

157. Has the quantity of West Coast coal used in the North Island generally increased or decreased of late years?—I could not tell you that straight off. Of course, our coal-consumption has increased with advance of train-mileage, and we have had difficulty in getting sufficient West Coast coal, which has affected the quantity of that coal used by railway.

158. Are you speaking of Foxton or generally?—I am speaking generally.

159. Has the Railway Department at any time been met by refusal on the part of the shipowners to send their boats to Foxton for reasons connected with the condition of the river?—No, I cannot recall any case; but I know that the Railway Department from time to time, in order to assist shipowners, has on different occasions agreed to take 100 tons of coal at Foxton when the shipowners have had a ship they wanted to fill up for Foxton.

160. But that has not been at the order of the Railway Department in the first instance?—No; it has been invariably done in response to inquiry from the shipowner as to whether we could take a cargo of 100 tons, and for the purpose of assisting the shipowner.

161. So that when a shipment of coal has been distributed partly at Wanganui and partly at Foxton has that been done at the request of the Railway Department?—Certainly not.

162. Now, whether the river conditions at Foxton are good or bad, does that affect the question of the importation of coal by the Railway Department into Foxton?—Not in the slightest degree. So far as the Railway Department is concerned, the coal sent into Foxton is a negligible quantity. The Department does not regard Foxton as a necessity for its coal-supply.

163. That used not to be so?—No. I am speaking, of course, of the present time, and since we took the Manawatu Railway over—since 1909.

164. We heard when in Palmerston North from Mr. Goldingham that it had decreased in consequence of the river. Can you tell the Commission whether the railages of Messrs. Goldingham and Beckett have increased or decreased during the last few years?—The railages for the year 1914 were £1,742, and for 1915 £1,763; and up to the present time this year the account is £793. So if anything it is really on the upgrade. There is no appreciable difference.

165. We heard something also in the country about the West Coast Trading Company's wharf. That company erected some coal-bins which the Commission saw in Foxton?—Yes.

166. They had to cease using the coal-bins: do you know why that was so?—I understand that is was for a twofold reason. I know what they ascribe it to. In the first place, the bins were built too high; consequently the ships found a difficulty in hoisting the coal into the bins. They had to go right up to the limit of the topmast to fix their gear, and I was told when at Foxton that in some cases the ship had to make special provision for hoisting-gear, and the shipowners would not agree to continue to perform the special service free of charge. They were undertaking a service involving expenditure that they had not realized at the outset, and would not agree to continue unless they got a special rate. That, I understand, is the true reason why the use of those bins was discontinued, not the fact that the Railway Department charged wharfage on the coal.

167. The value of the wharf merely as a structure has been given by two witnesses, in one case as £3,200, and in the other as £3,700. You are not disposed to quarrel with that figure as representing merely the present structure value?—No.

168. But that includes nothing for reclamation-work?—No; that is for the wharf only.

169. Of course it was necessary for the reclamation-work to be done in order to construct the wharf?—Yes, that is right.

170. You personally, I suppose, have no knowledge of the condition of the river from time to time, with regard to the depth of the channel?—No, except what I have seen from the plans.

171. What is this plan [plan produced—No. 20497]?—That is a Railway plan. It shows the soundings at Foxton Wharf taken by Mr. W. R. Davidson, one of our engineers, on the 26th March, 1907. His soundings are shown in black figures. The soundings taken by the Assistant Engineer, Mr. G. J. B. Bertinshaw, on the 18th June, 1913, are shown in red. It is an official plan. [Plan put in.]

172. Does it show an increase or a decrease in the depth?—It shows an increase, but in some places it is stationary.

173. The first soundings were taken in 1907, and the second in 1913?—Yes.

174. Was any dredging or work of that kind done between 1907 and 1913?—Yes, dredging has been done. The first was in 1902, the last in 1904: none since then.

175. Mr. Kellow seems to think there was some more recent dredging at the wharf: have you any record of that?—No.

176. But you have a record of the dredging in 1904?—Yes. That, I believe, was down at the bend of the river.

177. Is there any other information which I have omitted to ask you about, but which you think would assist the Commission in regard to the Foxton Wharf?—I do not think so.

Re Sandon Tramway and Railway Deviation.

178. We will now deal with the suggested new line between Levin and Marton?—Yes.

179. I think you have gone to a considerable amount of trouble with a view to ascertaining what would be the commercial result?—I have taken out the particulars.

180. It would be as well to give the Commission that information first?—I have had it compiled for the purpose of showing the volume and trend of the existing traffic. The statement [Exhibit 14. See page 200] shows, first, the traffic originating at or going to Thorndon-Levin and all intermediate stations inclusive to and from Marton, and all stations beyond on the Main Trunk Railway.

181. Is that the return which you put in in Palmerston?—Yes.