

305. *Mr. Bell.*] Which part of New Zealand do you get your merchandise from?—Produce principally from Dunedin, Oamaru, and Timaru, and something from Nelson; but principally from Dunedin and Oamaru. General merchandise, I think, is pretty equally distributed between Wellington and Dunedin. Very little comes from Lyttelton or Auckland; in fact, almost nothing.

306. *The Chairman.*] And shipping is a considerable difficulty? You cannot get freights here for exporting timber, &c.?—It is very difficult.

307. What is the rate of wharfage here on imported goods?—On produce, 2s. a ton; coal, 1s.; and general goods, 3s. 6d.

308. *Mr. Bell.*] Do you know of any advantages which carriage by railway would bring so as to secure the traffic to the railway more than by sea?—The advantages would be these: that there would be none of the interruption we have now on account of the bar. Sometimes boats have been shut out as long as three months, and the whole trade of the Coast has been almost paralysed. It frequently happens that boats are lying in the roadsteads for a month on account of the weather or the bars being silted up. Delays are nearly periodical. The time varies very much. Last year the delay was not so long. It was about three weeks. If there was a railway connecting the East and West Coasts, these delays would be obviated. Of course, I really do not know very much about the matter. I have not given it much thought.

309. *The Chairman.*] Have you any idea whether the making of a railway through would tend to increase the population, and in what form it would be likely to increase here? Would it bring through more miners, who would prospect the country; or would the building trade be improved, or would new industries be started?—Yes; I really think they would start new industries. That is one of the principal advantages that would arise. The fact of the matter is that this place is very much isolated. It is almost cut off from intercourse with other parts of the colony. If I want to go to Canterbury on business matters, I am deterred because of the expense. It means £25 to go there and back. If you want to go to Wellington, it will cost £10 more. I have gone twice, and cannot do so under £35. No families can move out of here. If they go by seaboard, it means what I say, and if by overland coach, higher. I believe that with a railway there would be a great deal of traffic backwards and forwards, because it would connect us with the centres of population. People would travel a great deal more than they now do. The traffic itself, with the population we have, would increase very considerably.

310. Can you give us any instance of this isolation having driven people away, or prevented people from coming here? Do you think it has much effect in either of these directions?—Yes; I have known of families leaving here on that account, because they could not get their children educated. The expense of sending them to Christchurch or other places is very great. That would have been obviated if a railway had existed. I have known a great many very desirable citizens who have left on that account.

311. *Mr. Wilson.*] Speaking for yourself as a merchant, suppose you had an opportunity of sending goods by railway for £1 10s. a ton from this place, and you could send them by steamer or sailing vessel for £1 per ton, would you give the railway the preference?—Certainly not; I should send them by steamer. I should not pay the extra amount unless there was an immediate want of the goods. If I wanted them at once, of course I might pay the extra freight, but not otherwise.

312. Practically speaking, all the trade would not go by train?—Certainly not, if there was that difference.

313. If the charges were the same, would the railway take all the trade?—I should think so, if the freight were the same. I do not believe they would give two or three shillings' consideration to the train, if they could get their goods carried by seaboard for that difference. A difference of 2s. or 3s. would spoil the train as regards traffic. My own impression is that, if the train is coming here, they will have to make the freight as little as, or less than, it is by sea.

314. Do you not think that this competition will bring down sea freights?—It very possibly will. I anticipate that freights will soon be reduced. I do not think they will keep on at the present rate much longer, because the competition is beginning to get very great. The Union Company are getting steamers to run to these ports, and that will cause sailing vessels to reduce their freights considerably, or they will be run off.

315. *Mr. Bell.*] What are the freights now?—£1 2s. 6d. by sailing vessels, and £1 10s. by steamer.

316. Then there are several incidental charges connected with sending goods by sea?—We pay nothing except £1 2s. 6d., and the wharfage here.

Mr. JULIUS MALFROY, examined.

317. *The Chairman.*] You are in the timber trade, I understand?—Yes; and I have been for ten years in Hokitika.

318. There is an estimate of 10,000,000 feet of timber per annum as the amount that would be carried by a railway from the West Coast. We found out that there are a certain number of millions of feet used in Christchurch. The question we are not quite clear about is, whether the persons who made this estimate imagine that these 10,000,000 feet would be in excess of the 20,000,000; or do you think you can produce so much more cheaply than other places as to turn 10,000,000 feet out of the market?—A railway going in the direction it is supposed to go will call at Ashburton, and a great deal of timber comes as far as Ashburton from Invercargill. We could supply it cheaper at Ashburton than the millers at Invercargill. And, besides, if you refer to the timber merchants in Christchurch, you will find that they will sooner take West Coast timber at 3d. extra. It is clean, has few knots, and is very little cross-grained. I have an order from Mr. W. England, of Christchurch, for 100,000 feet, and it is nearly 4d. dearer than he could get it from the Sound and other places. If there were railway communication from here to Ashburton, the merchants in Canterbury would not have to send the timber from Lyttelton to Christchurch and then on to Ashburton, if the order came from Ashburton. The present freight delivered in Christchurch, counting the Lyttelton