

made for years—this is especially so in the case of the deviation of the line—we are not sure that the Commission is in a position to decide that point on the evidence of the officers of the Railway Department, which to us is a very important matter, unless it has very much more information before it by competent engineers. I do not know for the moment that any person in New Zealand can show that Mr. McVilly is not capable—perhaps he is more capable than any person in New Zealand—to manage the railways of this country. I have no hesitation in saying that Mr. MacLean as an engineer from the railway point of view is a first-class man. We have nothing to say against them, and we have every confidence in their ability and in their management; but I suggest to you, gentlemen, that they are only looking at this matter from a railway point of view, and I consider it is their duty to look at it from that point of view—it is a duty we expect of them; but there is something else they have to consider, and it is the duty to the public that they have to bear in mind. It is undoubtedly their duty to work the railways to the best advantage, but, as I have already stated, the Railway Department has a duty to perform to the general community of New Zealand, the same as the local bodies have their duty to perform.

*Mr. Myers:* I think they are nearly all supporting the scheme submitted by the Railway Department.

*Sir James Wilson:* They are all interested in seeing money expended in the City of Palmerston North. As far as we are concerned, we have nothing to say against Palmerston North. We are delighted to see it going ahead, and we are pleased to see the trains going through the Square. The whole of the public travelling from north to south say it is one of the best squares in New Zealand, and if the station is shifted two miles out they will not see it at all. Every person who goes from Palmerston North would have to go out a distance of one mile and a half or more. That is a very serious matter; but I do not propose to stress that point any further. There is another matter you gentlemen have to consider, and that is the question of cost. The Railway Department states that it will have to spend about £700,000 in deviating the line around Palmerston North, and I ask, what advantages are you going to get? You are going to get an improved yard. I admit that a larger station than the present one is necessary. I also ask, what extra income are you going to get if the proposed deviation were carried out? Are you going to save anything—are you going to make the railways more profitable? Then there comes a very important matter, and it is the benefit to be derived by the general public. You have to consider those matters, because they are very important. They are matters the Government has to consider, and I feel sure the Railway management looks upon them in the same light. It is a great responsibility to be placed on your shoulders, and you have to advise the Government. By shortening the distance you are certainly saving the passengers' time, and of course you will save so many miles of railway, and you will deduct from the fares a certain amount of money, because you will not carry the passengers the same distance as you do now; and, furthermore, every ton of goods that goes over the railways will be conveyed a shorter distance, and in consequence a few shillings saving will be effected. I should now like to draw your attention to a report made by Mr. Bush—or, rather, the evidence given by Mr. Bush during the sitting of the Foxton Wharf and Main Trunk Deviation Commission. The evidence to which I refer will be found at pages 89 to 95 of the Commissioners' report. In his evidence he points out the saving in cost if the deviation of seventeen miles were carried out. That is expert evidence, and I will not be in a position to give you that information. However, if you deduct a certain number of miles of railway you save over an extended period a very large sum of money. There is one thing that should be ascertained, and it is whether there has been any truth in the statement that a saving in money will be effected by the deviation.

*The Chairman:* Anything that has been stated will be in the report of 1916.

*Sir James Wilson:* I would also like to draw the attention of you gentlemen to the report of Mr. McKerrow on the proposed deviation via Foxton, 1896. I may say that this report was submitted to the Commission in 1916 by Mr. McVilly, and will be found at page 201 of the report of the Foxton Wharf and Main Trunk Deviation Commission. Mr. McVilly was opposed to the purchase of the Sanson Tramway, which was doing a great service to the settlers in that locality. We were endeavouring to extend our railway to Greatford, and if this had been carried out it would have been doing a great service to the whole of New Zealand. Mr. McKerrow, who was a very able man, went over this line and examined it, and although he was Surveyor-General he was not a railway man in every sense of the word. He went into the question and he gave us a great deal of information, and he gave it as his opinion that the distance from Levin to Greatford by the proposed line would be about thirty-nine miles, whereas Mr. MacLean said the distance was fifty miles.

*Mr. MacLean:* I said "about fifty miles."

*Sir James Wilson:* Mr. MacLean speaks of a line from Greatford. The suggestion is that the line to Greatford is not altogether satisfactory because there is a steep hill close to the place in question. I should like to take this opportunity of reading to you gentlemen an extract from Mr. McKerrow's report, in which he says, "There would, therefore be, after deducting the five miles and a quarter from Foxton to Carnarvon, thirty-four miles of railway to construct. Further, as Greatford Station in its present position is unsuitable for a junction, and moreover it is undesirable to have another junction so near Marton Junction, it would be better, therefore, to continue the existing line from Greatford to Marton Junction, 3 miles 16 chains, or in all about thirty-seven miles or thirty-eight miles and a half of railway to construct, which, in the absence of detailed survey and estimates, should not be estimated to cost less than £200,000." Mr. MacLean's estimate of the cost was £1,000,000. I think you were very alarmed when Mr. MacLean said that the cost would be about £20,000 per mile. Of course, I quite realize that Mr. MacLean knows the country, but I do not think he has gone so carefully into the matter as to make the estimate he has. He will find that evidence will be given showing that the cost is very much smaller than he estimates.