

"This is some of the finest land in the Dominion"; and further on, "A large block of land was so nearly level that it might be called a plain extending from Paekakariki to Marton, and containing about half a million acres." "Some of the best farming and grazing land in the Dominion" (Official Year-book, 1910, page 777). I do not think there is anything else I can say. Perhaps I have not made my statement very clear, but what I have done is this: I have brought before you the feeling we have in the matter ourselves. We are struggling to better our district, and by bettering our district we would be bettering the whole Dominion.

The Chairman: What you really want is to get the Government to connect Pukenui to Greatford so as to tap the main line, or to obtain leave to do the work yourselves?—Yes. We have not come to ask for a sum of money, but we do humbly petition to be allowed to find the money ourselves, and do the work for ourselves.

Mr. Nosworthy: Am I to understand that you would never have extended the tramway system as close to the Government line if it had not been for Mr. Macandrew's promise that he would connect it?—No, I do not mean to infer that. In describing a portion of the line I said it had been authorized.

Mr. Forbes: Would it not be a great benefit to you if your line were carried in close proximity to the railway without the connection?—If you had to cart stuff for 2 chains, and load it on trucks again, and take it on to Bull's, it would be useless on account of the extra handling.

Mr. J. Duncan: The application to extend, you stated, met with a flat refusal from the Government?—Yes. I will explain that. This portion of the line here will have to be formed under the Tramways Act. When making an application to the Government for a loan for roads we can make provisional application, and the Government says whether moneys are available or not, but under the Tramways Act we have to provide detailed surveys, &c. It would have cost something like £400 or £500 before we could have found out what the Government would do in the matter. Under these circumstances, our Chairman and myself came down and interviewed Sir Joseph Ward, and he promised that if we would put in writing a question of whether or not we would be allowed to connect he would give us a reply. We then said, "Supposing we went through all the formula, would you grant permission to connect?" The reply was that he would not allow us to connect. The line had been offered to the Government on several occasions, and we are prepared to hand it over at any time on conditions to be arranged, and one of the conditions would certainly be that the line be connected. We will hang on to the line otherwise, as the only inducement to part would be to get that connection.

Were there no reasons given as to why permission could not be granted?—I think the answer was that the Government would not give permission to any one.

You are an old resident of the district?—I have been there for half a century.

Did you have to make application for the line to Foxton?—Yes. That was a long time ago, and we paid for our private sidings there. There is no annual charge, but we have to pay for the trucks we run over the line at the rate of 5s. per truck, also truck-hire and totes.

The Chairman: You have your own engine?—Yes. We use the Government rolling-stock.

Mr. Duncan: You got that concession without any trouble at all?—I do not think there was any objection raised. It was not inimical to the interests of the Government line?—It was looked upon as a feeder.

The Chairman: What would be the cost of Pukenui to Greatford?—I think, roughly, £2,000 a mile, and say another £1,000 for strengthening the bridge. About £12,000 would do the whole thing. It has not cost us quite £2,000 a mile so far.

Mr. Newman: You are a member of the County Council?—Yes.

You know that the Council are quite willing that the Government take this line over at cost?—Well, we have discussed the matter several times, and so far as I am concerned I am quite willing to vote for handing over the line to the Government at any time, on condition that the Government make the connection.

Has there been a large increase in traffic on the line lately?—Yes, a very considerable one. Less than two years ago we were only running three trams a week (unless there happened to be something special on), but now we run five a week and even then find sometimes that we have too big a load.

There has been a new industry started at Sandon in the grass-seed industry?—There were some 400 tons of grass-seed sent out last year by tram besides what went by road.

This industry is going ahead very much—the grass-seed is being sent up the Main Trunk line to a large extent?—Yes, principally for the reason that there are no noxious weeds in Sandon.

How does that grass-seed go up the Main Trunk line?—It goes from Sandon down to Himatangi and round that way [indicating on map].

How much longer does it take to send the grass-seed on account of there being no connection?—From Pukenui to Greatford by rail and tram is sixty-one miles, and the other way would be five.

The refusal from the Railway Department was because this line would enter into competition with the Government railway?—I do not know that for certain. I did hear the Hon. Mr. Millar state that he would not favour anything that was going to compete with the Government line, which I thought was unfair.

Do you think this connection would increase the traffic on the Government line?—I think, on the whole, it would.

Stock has now to be driven: it would go by rail if the connection were made?—Yes, a great portion of it would.

The Chairman: Between receipts and expenditure you do not seem to have much profit, after paying your way?—It amounts to this, that all we make off the tram goes to improve it. I should have explained that the original line was laid with 28 lb. rails, and now most of the way has been relaid with new 40 lb. rails. Money has gone also in purchasing an engine and in improving grades, so that if we make £100 it is spent on improvements. The consequence of this is that our tramway working account is showing a loss the whole time, but on the other hand it is showing a profit on capital account. Over £3,000 has been spent out of earnings during the past five years in improvements over and above working-expenses.

How much do you reckon you are saving on the maintenance of roads by having the tram?—It is very hard to tell, but the cartage of 838,000 ft. of timber alone over the roads would make a serious difference to them. I know that the cartage of 30,000 ft. down near the Oroua Bridge left the road in such a state that we had to close it for heavy traffic. It was through a swampy part of the country.

It does save heavy expenditure on roads?—Yes. We do not carry nearly all the grass-seed, because some of it is carted now to Feilding—neither the Government railway nor ourselves get it.

The Chairman: The Minister of Railways is here, and as he is due at another Committee before he goes he might say a few words.

JOHN ALFRED BUSH sworn and examined. (No. 32.)

1. *Mr. Skerrett:* What are you?—Manager of the Rangataua Timber Company, and also of the Marton Sash and Door Company.

2. How long have you been connected with the sawmilling industry?—About eleven years.

3. The mills belonging to your company are situated where?—At Rangataua and Horopito.

4. What place would you regard as the centre of the sawmilling industry in the North Island?—Ohakune is the centre of the sawmilling industry, in so far as the ordinary timbers are concerned. That is the principal loading-station on the line.

5. Is timber a profitable freight for the railways?—I believe so. It compares favourably with other freights, and there is a higher rate per weight than any other class in comparison with its value.