

## Statement by Mr. LUCKIE. (No. 31.)

*Mr. Luckie:* There is some evidence which was given before the Public Petitions Committee in 1910 by a Mr. R. B. McKenzie, who is since deceased, and I would like to put a copy of the evidence in. It is as follows:—

R. B. MCKENZIE examined.

*The Chairman:* What are you, Mr. McKenzie?—I am a farmer in the Manawatu County, and a member of the County Council. I have been Chairman of the County Council, and of Road Boards.

Tell us what you know about this matter?—The first thing I wish the Committee to clearly understand is the exact position of the line. This map, unfortunately, does not show it very well. The County of Manawatu is between the River Rangitikei and Oroua [pointing to map]. From Foxton to Himatangi there are about six miles of Government railway; then it turns and goes through Palmerston to Greatford. This six miles to here [indicating on map] has been constructed. That is a working Government line. From there [indicating on map] the Council has carried the line on to Sandon and Pukenui, within five miles of Greatford. The Government allow us to run our trams over this portion [indicating on map] of the Government line. For instance, we load chaff at Sandon. We run straight in to Foxton over that portion of the Government line [indicating on map]. We take, say, a truck of coal from Foxton: that is put on to our tramway at Himatangi. The tram runs through almost the centre of the county, alongside the County Main Road, and all the branch roads are feeders to it. What we asked for is a connection at Greatford (there have been various schemes) at various times was for the connection. That portion of the line there [indicating on map] was authorized during the time the late Mr. Macandrew was Minister of Public Works—from Greatford to Bull's. I noticed the other day that Sir Joseph Ward was quoting lines authorized. He had this line in as one suggested, but did not quote it as a line authorized, but I understand from Mr. J. G. Wilson that portion of the line was authorized in Mr. Macandrew's time. We got Mr. Fulton, Engineer, at one time to make an estimate of the cost of carrying the line to Bull's. He estimated it could be carried across the present traffic-bridge [indicated on map] at a very small cost, his estimate of the extension to Bull's, a distance of 1 mile 51 chains, being something under £3,000.

*The Chairman:* Including the cost of strengthening the bridge?—No. When we submitted the matter to the Government they said the bridge would require to be strengthened. £2,650 was the exact estimate for the 1 mile 51 chains, and that is the most expensive part. Then we applied for permission to connect here, Greatford [indicated on map], but we met with a flat refusal from the Government, and we think it is rather hard. We have contributed our full share to the cost of the railways of the Dominion, and have made practically all the roads in our county. Certainly we have made them without any special assistance from the Government. In addition we have spent some £27,000 on our tram, and we find that while the Government are willing to provide sidings for private individuals, they flatly refuse to give us what we ask for—which is equal to a private siding to us. In the meantime, having spent all that money, we still find ourselves without the advantages we consider we are entitled to. The distance from Greatford to Himatangi by rail is forty-four miles. By the shortened route it is twenty-two miles—exactly half the distance; and that does not represent the saving altogether, because we still have to connect with Rongotea. From Greatford to Himatangi is forty-four miles; then we have to go up by tram again nine miles, which makes the distance fifty-three from Greatford to Rongotea by rail, as against fourteen miles by the proposed route. It is sixty-one miles round here [indicating on map] to Pukenui, but only five miles by proposed route. Mr. Drew has given some figures in relation to the amount of traffic that is carried. I would just emphasize this point: that there is absolutely no timber left in the County of Manawatu—neither sawing nor fencing timber. A great deal of it was originally open country, and what bush there was has been cleaned out. Therefore, the whole of the timber comes from the north, and, as Mr. Drew has pointed out, there were 838,000 ft. of timber taken down here [indicating on map] and that was hauled all that way round about. Now, there is a point I would like to impress on you gentlemen, and that is in regard to what has been stated to the effect that this would be an opposition line to the Government. It is nothing of the kind. It has been more of a feeder to the Government line. That 838,000 ft. of timber would never have been brought down to Himatangi by the Government if it were not for the tram, because on this portion of the line into Foxton [indicating on map] there is absolutely no metal. Until we constructed the tramway we could not metal our roads. We have metalled all our cross-roads by this means. People would not send their stuff round to Himatangi and cart it from there, because there was no road. Practically none of that 838,000 ft. of timber would have come round to Himatangi but for the tramway. It would have been put off at Greatford, and carted from there. Instead of working against the Government the line has been made a feeder for the Government railways.

