

be carrying the chief route of the railway farther away from us instead of bringing it nearer, which is our desire, and which we think we have a claim for. We object to the deviation being made on those grounds. We do not consider that the deviation of the railway through the proposed route from Levin to Greatford would be a payable proposition, as a good deal of the country through which it would pass is of poor quality. A good deal of the land in that locality is of a sandy nature, which does not permit of intense farming, and could not be subdivided to be profitably farmed on the scale which a small man would have to do in order to make it profitable. We contend, therefore, that the proposition would not be a payable one from the standpoint of the Railway Department, and we also claim that that district is already well served with railway communication, there being none of it which is any great distance from the railway. The chief districts which are closely settled there are Rongotea and the Sandon district, and we know that the Rongotea people, who do a lot of dairying, send their products to Longburn, which provides an easy access. The Sandon district also is cut up into small farms, and the areas have remained about the same during a period of over forty years. There has been no aggregation. The farms there are not large, and I submit there is no land within easy distance of the proposed railway which could profitably be subdivided unless you go into the sandy country, which we all know has to be left severely alone if you want it to grow grass. We contend, therefore, that if a railway is to be constructed anywhere we have a better claim for a railway than those people up in that country.

12. *The Chairman.*] You would prefer a branch from Mangaweka to Feilding?—Your Honour will remember that when the traffic-road was surveyed there were alternative routes surveyed, and one was from Feilding through Kimbolton and Rangiwahia. We contend that if a route to shorten the distance is to be found, we can show one which will shorten the distance to a greater extent and open up new country.

13. *Mr. Innes.*] You told us that Feilding is the market town for your district?—Yes.

14. And most of the produce goes to Feilding?—The bulk of it. Some goes to Mangaweka.

15. Does your wool go to Feilding?—Yes, all the wool from my district.

16. How is it carried—by motor-lorry or wagon?—By wagons of five-horse teams. It costs various prices up to 10s. 6d. per bale. At my place it costs 5s. per bale, which is a distance of sixteen miles.

17. And your goods from Feilding are carried in the same way?—They are carted out by wagon. I do not know what the cost is to Kimbolton, but up to my place, a distance of sixteen miles, we pay £1 2s. 6d. per ton.

18. Is that by the regular carrier?—Yes.

19. I suppose they do not always get return goods?—No, not always.

20. Has your Council considered the proposed continuation of the tram-line to Greatford or Marton?—No. As a matter of fact, when the resolution was passed we had no knowledge of the county tramway question coming into the matter at all, so we have not considered that.

21. *The Chairman.*] What does the land about twenty miles away from Feilding sell for?—It is selling in my district, which is sixteen miles away, up to £40 per acre.

22. And what beyond—say, thirty miles?—The land which is considered not sufficiently good for cultivation—that is, the hilly country—is selling up to £18 per acre.

23. *Mr. Innes.*] What produce goes from your district besides wool and stock—does butter?—No. The Cheltenham Dairy Company are the only people who are within the radius to manufacture butter. We had a factory years ago, but it was found that the carriage and cost of getting in the supplies were so great that they had to give up.

24. Do you crop at all?—In a limited way—potatoes and oats. The cost of carriage kills the growing of it for export. We do not go in for oats and chaff except for our own use.

25. *Mr. Skerrett.*] I understand that your objection and the objection of your county is to the construction of a line from Marton to Levin to form part of the Main Trunk line?—Yes.

26. You have told us that the Kiwitea County is substantially a meat and wool producing district?—Yes, at the present moment.

27. Apparently you have to pay for the cartage of your wool over a distance of sixteen miles about £1 5s. per ton?—It is about 5s. per bale. The average bale is 400 lb., and there would be five bales to the ton.

28. So that the cartage is a considerable disadvantage to the district?—Yes.

29. Is it a level road?—Not exactly level, but the grades are good.

30. Well, that is a very high price for cartage?—I might state that two or three years ago there were two or three carriers, but they have all abandoned the business with the exception of one, and he has a monopoly of the cartage.

31. *Mr. Williams.*] Is the cost higher than it was?—Yes, since the war broke out.

32. *Mr. Skerrett.*] I believe your district hopes some day to get a railway running through it?—Yes.

33. And you desire to put a spoke in the wheel of the other districts until you get yours?—We desire to try and induce the Department to consider our request, and if they did they would find we have a prior claim.

JOHN MOORE JOHNSTON sworn and examined. (No. 39.)

1. *Mr. Innes.*] You live at Palmerston North?—Yes.

2. What is your occupation?—Estate agent, valuer, &c. I am president of the Manawatu Agricultural and Pastoral Association.

3. You were at one time manager of the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Company?—I was.