

I wrote as far back as August last asking for detailed information in regard to Mr. Hiley's scheme. The reply I got from the Minister of Railways was that the Railway Department had no records whatever of Mr. Hiley's scheme. Then I wrote immediately afterwards and pointed out to the Minister of Railways that not only must the Department have those records, but that Mr. Hiley's scheme in detail had been referred to in Palmerston North by the Borough Council and the Chamber of Commerce, and fully considered by them. The only reason, as far as I could make out, why Mr. Hiley's proposal was not carried out was on account of some controversy between those local bodies to which I have referred and the Railway Department as to whether the sub-bridge should be constructed under Cook Street. I received a reply from the Minister of Railways to the effect that the matter would be further looked into, but I have heard nothing further. We do not know what Mr. Hiley's proposals are, nor do we know what the proposals of the Department are as dealt with in the schedule to the Bill of last year. We want to tender evidence to show that the proposals contained in the schedule to the Bill would be unjustifiably expensive under the present conditions of the country, and we want to show also that Mr. Hiley's scheme, or some modification of the scheme, would be ample to provide for the congestion at Palmerston North at the present time. We cannot tender that evidence under the circumstances unless we know what the proposals of the Department are. We want that information made available for our expert witnesses in order that they may be in a position to give evidence before this Commission, either at Palmerston North next week or in Wellington at some subsequent date. But all these things take time, and all I ask for this information to-day is so that we may not lose time. We would like to know to-day whether the information can be made available.

*The Chairman :* I may say at once that I cannot state what information will be available, or what information the Department is possessed of. The Commission does not know. We have power to call for any information necessary, but I would have to consult my colleagues in regard to your application.

*Mr. Myers :* The records of a public Department are not to be laid bare to any person who desires a roving commission to inspect them. No public Department can tolerate such a thing. If Mr. Field is correct in saying that Mr. Hiley discussed with the Palmerston North Borough Council and the Chamber of Commerce details of a worked-out scheme—and on this point I may say that I think Mr. Field will find he is wrong—Mr. Field could readily have obtained all the information that he and his experts require on reference to the Palmerston North Borough Council. If his hypothesis is correct there should be no difficulty about it; but I think he will find it is not correct. Now, Mr. MacLean is going to give evidence this morning, and if Mr. Field and Sir James Wilson will wait and hear what Mr. MacLean has to say, the probability is that they will get all the information they require. May I say one thing whilst Sir James Wilson and Mr. Field are here, and that is that I venture to suggest to them that it is of some importance that they should hear the evidence with regard to the proposed alterations in connection with the Palmerston North Station, because it may have, from what Sir James has said, a very important bearing upon the view which he and those associated with him should take in regard to the Main Trunk deviation. The view of the Railway Department is that, whatever may be done so far as the Main Trunk deviation is concerned, the Palmerston North Station accommodation must be dealt with and dealt with properly. What I mean to suggest to Sir James Wilson and Mr. Field is that a great deal of expenditure must necessarily take place in connection with Palmerston North, so that it is quite possible that in those circumstances they may not think it advisable to press any suggestions which they may have to make in regard to the Main Trunk deviation at this stage.

*The Chairman :* I think we will now proceed to take Mr. MacLean's evidence.

*Sir James Wilson :* You will excuse me, Sir, but I cannot wait to hear that evidence. I hope Mr. Field will be able to do so, but I have an important engagement which I must keep.

*Mr. Field :* I only want to say, Mr. Chairman, that if Mr. Myers's suggestion is carried out it will place us at a decided disadvantage. It is quite impossible for us to obtain from the Palmerston North Borough Council and the Chamber of Commerce the details of Mr. Hiley's scheme, because they did not keep details of the scheme.

*The Chairman :* But Mr. MacLean is going to give evidence.

*Mr. Field :* Yes, but I wanted my expert witnesses to be here. I am not here as counsel but as one of a sub-committee composed of Sir James Wilson, the Mayor of Foxton, and myself, which sub-committee was set up for the purpose of instructing witnesses to give evidence in this matter. I think it is very likely now the Commission is sitting and that counsel is appearing that we will also instruct counsel on the matter; but if the Commission is going to take evidence to-day of a highly technical nature which I do not profess to understand, I would like our witnesses to hear that evidence, or, at any rate, to hear what the proposals are. If the public are not going to be advised as to how the money is to be expended and the Commission upholds that view, I have nothing more to say. I wish to say, in addition to what Sir James Wilson has said, that we would not be here to-day if it were not for the fact that the question of the deviation arises. We would not be present if it was only a question of the accommodation at Palmerston North. We say that the accommodation at Palmerston North can be provided for without any deviation. If there is to be a deviation, then we say that our suggested deviation, saving as it does seventeen miles of the Main Trunk line, and doing away with special grades, could be carried out at an expenditure which would not be in excess of what we believe the proposed expenditure is likely to be. We say that our suggested deviation could be made for the same amount of money, and would at the same time be of very much greater national advantage.

*The Chairman :* All the same, I think we will now go on with our evidence.

*Mr. Field :* How am I to instruct my witnesses? I would like to have Mr. Holmes or Mr. Fulton here this morning. We want the Commission to give us the most ample opportunity of going into this question in all its bearings.