

I am not able to explain the object of this line beyond the fact that it brings into connection the Port of Nelson on the North and that of Greymouth on the West Coast.

Two short portions, one at either end of this line, as you are well aware, have been constructed and open to the public for some time past.

This line has always been known, especially in Nelson, as the West Coast line; but, after the line had been surveyed, I have reason to believe that its further extension, especially from the Foxhill end, was stopped in consequence of the estimate making the probable cost of the line not less than from £10,000 to £12,000 per mile; nor have I ever heard that it was intended that this line should form part of the general scheme of railway accommodation in the northern portion of the South Island as an extension of the main trunk line northwards from Canterbury, or whether it was merely for the purpose of connecting the two ports before alluded to.

However, since this survey for a line of railway was made, I find that a first-class dray road has been completed, and of such a character that a stage coach, with the exception of a gap of four miles between Hampden and the Lyell, could travel the whole way from Nelson to Greymouth: together with a branch road from Reefton to Westport, as shown upon the sketch map. This road, having been completed, is now open, and over which a stage coach is running.

With these facts before us—that is, of a first-class dray and coach road accommodation as just described, and upon which a considerable outlay of capital must have been expended, it can scarcely be expected that the Government would feel themselves justified in any way in providing railway accommodation along this route; and more especially when it appears, from information received, that upon the portion of the dray road, namely, from Foxhill to Hampden, a distance of about sixty miles, the average amount of traffic, at ordinary times, does not exceed one or two drays per week.

And when we further consider that the railway from Nelson to Foxhill, its first instalment at the northern end, and passing through the only populated district along the entire route, is said not to pay working expenses (I am glad to find that the revenue of the line is improving), how can it reasonably be expected that, at an increased cost of construction per mile of its extension southwards, any improvement can possibly be looked for? On the contrary, it is absolutely certain that a worse state of things must follow the further the line is extended in this direction. And I feel certain that it will soon be discovered that the repairs of even the present dray road will so tax the pockets of the ratepayers that ere long the road will be abandoned as regards its repairs, and left to take care of itself, or that a toll will have to be levied and the repairs maintained by those who use the road; which simply means that, like too many other works in this country, the repairs are found to be so costly an item that they have, in consequence, been allowed to go beyond the power of repairing. If this is likely to occur in the case of a dray road, what a mistake would be made by extending the railway upon such poor prospects of success.

We may, therefore, without any feeling of prejudice towards the district, reasonably and fairly assert that, for a long time to come, the settlers along this district, who are, with truth, few and far between, should be satisfied, and consider their dray road sufficient accommodation for all the purposes of traffic, at all events for the present, without anything additional in the shape of a railway.

I shall have occasion to allude again to a portion of this route further on in this report.

For a fuller description of this route I beg to refer you to Mr. Rochfort's report, which will be found on page 1 of the Appendix; also, to the late Engineer-in-Chief's remarks upon this line, which will be found at page 6 of the Appendix, under the heading of "Surveys, Nelson to the Grey."

The only consideration that might engage the attention of the Government relative to this matter, in my opinion, is the extension of the line from Foxhill until it reaches the timbered country, where saw-mills have been erected about three miles from the present terminus.

I have always understood that the railway scheme of the late Engineer-in-Chief, as applicable, in his opinion, to the districts of this part of the South Island, was that of the extension of the North Canterbury line from its present terminus at Amberley to one of the northern ports—namely, Nelson or Picton, thereby completing the main trunk line throughout the whole of the Island, together with a branch from off this line at some convenient point to Brunner-ton, the present terminus of the Greymouth and Brunner-ton line on the West Coast, and which may be designated as the "inter-coastal" line.

This scheme, considered from a commercial and, I may perhaps add, from an equitable point of view also, and more especially in the case of the intercoastal line, appears to have met with the general approval of the inhabitants, who have settled down upon these districts with the certain assurance that, if this scheme were carried out in its entirety, the country would not only become benefited by it as a means of communication, but that it would also become the means of adding to its further settlement, and that to a very considerable extent.

I will now give you a description of the various routes that have been reconnoitred and partly surveyed with this object, and afterwards remark upon them from an engineering point of view.

#### INTERCOASTAL LINES.

##### *Descriptive and Explanatory Remarks.*

*Line No. 1.*—This route was the first that was examined in connection with the before-mentioned scheme.

This line commences at the Brunner-ton terminus and passes through the valley of the Grey River as far up as the point where the Brown Grey flows into it from the North. This line, reported upon in the year 1875 (*see* Appendix, page ), was considered altogether too rough for construction, and passing along as it does what is called the "Gorges of the Grey," and through a country, from the point of junction of the Grey River with that of the Little Grey, that could never be expected to contribute in any way whatever to the traffic of the line.