

25. Are Sandon and Rangitikei well served by roads?—The best roads on the coast, except New Plymouth district.

26. Do you see any great difficulty in the farmers at Sandon being eight miles from the railway?—No; they are not nearly so badly off as the farmers at Rangiwahia, Waituna West, Cheltenham, and Pohangina.

27. Do you know anything about stock going by road?—It all depends on where the stock comes from and what stock it is. The bulk of the store stock is driven at certain seasons of the year, and at other seasons it is railed. It depends on what locality it is going into. For instance, a man taking stock up to Taihape from Feilding, if the weather was bad, would rather rail it because of the hilly country and the steep and narrow roads. In winter-time he would rail it and in summer he would drive it. There is very little store stock taken by train except in winter-time. It depends on whether it pays. Stock from Woodville and Dannevirke would never be railed unless it was stud stock. The Gear Company have been driving fat cattle for years to Wellington, and when the Manawatu Company had the railway they got the settlers to drive the sheep to Longburn for trucking to Wellington.

28. Is there anything, in your opinion, in the suggestion that cattle being driven are more likely to be knocked about than if railed?—No, it is ridiculous. They are more knocked about in the train. Cattle do better on the road.

29. I would like you to give the Commission your views on the proposed extension of the tramway from Pukenui to Marton or Greatford?—It would be a nice little toy for a few of the settlers there to deal with. It can never pay. If the County Council likes to spend the money I do not see why they should not be allowed to extend it from Sandon to Marton in a direct line, but there is absolutely no necessity for it. There are tip-top roads, and if they had it it would be like the present tramway—it would not pay. The present tram has not paid for years. If it were not for the railing of metal for their own roads it would be a big loss. It is very useful for taking metal to parts of the country where none can be got.

30. Is there anything further you wish to say?—If there was a demand for land the population would have increased, but the population of the Manawatu County has not increased materially along the tram, and there is no special settlement along there except in the Oroua Downs. Nothing has been cut up except a small farm belonging to Mr. James Bull. The land in the Johnstone Estate was cut up and 1,200 acres was sold to Thompson Bros. at about £30 per acre, and a short time ago it was sold again for £55 per acre. The land that could be cut up is Sir J. G. Wilson's. He has 4,000 or 5,000 acres not far from the present tram, and the balance is the Johnstone Estate of about 5,000 acres, which is not near the line. The land marked red on the plan is all rich swamp land. [Map referred to and land indicated.] The land marked green is heavy clay suitable mostly for cropping, and the land marked red is rich swamp land and some of the best land in the Dominion. The chocolate-coloured land is sand. The land marked blue is good dairy land, but not rich swamp like that marked red. I should say that on the sea side of the proposed line there are 53,000 acres of poor land between the sea and the tram-line and the proposed extension to Levin—that is, Warikeno Estate.

31. *Mr. Skerrett.*] I suppose the Chairman and Councillors of the Manawatu County Council in the past and the present are business men—it may be assumed that they are?—No. The Chairman for years and years has been Sir James Wilson, but I do not consider the members of the Council are all business men.

32. But competent farmers and competent settlers?—Yes, good farmers.

33. And able to manage their own affairs?—Yes.

34. Without any assistance from Mr. Johnstone or the Chamber of Commerce of Palmerston North?—Yes, quite so.

35. Do you know that those business men have maintained this tramway for the past thirty years?—Yes, I am quite aware of it.

36. And have regarded it as an asset to the county?—Yes, a very bad one.

37. And yet in your judgment they are entirely mistaken?—No; it is quite good enough for what it is used for at the present time.

38. So it is not a mere toy, as you suggested?—I did not suggest that. What I said was that the piece from Bull's to Marton would be a toy.

39. Very well, I put it to you again: these men are entrusted with the management of county affairs?—Yes.

40. If they are prepared to spend a substantial sum of money in the extension from Bull's to Marton, it may be assumed that they would proceed upon safe ground?—It is quite right that they should do it if the County Council are going to undertake it and the ratepayers would be responsible for the country to be rated, and do not approach the Government for a subsidy.

41. It is not proposed to approach the Government for any contribution towards the cost of the construction, so therefore you are content to leave the expediency of its construction to those who are responsible for it?—Yes, I do not object to that if they like to undertake the liability.

42. You are a busy man and know the value of time?—Yes.

43. You know also that there is the limitation to speed upon the Government railways on account of the gauge at which they are constructed?—Yes.

44. I understand you to intimate that at some future date it probably will be advisable to construct a permanent deviation from Marton to Levin, or somewhere in that direction?—It might be considered advisable.

45. That future date is, of course, in the womb of time?—Yes.

46. And neither you nor I can express an opinion upon that?—The same thing happened between Settle and Carlisle in England, and it cut off the London North-western Railway via Penrith.