carried on their timber-trucks. In fact, we had to ask the Railway Department to raise the staunchions of their trucks?—Yes; timber varies very considerably in weight.

36. On the question of a through rate: the figures you gave were given without your having an opportunity of going through them?—Yes; I have not had time to go into them exhaustively.

37. You gave them hurriedly, necessarily?—Yes; certainly I am not going to vouch for their correctness.

38. You based your estimate on a through rate from Mokai to Auckland?—Yes.

39. That is assuming that all the timber goes through from Mokai to Auckland?—Yes; but it does not follow that it does.

40. The bulk of it does not, I believe; it is distributed all along the Waikato?—Still, my statement holds good in the same degree.

41. Mr. Holmes in his evidence suggested that district railways ought to be run on some system of differential rating: that would get rid of the difficulty you suggest?—What I imagine Mr. Holmes meant was that in order to make a railway pay where the traffic will not pay at the ordinary rates you should have increased special rates for that particular line. That system was applied to the Kawakawa line when Mr. Cadman was Minister of Railways. The rates were increased there at the request of the settlers, and with the view of keeping the line open and making it pay, but it was quite impossible even with the increased rates; and after the increased rates had operated for a time the settlers resented the increased impost and agitated to have it removed. They objected strongly, and after a time, when Sir Joseph Ward became Minister for Railways, he realized that it was not a proper thing to enforce the higher rates simply because the line was not paying. I think something of that kind was in Mr. Holmes's mind.

42. You have said that in your opinion our trucks should have been built to your standard, so that they should have been transferable?—Yes, that is my opinion.

43. You have not gone into the cost of demurrage, and so on?—No.

44. It might pay us to tranship rather than to pay the cost of demurrage you charge?—I cannot see how that contention could stand.

45. Well, your demurrage charge was so high that we thought it would be better to tranship?—I think you are mistaken there.

46. Taken on the whole, you say that a line such as this can be worked safely both for goods and passengers?—Yes, under certain conditions as to restricted speed.

JAMES BURNETT sworn and examined. (No. 23.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Chief Engineer?—Of Working Railways.

2. We have asked you to come here to-day to give us such information as you can on the matter we have to advise the Government upon. We are asked to give our opinion as to whether the prayer of the petition should be acceded to, and we want you to give us all the information you can upon everything connected with the petition?—Well, as I have no knowledge of the country traversed, or of the line referred to, as between Mokai and Putaruru, I do not think that any statement I could make would be of any value.

3. You have not been over the line?—No. I just know in a general way that it is a line built with 30 lb. steel rails and with a large number of sleepers.

4. Can you give us your opinion as to the value of light lines as feeders? This line cost £2,500 a mile, and witnesses have told us that similar lines working in other parts of the world are working satisfactorily. Can you give us your opinion as to light lines such as those in the South at Waikaka, Switzers, and other places?—I think the economies that can be made may, in certain districts, justify the substitution of a cheaper form of construction than the standard form; but it is essential that the ordinary rolling-stock of the main lines should be able to traverse all the spur lines from the main lines, otherwise the cost of transshipment limits the usefulness of the line too much. There is always a difficulty, or has been in New Zealand, in confining the