

SESSION II.
1912.
NEW ZEALAND.

WESTERN TARANAKI RAILWAY COMMISSION :

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION APPOINTED TO INQUIRE AND REPORT AS TO THE RAILWAYS AND TRAMWAYS REQUIRED TO SERVE THE DISTRICT OF TARANAKI TO THE WEST OF THE MAIN LINE OF RAILWAY.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

COMMISSION.

To all to whom these presents shall come, and to Robert West Holmes, of Wellington, Engineer-in-Chief of the Public Works Department; James Burnett, of Wellington, Chief Engineer of the New Zealand Government Railways; George Henry Bullard, of New Plymouth, Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor of the Department of Lands; and Edmund Clifton, of Wellington, Director of the Fields and Experimental Farms Division of the Department of Agriculture: Greeting.

WHEREAS the area of country lying to the westward of the main line of railway from Hawera to New Plymouth is devoid of railway or tramway communication, and it is deemed expedient that adequate means of communication and facilities for the transport of produce and other merchandise should be provided, and that a Commission should be set up to inquire into the facts and circumstances necessary and proper to be considered in determining these questions :

Now, therefore, I, John Poynder Dickson-Poynder, Baron Islington, the Governor of the Dominion of New Zealand, acting by the advice and with the consent of the Executive Council of the said Dominion, do hereby, in exercise of the powers conferred on me by the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1908, and of all other powers and authorities enabling me in this behalf, constitute and appoint you the said

ROBERT WEST HOLMES,
JAMES BURNETT,
GEORGE HENRY BULLARD, and
EDMUND CLIFTON

to be a Commission for the purpose of making inquiry into the following matters :—

1. To inquire into and report upon the best means to be adopted to provide adequate means of communication for the transport of produce and other merchandise in the area of country lying to the westward of the main line of railway from Hawera to New Plymouth, whether by railways or tramways, and having regard to the opening-up and development of the said area, the probable traffic, and the necessities of the country through which such railways or tramways will pass.

2. To inquire into and report upon the different routes suggested for the proposed branch line of railway from the Wanganui - New Plymouth Railway, to Opunake.

3. To further inquire and report what, if any, tramways would be advisable for the opening-up and development of the area of country hereinbefore referred to, and the best location for same.

4. What will be the probable cost of the said railways or tramways, and what will probably be the economic and commercial value and other merits of such railways or tramways respectively.

And, with the like advice and consent, I do hereby appoint you the said ROBERT WEST HOLMES to be Chairman of the said Commission.

And for the better enabling you to carry these presents into effect, you or any three of you are hereby empowered and authorized to make and conduct any inquiry under these presents, and at such place or places in the said Dominion, as you may deem expedient, with power to adjourn from time to time and from place to place as you think fit, and to call before you and examine by all lawful means such person or persons as you may think capable of affording you any information in the premises. And you are also hereby empowered to call for and examine all such books, documents, papers, maps, plans, accounts, or records as you shall judge likely to afford you the fullest information on the subject of this Commission, and to inquire of and concerning the premises by all other lawful ways and means whatsoever. And using all diligence you or any three of you are required to report to me under your hands and seals your opinion resulting from the said inquiry in respect of the several matters and things inquired into by you or by virtue of these presents not later than the thirteenth day of June next ensuing, with power to certify unto me from time to time your several proceedings in respect of any of the matters aforesaid, if it may seem expedient for you to do so.

Given under my hand, this nineteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twelve.

Issued in Executive Council.

ISLINGTON, Governor.

J. F. ANDREWS,
Clerk of the Executive Council.

REPORT.

To His Excellency the Right Honourable John Poynder Dickson-Poynder, Baron Islington, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over His Majesty's Dominion of New Zealand and its Dependencies.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

We, the Commissioners appointed by Your Excellency to inquire as to what railways or tramways are required to open up and serve the country lying to the westward of the main line of railway between Hawera and New Plymouth, as mentioned in the Commission, a copy of which is attached hereto, have the honour to report as follows :—

We have made a thorough investigation into the matters covered by our Commission from every practicable point of view; we have traversed and examined practically the whole of the country which would be served by a railway or tramway, covering about two hundred miles in several different directions; we have carefully computed the probable output and inward freight from and to the district concerned which would be available for transport by rail; and we have taken evidence of representative farmers, commercial men, and members of local bodies throughout the district, who have supplied us with information regarding the present capacity and prospective development of the different areas of land coming within the scope of our inquiries.

We held meetings at Hawera, Manaia, Kapuni, Auroa, Opunake, Kaponga, Eltham, Stratford, New Plymouth, and Okato, and examined 113 witnesses who appeared voluntarily before the Commission, and whose local knowledge and experience appreciably facilitated our labours. Without exception we found the settlers and commercial men ready and willing to assist us in every way possible in carrying out the duties intrusted to us.

