

will remember that in my opening I pointed out—and I believe it has been established by the evidence—that the main object of the existing tramway and the extended tramway so far as the Sandon district is concerned will be to get our merchandise, manures, and supplies from Wellington via the tram and via Foxton or Himatangi, whichever may be the cheaper. We carry little or nothing from Sandon to Wellington, with the exception perhaps of wool. Now, I understand the attitude of the Department is on the principle that it ought not in any way to assist the development of a port which might possibly come into competition with the railway, and on the further principle that it objects to give facilities for the carriage of local traffic if those facilities are likely to cause any diminution in the railway revenue. The whole question of the diversion of through traffic, as I pointed out, depends upon the possibilities of the Foxton Harbour. Foxton Harbour is at present a poor harbour, and probably always will be, capable, your Honour, of accommodating only small coastal vessels. With any practicable expenditure which a Harbour Board can make, it may or may not be capable of affording accommodation and shipping facilities for coastal vessels of a large type; but I submit that it is clear that no amount of expenditure will make Foxton capable of berthing or loading and discharging Home-carrying cargo-steamers. Now, I want to point out with what want of forethought the case for the Department has been presented to this Commission. It is suggested that Foxton is to be a successful competitor with Wanganui. It is Foxton who they fear will divert the trade from Wanganui, where, according to Mr. McVilly, it ought to go. I want to point out that Wanganui is almost past the experimental stage. It has been proved that they will be able to berth, load, and unload Home-carrying cargo-steamers; that probably much progress would have been made but for the fact that their dredge, which is built in England, cannot, owing to the war, be sent across the seas. Now, I want to ask the Commission to consider the advantages the Wanganui Harbour will possess over Foxton, and possibly as a competitor with the railway-line from Palmerston and from Auckland to Wellington. If produce can be taken to Wanganui and shipped direct into the Home-carrying cargo-steamer, look at the enormous advantage it will be; or if the produce can be unladen from the steamer into the railways of the Dominion at Wanganui, look at the enormous advantage that would entail. I venture to submit that so far from Foxton being any competitor to the Wellington-Palmerston line, the competitor that is to be will be Wanganui; and I submit it is hyper-timidity on the part of the Railway authorities to suggest that Foxton is in the least degree likely to detract from the traffic to Wanganui. I must say that the demeanour of the Railway Department with reference to the possibility of the loss of revenue reminds one of the trepidation and alarm which would be caused in a class at a young ladies' seminary if a little mouse appeared in a remote corner of the class-room. They are trying to frighten themselves with all sorts of bogeys. Now, may I trouble your Honour to consider what goods now go from Wellington to Marton, and what through traffic is likely to be affected by traffic from Wellington to Marton. I submit, none. The goods which go to the Sandon district are merchandise, groceries, sugar, kerosene, benzine, and manures. I venture to put to this Commission as business men: that it is in the highest degree unlikely that any of that traffic would go via Foxton beyond Marton. We know that Marton already has considerable traffic with Wanganui and with the Port of Wanganui. Take the exports of the district: what are they, and what go to Wellington direct? Only the live-stock does not go, and butter and cheese do not go. Grain and butter do not go via Foxton, and no part of it, it is submitted, would be diverted to the Foxton line. Now, in regard to the northern traffic, upon which great weight has been laid by us, what will that northern traffic consist of? It will consist of timber, posts, firewood, and coal, and possibly store sheep. It is submitted that none of that through traffic will be lost to the railway-line. It is ridiculous to suppose that timber and posts and firewood will go to Marton, then along the tram to Foxton, and be shipped at Foxton. Besides, it has been pointed out that the profitable part of the carriage of this traffic has been earned before its arrival at Marton. From Ohakune to Himatangi the rate is 3s. 6d. per 100 ft., and to Greatford 3s. 1d., so there is only 5d. for the carriage of forty-three miles. I submit that the objections as to a diversion of traffic are pure phantasms on the part of the Railway Department; but a further answer to it is this: that we are prepared to confine our connection with the railway to such conditions as will prevent us engaging in foreign or through traffic, and I will show that the Railway Department have it in their own hands to control that condition. The live-stock which my learned friend Mr. Myers referred to would be imported into Marton, would be fattened in the Sandon district, and would go to Wanganui, Feilding, or Longburn. The third objection is that this is the thin end of the wedge, and the hearts of the Railway officials are in a flutter lest, having got the thin end of the wedge in, the rest should rapidly follow through some form of pressure. I apprehend that if such a suggestion were acted upon all pioneer development and progress would be stopped, and I submit that it is impossible for this Commission, and improper for this Commission to assume that the Government or Minister of Railways, entrusted with the administrative affairs of the railways, is not capable of drawing the line at the proper condition. It is absurd to assume that moderation is to be impossible for fear it should degenerate into immoderation. I submit it is not a question that can be considered by this Commission. Now, we ask your Honour and gentlemen of the Commission for one of two recommendations. The first we ask for is a siding with a junction at or near Marton, with such interchange of traffic and such conditions only as the Railway Department think proper to prevent any appropriation of foreign traffic; or, second, if that be refused, say a terminal connection at the Marton Station—a dead-end. Gentlemen, it will be impossible to deny that there are grave objections to the interchange of traffic on the Government line and upon this tramway, arising from the character of the construction of the tramway, and arising from the weight of some of the Government trucks, and perhaps the character and construction of some of our trucks; but I desire to point out that all that can be regulated by the Railway Department. It is not sought to take from the Railway Department the control of their own line. It will be their function to prescribe the condition upon which the interchange of traffic would be permitted, and thus it will be seen that the suggestion that we should be able to appropriate foreign traffic can be met readily by the regulation of the Department and by the conditions which the Department will be able to invoke. I point out to your Honour that in that