

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 3RD OCTOBER, 1929.

MR. JOHN O'SHEA, Wellington City Solicitor, examined. (No. 1.)

Mr. O'Shea : I represent the views of the Municipal Association. As the explanatory memorandum states, this Bill is the first step towards the preparation of a comprehensive measure dealing with motor transport. The present instalment clearly shows that the purpose of the Government is to centralize in Wellington the control of all motor-vehicles and motor traffic in the Dominion. The Bill also indicates that it is the purpose of the Government to put under the control of this Department (1) administration of main highways, (2) control of tramways. The Municipal Association think that to do either of these things would be a retrograde step. (1) Administration of highways : The association is satisfied that the transfer of the control of the Main Highways Board from the Public Works Department to any other Department would not be satisfactory. The Engineers of the Public Works Department are perfectly competent to deal with highway-construction, and have demonstrated their ability in this matter within the past few years. They have been increasing in efficiency and perfection of administration, and the transfer from them would involve serious risk of increasing expense and of diminution in efficiency. Apart from objecting to the small financial benefit which municipal bodies derive from the administration of the Act, and the practical exclusion of the cities and larger boroughs from this benefit, the Municipal Association finds no fault with the administration of the Act by the Public Works Department. It therefore views any change with alarm. (2) Control of tramways : The contents of the present Bill, and the constitution of the Advisory Board set up by the Minister, suggest to the Municipal Association that the advice given to the Minister has been given by the majority of the Transport Board solely in the interests of the motor trade. The whole of the present Bill has been approved by a majority of the advisory committee and has been accepted by the Minister. The local-body representatives opposed most of the proposals, but they had no say in the final conclusions. The administration by the Public Works Department of the tramways has in the past been, on the whole, satisfactory. The Engineers administering this work in that Department have built up a tradition of experience and knowledge that is now very efficient and very fair in its operation on the various local bodies and tramways concerns affected. Our officials are always able to settle engineering questions and questions of tramway administration with the Public Works officials without any difficulty. It seems, therefore, dangerous to alter the system—first, because the present system is good, and it is always dangerous to destroy anything that works efficiently ; and secondly, because there seems a probability of the motor interests being given a preponderant consideration in the deliberations of the advisory committee, and consequentially of the new Transport Department. The case for exclusion of the administration of the Tramways Act from the purview of this Department is even stronger than that of the Main Highways Board. In this connection I refer to clause 3 of the Bill, subclause (1), from which I quote : " There is hereby established a Department of State, to be called the Transport Department, which, under the control of the Minister, shall be charged with the administration of the several Acts specified in the Schedule hereto." The last two Acts specified in the Schedule are the Main Highways Act, 1922, and the Tramways Act, 1908. We suggest that these two Acts should be struck out of the Schedule. The present advisory committee has a majority consisting of representatives of the motor trade. They have all along acted solely in the interests of the motor trade, and their representations appear in the Bill. The Municipal Association is therefore of opinion that an amendment should be made to clause 5 by adding the following new subclause : " (4) At least half of the members of every advisory committee shall be appointed on the joint recommendation of the executive bodies of the Counties Association and of the Municipal Association, including in such number of members a member of the Auckland Transport Board or the Christchurch Tramways Board." We have no further remark to make on Part I of the Bill. With regard to Part II—Motor-vehicles Amendment—clause 10, the Municipal Association is of opinion that this clause should be struck out. The clause is inserted with a view to bringing trackless trams within the definition of motor-omnibuses. They see no reason whatever for this change, and the only ground on which it can be suggested is that the motor people wish the trackless trams to be controlled by the Transport Department with a view to the restriction of their use. The Wellington City Council is advised by its Engineer that there is a strong probability of trackless trams being employed for the purpose of tramway extension. The construction of tramway-tracks involves very heavy expenditure, and the present method—bitumen and concrete constructions of streets—enables a suitable road for the running of trackless trams to be constructed in outlying districts at a moderate expense. The cost of overhead construction for the supply of electricity is not a large item, and the Wellington Tramways Engineer regards trackless trams as the precursor of ordinary trams. When the districts which are first served increase in population and it is necessary to carry large numbers of people at rush hours the trackless tram can be replaced by the ordinary tram, and the expense of track can then be justified. The Wellington Engineer states that frequent reports come to New Zealand of the scrapping of tramway-tracks in England and the replacement of the trams by