*Mr. Pearce:* That would not be so if you connected?—The position then would be this: At the present time the bulk of our timber comes from Ohakune. (There is a butter-box factory at Rongotea; the owner of the factory also owns a sawmill at Ohakune.) The question now is whether that traffic is of any use to the Government. From Ohakune to Himatangi is 130 miles, and from Ohakune to Greatford is eighty-six miles. The tariff from Ohakune to Greatford would be 3s., to Himatangi 3s. 6d. The Government, when they have carried it to Greatford for 3s., carry that additional forty-four miles for 6d. on the railway, and the question is, does it pay the Government? In passing through Feilding trucked timber has to be shunted up and down. It goes down to Palmerston, then to Longburn, and then on to Himatangi. Certainly 6d. is a very small amount for carrying for forty-four miles. The minimum charge for timber for eight miles is 8d. But I submit this is not an alien company, and that we are not trying to rob the Government. We own the railways. The railways belong to the people of the country. We are ratepayers in that country. We have paid our full share for the cost of the railways. Even supposing the Government lost by that portion of the line, surely we are entitled to have the shorter and better route. Surely it is in the interests of progress to shorten the distance, and give us the most convenient route. That, I understand, is the function of the Government. I hope you will excuse me for taking up so much of your time, but I have come a long way at my own expense to give evidence in this matter. As to the traffic, what I want to show at the present time is that we are not robbing the Government line, but we are losing traffic ourselves. Our butter (and there are three factories in the district, also nine creameries, I think) is carted to Longburn, or to Greatford or to Longburn. If we had the tram connected we would rail the stock here [indicating on map] and go to Wanganui. Our stock is driven and our butter is carted. Our wool goes down to Foxton for shipment. If connected we would have the advantage, convenience, and profit of the connection, without the Government losing anything: as a matter of fact, they would be gainers. Last year we sent 400 tons of grass-seed away, and you know, gentlemen, grass-seed is required in bush country. We got in last year over 400 tons of manure, and it all comes and goes by rail. It goes down to Himatangi and goes up by rail. If it were not for the tramway it could not have gone that way, and Government would lose it. The most important matter of all is the connection for timber and fencing-material. Then there is the saving in distance, the saving on the wear-and-tear on our roads, the profits that would go on to our trams by reason of the increased revenue, and the increased traffic on the Government line, which would more than counterbalance anything that would be taken from it. The Government would also be able to use the tramway for mail-carrying. The Government are paying at the present time for mails, from Himatangi to two miles up the line, by cart, £30. The cost for carrying mails fourteen miles by them is £10, and that is the only mail we get paid for. They are paying £60 for the mail-carrying to Greatford, and another £60 from Sandon to Bull's. The tramway would be able to carry the mails at a cheaper rate. There are at the present time four coaches daily between Greatford and Bull's, which gives some indication of the traffic. There is the coach from Sandon to Bull's and Greatford, one from the Government State farm at Ohakea, and from Sandon, to Feilding and Palmerston; there are two coaches daily from Rongotea to Feilding and Palmerston, and one from Rongotea to Carnarvon. That gives an indication of the amount of traffic that goes away from the line. I should have said at the beginning, in describing the country, that the land through which the tramway would run is good land. Mr. James Mackenzie, Chief Surveyor and Commissioner of Crown Lands, says in his description of the Wellington Land District, and referring to this particular part of the coast,