Our principal function was to ascertain by investigation the best means of providing railway facilities to serve the district mentioned in our Commission, and from our own observations, and after careful consideration of the evidence tendered at the different sittings mentioned above, we are unanimously of opinion that a line of railway should be constructed from Moturoa to a point near Te Roti Station on the main line, following the route to the westward and southward of Mount Egmont indicated on the accompanying map, with a branch line from Kapuni along the existing road-line to a point near Kaponga, which would permit of future extension to Stratford and Manaia. We have arrived at this conclusion after taking into consideration the volume of traffic which is likely to arise from the development, probable subdivision, higher cultivation, and consequent increase in the productivity of the land along and adjacent to the route of the suggested line.

In considering the commercial prospects of a railway through this district we have been influenced somewhat by the important works now in progress and approaching completion for the improvement of the shipping facilities at New Plymouth. When the works in hand are completed, there seems little room for doubt that this port will be available for use by ocean liners, and the authorities intrusted with the control of the harbour expect to be able in the near future to send consignments of dairy and other produce from New Plymouth direct to the world's markets without the transshipment which is usual at present. The harbour authorities satisfied us that in a comparatively short time the port would be able to accommodate ocean liners suitable for carrying the whole of the produce for export offering from Taranaki and the interior country for which New Plymouth is the natural outlet.

The developments in progress also warrant the assumption that New Plymouth will in the near future be the port through which the greater portion of the British and foreign imports for the Taranaki Province will reach the Dominion. We have therefore recommended the location of the proposed railway to suit the collection of produce for export and the convenient distribution of imports, although the route may not in all parts fit in with the traffic routes which have developed up to the present. There is already a considerable import trade through New Plymouth from other parts of the Dominion.

With regard to export of dairy-produce, it is essential that it shall arrive regularly at the market. To secure this, the exports are confined almost entirely to the mail-steamers, which, leaving at fortnightly intervals and being under contract, can be relied on for the necessary regularity; but as it is found inconvenient and unprofitable for these vessels to call at other than main ports for lots of dairy-produce which are comparatively small in mass, the practice has arisen of forwarding this class of produce to Wellington for shipment, from Auckland, *via* Onehunga, New Plymouth, Patea, and Wanganui, several steamers being almost exclusively engaged in the coastal conveyance. The shipping companies appear to encourage this system by arranging to pay the coastal freight and charging the same rate of freight from Wellington and each of the ports mentioned to England, &c.

Several of the witnesses have expressed the opinion, which is shared by your Commissioners, that when the ocean liners visit New Plymouth, the exports of the Taranaki District will concentrate at New Plymouth and provide bulk sufficient to warrant the mail-boats calling there. In this case it is likely that New Plymouth would become their second last port of call.

Under these circumstances, on the expiration of present engagements, the shipping companies will require some modification in the present terms as regards the payment by them of the coastal freight. This will induce the shipment of dairy-produce at New Plymouth instead of Wellington.

The lengths of the lines which we recommend are approximately as follows :—

	Miles.
1. Main line, Moturoa to Te Roti	55
2. Branch line, Kapuni to Kaponga	5
3. Extension, Kaponga to Stratford	9
4. Extension, Kapuni to Manaia	3½
Total	72½

The cost of construction of these lines sufficient to carry the rolling-stock in use on the railway between Wanganui and New Plymouth will be approximately as follows :—

	£
1. Moturoa to Okato, 11 miles at £9,000 per mile ..	99,000
Okato to Te Roti, 44 miles at £7,000 per mile ..	308,000
2. Kapuni to Kaponga, 5 miles at £5,000 per mile ..	25,000
	£432,000
3. Kaponga to Stratford, 9 miles at £10,000 ..	90,000
4. Kapuni to Manaia, 3½ miles at £5,000 ..	17,500

We recommend that construction of the line should be commenced simultaneously at Te Roti and Moturoa, and that when Kapuni is reached at the southern end the construction of the five miles of branch line to Kaponga should be put in hand. The extension to Stratford might await the completion of the remainder of the suggested line. The line could be brought into profitable use as soon as ten miles from Te Roti with the Kaponga branch, or fifteen miles from Moturoa, are completed.

We have gone very carefully into the matter of the present and prospective volume of traffic which will be available for transport over the railway, and estimate that the earnings of the suggested line will amount to at least £600 per mile per annum, and that the working-expenses will not exceed £450 per mile per annum. As the country is further developed there will be every prospect of a considerable increase in the railway revenue.

Owing to the small bulk and weight of the dairy-products compared with their value, their carriage will not give as great a return to a railway as many other articles of production. This feature was taken into consideration when estimating the revenue.

The construction of the railway will have the effect of relieving the local bodies, and, indirectly, the settlers and taxpayers, of a very heavy annual expenditure on the maintenance of about ninety miles of main roads, amounting at present to at least £100 per mile per annum, a recurring charge of £9,000 per annum.

