

in an unremunerative additional expenditure of about £500,000, which would be the case if the proposals of the Department were given effect to; and, as I have already intimated, a number of people who are in business will suffer if the station-site is shifted. I also contend that it is the duty of the officers of the Railway Department to show you that it is impossible to make the necessary improvements at the present site before asking you to agree to the proposal to shift the station out to another site. The Department will also have to produce very conclusive evidence to show why the scheme which was approved in the year 1914 is considered to be unsound to-day. We are told that there is going to be available 7,000 ft. of frontage round Church Street and Main Street, and that this land is worth £30 a foot. Possibly three or four yards of it down Main Street might be worth that amount, but the rest of the land would not be worth more than £7 or £8 a foot. The Engineer said that it would realize at £30 a foot the sum of £200,000. To my mind that will show you how totally inadequate the calculations of the Railway Department are when dealing with a simple ordinary proposition of this kind. Representations have been made to close Cook Street, and the citizens of Palmerston North would naturally be contented if a vehicular subway were provided, but the Railway Department was only prepared to provide a pedestrian subway. Palmerston North is going to benefit in a direct sense if that is the only obstacle that is going to stand in the way. I may say the whole curse of the business is this failure to close Cook Street in a satisfactory manner. I submit that if the closing of Cook Street is the only obstacle in the way it is a sorry lookout.

*Mr. Myers :* Mr. MacLean has given evidence to the effect that the closing of Cook Street would be inadequate for the required accommodation, and that in the interests of the town the station should be shifted.

*Mr. Luckie :* They have not said how much land can be acquired in the vicinity of the present station. I want to point out also that right up to 1914 the Railway Department was satisfied that this scheme of Mr. Hiley's was satisfactory, and, furthermore, no suggestion has been made for thirty years to make alterations in the proposed location of the station. It is proposed to shift the line in the vicinity of Rangitikei Road, a distance of one mile and a quarter away, and I propose to produce evidence which will show that the locality in question is subjected to floods from six to twelve times a year, and it will take an enormous sum of money, far in excess of what Mr. MacLean estimates, in order to get the proper foundation to build the line on. You can drive a pile down from 10 ft. to 15 ft. before you can get a solid bottom, and it will mean an immense cost to the Department, estimated at more than £700,000. As I have already explained, the tendency in other countries is to bring the railway-stations into the cities. I do not propose to weary you any further, so I will call Mr. Holmes, who has had some experience in this matter, to give evidence.

ROBERT WEST HOLMES sworn and examined.

*Mr. Luckie.]* You are a retired civil engineer, and were Engineer-in-Chief of the Public Works Department?—Yes, and Under-Secretary of the Public Works Department at Wellington.

You have had a great deal of experience during your years of office as Engineer-in-Chief and Under-Secretary of the Public Works Department in surveying and outlining the railways in various parts of the Dominion?—Yes, I have.

In the course of your experience you have had some knowledge of the inevitable growth of inland cities, such as Palmerston North, and their dependence upon railway communication?—Yes.

Will you tell the Commission what is your view of the inevitable consequence of the proposed deviation?—My idea is that the moving of the station is hardly a necessity.

Is hardly a necessity?—That is so. I practically support what you have stated in your recent address. It is the usual practice in other places to take the railway-line to the traffic.

Could you instance any particular place you have in your mind?—Yes; take Sydney, for instance, where the station is in the heart of the city. They are proceeding to extend that railway by an underground railway. I can also mention London, where the principal termini are in the city. It has not been found necessary to remove any of the termini out to the suburbs.

I suppose you have not examined the site where it is proposed to construct this new station?—I know it fairly well.

I suppose the fact of building the station a great deal farther away from the present business centre is going to make it more expensive for people occupying premises in the centre?—The business people who require accommodation nearer the railway-station will have to build new warehouses.

That means their business premises will be removed towards the railway-station?—Yes.

If it increases the cost of carriage to these new premises it is going to make those goods more expensive to the people who consume them?—Certainly.

From your knowledge of the conditions in Palmerston North, if it is possible to acquire other land in the immediate neighbourhood of the present station, would it not be preferable to extend the operations of the railway at its present position than adopt the method proposed by the Government?—I think that would be the best policy.

Obviously the population in a city like Palmerston North follows the railway?—Yes, I should say so. I know that that is being done at Hamilton.

It is already doing so at Hamilton?—Yes, Hamilton has extended right across to Frankton Junction. I may say that Frankton Junction is the main station in that district.

As a matter of fact the removal of the railway-station in the direction intimated by the Government will do an injury to those people whose business has been built up by their own industry in the neighbourhood of the present site. What effect is it going to have on the properties in the immediate neighbourhood of where the railway is to be?—It will increase the value of the property.