

at Palmerston North has to be dealt with from four directions. There is not only the traffic which is passing through Palmerston North, but the traffic arising from those different directions and going from one to the other. For instance, there is quite a big traffic which goes to and from what we call the Taranaki direction, including the Auckland-Main Trunk line, and the east coast or Napier direction, and *vice versa*. Then there is also the traffic, although not to such a large extent, between Wellington—that is, the old Manawatu Railway—and Foxton, and *vice versa*.

Before dealing with the subject in detail I want to ask you whether the railway at present necessarily runs through the main streets in Palmerston North?—That is so.

And the station itself is on the main street?—It is actually alongside the main street.

Of course, in the old days Palmerston was a small place, and did that matter so much then?—I believe that the station was at the Square, which was intended to be the railway-station, and the borough was built round it.

Is the system such as now exists—a railway-station on the main street of a town like Palmerston North, and the railway running through the main street—a system which has your approval as a railway man?—To my mind it is absolutely inconceivable that that arrangement can continue for any length of time.

Looking, therefore, at the requirements of Palmerston North alone, and without taking into consideration any question of the deviation of the Main Trunk line, such as we have heard suggestions of, can you tell this Commission whether or not in your opinion and in the opinion of your colleagues some alteration in Palmerston is essential?—Absolutely essential.

That is irrespective of any question of the Main Trunk deviation?—The other questions have very little to do with it.

You have spoken of Palmerston North being a busy railway centre. I assume the Department has figures which will show the annual increase of the railway business there?—Yes, but that is a matter which I think it will be better to get evidence of from the General Manager.

Are you, however, able to say from your knowledge of the statistics that the business at Palmerston North has increased practically year by year and increased considerably?—Very considerably. There has been a specially rapid increase in later years.

Has the position at Palmerston North now reached such a stage as that you consider the matter is one of urgent importance?—I can only say that it is quite evident to even a layman that the conditions at Palmerston North at the present time are, to put it into plain words, chaotic.

We may take it that such a condition of things in a busy centre is not a good thing in a railway system?—It is not good for anybody.

When I say “not good for a railway system,” of course I have the public interest in mind?—Yes, that is so.

Have you, in conjunction with your colleagues, including the General Manager, considered various proposals in regard to the question of making alterations at Palmerston North?—Yes.

Have you taken into careful consideration all the possible alternative schemes that have occurred to the minds of your colleagues and yourself?—We have personally, and I may say I have specially, given every scheme which I could possibly conceive of the most anxious and careful consideration.

And have you by a process of elimination on considerations of railway and public expediency come to a conclusion as to what is the best course to adopt?—After giving the matter, as I say, the most anxious consideration, I was driven to the conclusion that only one proposal would meet the difficulty—that is, after examining all the possible schemes I was driven to one conclusion and one conclusion only.

Is that conclusion to which you have given consideration one which commends itself to your own knowledge to your colleagues, to the General Manager, to yourself?—Yes.

I think you have a plan or plans which show the present position at Palmerston North and the various alternative proposals which have been considered?—Yes, I have here a plan (No. 25252) of the Palmerston North Borough. [Exhibit No. 1.]

There is one street on the plan in Palmerston North—namely, Cook Street—which I understand has always caused your Department very great difficulty, and is really a bugbear to your experts?—That is so. In 1889 the Railway Commissioners sought power to close Cook Street and also Pitt Street. Objection was made, and the objection was taken to the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal gave its decision against the Railway Commissioners, on the ground that the proper authority had not taken the action that was necessary. The case was heard by the Court of Appeal in 1892. The first Proclamation was issued by the Governor in Council, and the Court of Appeal decided that the wrong authority had taken the action. The Railway Commissioners then issued a Proclamation with the same object in view. That was again heard by the Court of Appeal, and the Court decided that the Railway Commissioners had no power to do it. That is the position at the present time.

In Pitt Street you overcame the difficulty by means of a subway?—Action was taken under the Municipal Corporations Act with regard to Pitt Street. The question of the closing of streets has to be heard before a Magistrate, and in this case the Magistrate gave his decision that Pitt Street might be closed if a foot-subway were provided. That foot-subway was provided and the street closed.

How long ago was that?—That was in the early “nineties.”

You are not speaking positively with regard to the date?—No, I cannot give the exact date.

I understand your Department has been advised that the only way in which to effectually close Cook Street is by legislation?—We were advised that we have now under the altered legislation power to close Cook Street, but on reconsideration the Crown Law Office came to the conclusion that although we had that power it would not be advisable to do so without special legislation. We have certain legislative powers for instance, we have power to construct a railway along Lambton Quay—but