

30. Have you yet considered the shortening of time which this deviation would result in on the Auckland and New Plymouth expresses?—Well, I am not prepared to admit that there is going to be any shortening of time.

31. Have you got any report from any officer of the Department upon the question?—No, we have not.

32. What occurs to me is that a question of this kind would be a mixed question to be considered partly by engineers and partly by those concerned in the traffic arrangements?—No, it is purely a traffic question.

33. Is it not a mixed engineering question?—No; the Engineering Department has nothing whatever to do with the running of trains. It is a traffic question pure and simple.

34. In a question of this kind I should have imagined that you would have had some report by the Engineering Department and by the Traffic Department on this suggested deviation?—Well, we have not taken the suggested deviation into consideration at all.

35. I understand you produced plans?—Yes, the original survey plans made in 1878 and 1879.

36. For what?—For the Public Works Department. That is part of the scheme. It was a survey that was made at the time that the Government were considering how they were going to connect Wellington with Waitara and New Plymouth. The original railway was known as the Foxton-Waitara-Wellington Railway. The Foxton Tramway was made first. There was a difficulty in getting out of Wellington, and that survey was made, I think, by Mr. Hill.

37. Have you any data relating to the survey or construction of the line from Foxton to a point at or near Marton?—No. I think a survey was made by the Public Works Department in the early days, but the plans were burnt at the time of the fire in the Parliamentary Buildings.

38. Have you any report or information as to the estimated cost and construction of that line, Foxton to Marton?—We have Mr. McKerrow's report [Exhibit 16] which has been read. He says that the cost in 1896 would have been at least £300,000.

39. Then the item in his report "£200,000" is a clerical mistake for "£300,000"?—Yes.

PALMERSTON NORTH, FRIDAY, 26TH MAY, 1916.

FREDERICK CHARLES WILSON sworn and examined. (No. 35.)

1. *Mr. Luckie.*] You are Mayor of Marton, and have resided there for how many years?—Twenty-five years.

2. You have had some connection with the Railway Department in the past, I believe?—Yes.

3. You are retired now, are you not?—Yes.

4. You can give us some evidence, I think, as to what it costs in Marton under existing conditions to import goods which are consumed there?—Yes.

5. I refer you particularly to benzine and kerosene?—Yes. It is imported from Wellington via Wanganui via sea, and from Wanganui is carried by motor-lorry at a cost of 2s. 1d. per case. That is the shipping freight, wharfage, and lorry charge.

6. How are the charges made up?—When you take it per ton it costs 14s. by sea from Wellington to Wanganui, then 3s. wharfage, and 1s. 3d. per case by motor-lorry. It does not touch the railway at all.

7. What is the present rate by rail from Wellington?—About £3 2s. or £3 3s., working out at about 2s. 5d. per case.

8. If the line was shortened by going through Levin to Foxton and then on to Marton, what would it be reduced to?—About 2s. 2d.

9. Would there be any advantages in the matter of delivery?—It would be delivered practically the same as now.

10. And the Railway Department would get the whole of the freight instead of getting nothing at all?—Yes.

11. Then they could afford to make a concession?—I should think so. They lose the freight altogether now.

12. *The Chairman.*] Do the vessels which bring the oil from America go direct to Wanganui or tranship at Wellington?—Tranship at Wellington, I believe.

13. *Mr. Luckie.*] How many tons of kerosene and benzine go into Marton in a year?—About 150 tons in twelve months.

14. What would be the freight which the Railway Department would gain under those conditions if they had the freight instead of it going to Wanganui from Wellington?—There are twenty-eight cases to the ton: that is 56s. per ton on 150 tons.

15. They could still make the concession and make £350—Yes.

16. What about groceries?—I cannot say very much with regard to groceries, but they are chiefly purchased in Wanganui and taken to Marton by motor-lorry, and a shortening of the route through Foxton I am told by the tradesmen would considerably reduce the cost of the goods in Marton.

17. With reference to benzine, can you tell us what is paid when it goes to Foxton by steamer and from there by tram to Bull's?—I think 16s. 8d. or 17s. per ton. We pay 2s. 1d. in Marton. It is only nine miles difference by road between Bull's and Marton.

18. *The Chairman.*] You seem to say that motor-lorries can compete with the railways?—They do.