

5. And I think you propose to direct your attention to the suggested construction of the railway?—Yes.

6. You are not concerned with the extension of the tramway?—No. I have personally no objection to the extension of the tramway—that is a matter between the settlers and the authorities; but we do strongly object to the proposed diversion of the through traffic, because it would cut our district off entirely, and it would be a serious detriment not only to the Town of Feilding but to the whole of the settled district which lies at the back of it. There is one way particularly in which it will affect our town very seriously, and that is in reference to the stock-sales. The Feilding stock-sales are well noted all over New Zealand as being the best stock centre and the best stock market for the North Island. A great many buyers come down by the very excellent railway service, and the Main Trunk line suits our sales very well. Buyers can come down from Auckland and reach our town at 11 o'clock, do their business in the way of buying stock, and go back at 4 o'clock. Those buyers would not be able to attend the stock-sales if the through traffic were diverted without wasting two or three days.

7. You think that from the Borough of Feilding's point of view it would do some harm?—It would be ruination. It would mean removing the premises from the main street to a back street. We enjoy the facilities of the Main Trunk service, and it suits us remarkably well.

8. Leaving Feilding out of the matter altogether, in your opinion as a business man, do you consider the proposed deviation a necessary one in the public interest?—I consider it a very unnecessary thing in the public interest. We have at the back of our district a very closely settled and largely populated district. I refer to Kiwitea and the upper portions of the Pohangina County and the Oroua County. The bulk of it is connected with Feilding, and is a feeder to the Main Trunk line to a very considerable extent.

9. We may take it that the bulk of the Oroua, Pohangina, and Kiwitea Counties are unserved by railways?—Yes. I might say that the district at the back of Feilding is closely settled, and has been for upwards of fifty miles back into the country. It is excellently roaded. I have been connected with this district ever since I have been in this country. The Kiwitea Road Board, which included within its boundaries the present Pohangina County, was formed about 1882 or 1883; at that time it formed one riding of the Manawatu County, and about nine-tenths of its area was covered with standing bush. A few years later the Road Board was merged into the county, and the two new counties were formed—viz., Kiwitea and Pohangina. Since then that district has gone ahead rapidly. The bulk of the standing bush has been felled, and the land is well settled. In this district there were five special-settlement associations formed, which proved very successful—viz., Foxton, Feilding, Palmerston, Pemberton, and Marton. They are very closely settled on areas of 100- or 200-acre sections. The people have done well there. In Apiti a considerable amount of dairying is going on. They have to cart their pigs twenty-eight and thirty miles to a trucking-station, and of course all the other produce they require has to be carted back. It is the opinion held largely throughout our district that if any public money is to be expended that that is the district that really deserves consideration at the hands of the Government and the Railway Department.

10. You know some large blocks of land that have been referred to across the Rangitikei River on both sides—Dalrymple's, Wilson Bros., Donald Fraser's, and McKelvie's?—Yes; I have been over a good deal of that country.

11. In your opinion as a land-valuer, do you think that the construction of the railway-line from Levin to Marton is likely to accelerate the subdivision of those places?—Not as long as they have the present owners. They have had the land for many years, and would not sell under any circumstances. The railway may ultimately affect it, but not in the time of the present holders.

*Mr. Skerrett:* No questions.

*Mr. Innes:* That concludes the evidence on behalf of the objectors I represent.

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*Mr. Skerrett* put in balance-sheets of the Manawatu County Council from 1911 to 1915; also copy of capital account of the Manawatu County Council; also summary of estates near Foxton.

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WELLINGTON, TUESDAY, 30TH MAY, 1916.

GERALD FITZGERALD sworn and examined. (No. 41.)

1. *Mr. Myers:* You are a civil engineer living in Wellington?—Yes.

2. I think you have had a good deal of experience with the Manawatu River, have you not?—Yes.

3. And recently were you a member of a Commission which had to consider matters affecting the Manawatu River?—Yes.

4. What was that Commission, and when did it sit?—It was more than a year ago. It sat at Palmerston in connection with a petition which had been sent to the Government asking the Government to take statutory steps to abolish the Palmerston North and Kairanga River Board.

5. You heard a lot of evidence taken and made your own investigations as well?—Yes.

6. Had you had previous experience of the river?—Yes, I have known it since 1876.

7. In the first place, can you say whether the conditions of the river have materially differed from the time when you first knew it up till now?—No, not as to the general condition.