

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WELLINGTON, THURSDAY, 18TH MAY, 1916.

Preliminary Meeting.

A PRELIMINARY meeting of the Commission was held in the Judge's Chambers, Wellington, on Thursday, the 18th May, at which counsel for the various parties concerned were present.

Mr. Skerrett: Will your Honour permit us to bring before the Commission one or two matters we desire to mention? One relates to the procedure of the Commission, and the other to certain matters connected with the evidence to be brought before the Commission. May I first indicate that I think in the view of counsel concerned there will be three main questions which the Commission will have to consider. The first, of course, is the Foxton dispute with the Railway Department, with which I am not concerned. Mr. Weston and Mr. Luckie appear for the Foxton Harbour Board, and Mr. Myers represents the Railway Department. The other matter is a matter in which I am concerned, and that is divided into two separate and independent branches. One relates to the right of those local authorities who control the tramway or light railway from Himatangi running past Sandon to junction with the railway-line somewhere in the vicinity of Marton. That is to a large extent a somewhat local matter. The third matter is a matter which is not referred to in the Commission, but is a matter which, by arrangement with the Government, the Commissioners are entitled to proceed with, and the Government have promised to extend the scope of the Commission if required. That really is an alternative to the second matter—namely, consideration by the Commission of certain evidence relating to the advisability of diverting the present Main Trunk line from Marton along practically the line of the light railway. Now, sir, I understand, at an interview before your Honour at which Mr. Macassey and Mr. Luckie were present, counsel for the Railway Department promised to supply us with all statistical information which they proposed to put before the Commission. That would be a great convenience, but that so far has not been done.

Mr. Myers: We have given some.

Mr. Skerrett: You have practically given nothing.

Mr. Luckie: One statement of mileages.

Mr. Skerrett: That could have been extracted by ourselves. I apprehend the officer in charge of the Railway Department will understand that it would be of great convenience if it could be given.

The Chairman: I think that should be done, otherwise it would delay the inquiry.

Mr. Skerrett: There is another matter of importance I wish to refer to, and that is this: in considering the advantages or disadvantages of the suggested deviation, the earning-capacity and operative cost of that section of the line which runs between Marton, Palmerston North, and Levin is of considerable importance. Now, I understand the Railway Department has not hitherto kept any account of the sectional operation.

The Chairman: You want to know the quantity of goods deposited between Palmerston, Marton, and Levin by the present route?

Mr. Skerrett: Yes, and the proportion of revenue and cost which the Department ascribe to the through carriage of the goods. Now, sir, do I understand from Mr. Myers whether the Department can afford any information to the Commission upon that point? It seems to me to be a matter of extreme regret that we did not have the information, or some attempt at an analysis of the cost.

The Chairman: There is the question of the goods from Levin and Palmerston to Napier. I suppose most of the trade goes to Napier in that way.

Mr. Williams: All of it now.

Mr. Myers: That is from here.

Mr. Skerrett: It seems to me that information of that kind ought to be given.

The Chairman: They might make an estimate of it by taking what goods, for example, were delivered at the various stations—Shannon, and so on. There are three or four stations receiving flax on the line between Levin and Palmerston.

Mr. Skerrett: May I point out that the problem involves this question: it may well be that the railway route from Marton to Levin through Foxton might be unchallenged, but the existing conditions are that there is an existing portion of the line running from Marton to Levin via Palmerston North. It appears to me it would be helpful to enable the Commissioners to form an opinion if some data could be given of the result of the sectional operation, Marton to Levin via Palmerston North.

The Chairman: I think we will need some estimate.

Mr. Skerrett: You must have at least some attempt to assign some proportion of the traffic to this section. It need not be mathematically correct. It also appears to me that the cost of construction of that section between Marton and Palmerston and the grades and curves ought to be before the Commission.

The Chairman: I think so.

Mr. Skerrett: I understand also that a flying survey has been made of the proposed deviation from Marton to Foxton and Levin. Full information as to that survey ought to be before the Commission, and the estimated cost of the construction of that deviation. That information we have not so far been supplied with, although we have requested it.