

the line is absolutely and utterly unnecessary at the present juncture. The existing line between Marton and Levin is capable of carrying—when we have finished the deviation and alteration of the gradients at Kakariki—all the traffic in sight for many years to come. There is absolutely no justification at all for incurring the expenditure, which can be put down at anything up to half a million, and perhaps more, for building the Marton-Levin line at the present time.

196. You say that the construction of this line would involve the Dominion in the loss you have mentioned. Are you able to say whether there are any other lines, either in course of construction or in contemplation, which could be completed or constructed and worked at a profit to the Dominion?—There is no question that what ought to be done is to link up the unfinished main lines. That is the first thing that ought to be done if money is going to be spent on railway-construction. If funds are available they ought to be spent in joining up the uncompleted main lines and completing lines already partly made.

197. *The Chairman.*] What do you mean by that—joining up the main lines?—Take the district north of Auckland: there are broken sections on the Main Trunk line there. There is a line from Stratford to junction with the Main Trunk line at Okahukura: that is under construction. There are a number of other lines in both North and South Islands on which considerable expenditure has been incurred, still incomplete, and from which there is a good prospect of obtaining new and payable traffic, and they certainly ought to be finished before any other new lines are undertaken. Experience in this Dominion and elsewhere has proved that it is not a payable proposition to have a lot of disjointed lines. Another line which I consider must be built—it is the point where all our future difficulties are going to occur—is the line between Paekakariki and Wellington. There is no use building the Levin-Marton line providing a railway which would enable us to take a lot of traffic into Paekakariki that we absolutely could not clear under existing conditions, and there is no chance of increasing the capacity of the Paekakariki yard.

198. *Mr. Myers.*] That is, assuming you did get extra business in consequence of the construction of this deviation?—That is right.

199. I think in Mr. Hiley's report of 1914 there are works which he, as head of the Department, considered necessary, and which involve an expenditure of something like three millions and a quarter?—Yes, that is right.

200. And the programme was that that work should be done within—how many years?—Five years.

201. Has much of it been done?—None, as a matter of fact—the works have had to be held up because there are no funds available.

202. Is it considered by the Department that those are the most pressing requirements in connection with the construction and working of railways?—Unquestionably they are. We have quite a considerable congestion at a number of our main-line stations, and new stations and increased accommodation are badly wanted. They are important stations, and the works proposed are things that are required to give actual facilities that are necessary to enable the business to be efficiently and economically carried on, but they cannot be provided because we have not got the money. I look upon this proposed Levin-Foxton new line as a luxury which can stand over for half a century.

203. I suppose the country might advance to such an extent as to make it necessary before then?—It might, but it will be quite a long time—many years—before it will be wanted, and it will not be justified till other parts of the Dominion have been provided with rail-connections.

204. We have heard a suggestion which Mr. Skerrett made, that within five years the line between Palmerston and Marton will have to be duplicated. Is there anything in that suggestion?—No, that is not within the limits of possibility, in five years. If it were necessary to increase the capacity of the line, supposing we had a very much larger business in sight than we have now, we could do that by simply shortening up the tablet sections or lengthening the crossing sidings and making loops a mile, two miles, or three miles long.

205. You said that if you diverted these Main Trunk expresses there would be a considerable increase in the Main Trunk mileage on the section between Palmerston and Marton?—Yes.

206. Take the alternative: supposing you did not increase the train-mileage, what would be the result as far as the passengers are concerned who require carriage between Auckland and Marton, and Wellington and Levin, and the Hawke's Bay traffic?—The infliction on the passengers travelling on fast trains of so much inconvenience and hardship in the way of transhipment and delay that the Department would not be able to maintain its attitude for five minutes.

207. Is there anything else you think you should add with regard to this question of the suggested deviation?—You are speaking of the new line?

208. Yes?—No, I think not. It is a luxury.

209. I want to come now to the question of connecting the Sanson Tram with the Main Trunk line at Marton or Greatford: what have you to say about that?—Well, in the first place the Sanson Tramway is regarded by the Department as a private siding pure and simple, and as such the Department is not disposed to give another connection at Marton end.

210. Do you know for what purpose the promoters of that tramway said the tramway was required?—Yes; it was constructed under the Roads and Bridges Act, 1882, and the main purpose was to enable the county to get gravel. It was pointed out that the country was very sandy, that it was very difficult to get gravel for metalling roads, thereby making the cost, construction, and upkeep of the roads prohibitive, and the tramway was to be utilized for the purpose of getting gravel for road-construction. That is shown on the file. After the line was constructed application was made for a junction with the Foxton branch at Himatangi. The line was built of 28 lb. rails taken out of the old Duntroon Branch, and the General Manager at that time pointed out that a line of this character should not be allowed to junction with the Government railways—that ultimately it would become a