The existing toll-gates on most of the main roads throughout the district served will be abolished when the problem of road maintenance is simplified by the construction of the railway. The rates in many parts average from 4s. to 6s. per acre. This high rate, which amounts to a considerable rent, is required solely for the maintenance of the roads. The construction of a railway will so relieve the traffic as to materially reduce the wear-and-tear, the money so saved will then be available for the development of the farms instead of being wasted as at present, and being a constant drain on the wealth of the community.

It appears that, owing to the high quality of the land, and the favourable climate favouring specializing in dairy-farming, the size of the average farm is decreasing, cultivation is increasing, and more attention is being paid to the improvement of the cows, and the manufacture of the products is being conducted with increasing skill and economy. All these factors tend to increase the population, products, and imports, and in consequence transport traffic must correspondingly grow.

It was demonstrated to the Commission by many of the farmers and commercial representatives that the productive power of the land would be appreciably enhanced by the general and systematic use of artificial manures, which would render possible more intense cultivation and the subdivision of the dairying country into smaller areas than at present will be the result. The present high transport charges from the port or the railway to the farm limit the quantity of manure which the average farmer can afford to use, but when the railway is available this item alone will constitute no small volume of profitable freight which would be permanent in nature.

The construction of the branch to Kaponga will permit of the large output of dairy-produce from that locality being carried by rail to either Patea or New Plymouth at rates considerably less than those now being paid for road and railway haulage, the saving being about 7s. per ton on consignments to Patea or New Plymouth. A similar saving on the even greater inward freight would result.

There is a deposit of gravel of considerable extent close to Kaponga which can be tapped by the branch and utilized for ballasting a large portion of the suggested line. Another factor in favour of the branch is the tourist traffic to the Mountain House at Dawson's Falls, on the slopes of Mount Egmont, which already attracts over three thousand people per annum, and with transport by railway available to Kaponga the number of visitors will be bound to increase.

A large volume of traffic is at present carried by road between Kaupokonui, Manaia, and Hawera, a distance of nine to twelve miles, for which the transport charge is 7s. 6d. to 10s. per ton. This traffic could be carted about three miles to the suggested railway, and the saving in freight to Patea, its present port, would be about 2s. 6d. per ton, after allowing a reasonable price for the cartage. The saving on maintenance of the Main South Road, which at present bears most of this traffic, would also be a relief to the local bodies concerned.

The question of road haulage along the Main South Road was brought prominently before the Commission at Hawera and Manaia by witnesses, who endeavoured to show that it was preferable to convey produce and supplies by wagon all the way between Manaia and Hawera as against carting it about three miles to the nearest siding on the suggested railway. We have gone carefully into this contention, and find that on the Main South Road between Manaia and Hawera the total rises amount to 489 ft., and total falls 387 ft. The total rise from Manaia to the point where the line crosses the Manaia Road is only 222 ft. The steepest grade between Manaia and Hawera is 1 in 15, which is against the traffic in both directions. The steepest grade between Manaia and the suggested railway is only 1 in 44, and is against the outward traffic only. The contention of some of the witnesses that the uphill haulage to the new line would be a greater drawback than the transport by road from Manaia to Hawera is therefore disproved by actual measurements.

The advisability of the extension from Kaponga to Stratford will be more apparent later when the line now in progress from Stratford to the Main Trunk Railway is further advanced. In the near future, when the supplies of firewood are exhausted, the factories and settlers will require large supplies of coal, which will doubtless come through Stratford from the coalfields at Tangarakau, which will shortly be reached by the line now being constructed beyond Whangamomona.

Your Commissioners were directed to inquire as to what tramways, if any, it would be advisable to construct to serve the country under consideration. We have fully considered this question, and have come to the conclusion that the volume of traffic, present and prospective, to be handled is in excess of that which could be economically dealt with by tramways. If the railway is constructed on the route recommended, the heavy traffic on the roads in the district will be reduced to an extent which will afford much-needed relief to the local bodies responsible for their maintenance, and with this reduction of the road traffic it is not likely that there will be any need for tramways. We do not consider that the General Government should undertake the construction of any tramways in the country under reference. Dairy-produce is detrimentally affected by repeated handling, and it is desirable to convey it by railway to the port of shipment with as little change from one conveyance to another as is possible.

Your Commissioners recommend that the land between Eltham and Opunake reserved for a railway should be either leased or sold to the adjoining owners or occupiers.

We have the honour to forward herewith—(1) Minutes of our proceedings; (2) copy of evidence tendered; (3) a map on which are indicated, *inter alia*, the railway routes recommended and the positions of dairy-factories.

We have the honour to be,

Your Excellency's most obedient servants,

R. W. HOLMES,
JAMES BURNETT,
G. H. BULLARD,
E. CLIFTON.

Wellington, 14th June, 1912.

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**PLAN
ACCOMPANYING
REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS
ON THE
WESTERN TARANAKI RAILWAY.**

REFERENCE :

Railway Routes recommended, thus ..

Dairy Factories and Creameries, thus ..



SCALE OF MILES.
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