

62. On which of the projected routes are you in possession of the most complete information?—I am in possession of information upon both routes.

63. You have compiled some statistics respecting these lines which have been published?—Yes.

64. Have these statistics and maps reference to any particular line?—To both lines—the Central line and the East Coast line proper.

65. Can you state to the Commission which of these routes is, in your opinion, the better one?—In my opinion the central line is far before the other one. If there is to be a line to Cook Strait, there is no comparison between them as to the benefits that would be done to the colony.

66. On what ground is that opinion based?—Upon the returns before you which I have compiled. I have bestowed considerable care in compiling them. They are authentic, to the best of my belief, in every way. The country that you see coloured yellow on the map would send its produce by the central route. The country that is coloured pink would be benefited by the East Coast line. A larger extent of country would certainly be benefited by the inland route. It would also be the means of making the railway system between here and Cook Strait complete, whereas if you take the line to Picton and Blenheim alone you leave out Nelson and its railway, and you leave out also all connection with the West Coast.

67. You regard the extension of the central line as giving the West Coast people the opportunity of obtaining communication with the main trunk line?—Yes.

68. Having given some attention to the matter, have you ever made any calculation as to the possible traffic upon this route?—No; but I have given it a considerable amount of care; and I will put a case like this: A person coming up from Dunedin for the purpose of going to Wellington starts from Dunedin by the morning train and arrives in Christchurch at 8 o'clock in the evening. He there meets the train at 8.15, which takes him to the Port, and even by the indifferent steamers now running that passenger arrives in Wellington about luncheon-time next day. If he preferred the overland route to Wellington, as we have got no night-trains he would require to wait in Christchurch the whole night. He starts again in the morning, and it will be late the next night before he gets to Picton, and then he has a sea-passage to undertake before he gets to Wellington. I am speaking now of passengers coming from the South to Christchurch. That person would lose twenty-four hours in the journey to Wellington. Supposing he wished to go to Taranaki or Auckland, he would be a gainer of time if the central line were extended to Nelson from the Tophouse and a direct steam service between Nelson and Taranaki and the Manukau.

69. You are aware that it is probable within a very short time a steam service will be established on the coast running from the Manukau to Lyttelton, calling at Wellington only?—I was not aware of that. I knew that there were fast passenger-boats building to run between Lyttelton and Wellington. I was not aware that they were to go to the Manukau.

70. Supposing such a passenger steam service were established making the voyage from Wellington to Lyttelton within ten hours, and keeping in view the traffic between the two Islands, you think there will be a considerable loss of time in getting from Dunedin to Wellington by going along this projected line?—Yes, I am quite sure of that.

71. The steamer from Lyttelton would afford a speedier means of getting to Wellington than the projected railway to Picton?—Yes, it would.

72. The present population on the East Coast line or the central line is very small, I believe?—Very small.

73. Greatly scattered and very few in number?—Yes.

74. As a matter of fact the prospects of immediate traffic upon the line would be very small?—Yes. I think a good deal of the land might be more profitably occupied than by sheep runs. I think if there were better accommodation the Hanmer Plains Springs would attract a considerable number of people. Even now people go up there from time to time. What frightens people is the Waiau River; it is a very fatiguing journey. The land round the Springs is not the best, but it will grow something, and it is still in the hands of the Government. It is a reserve belonging to the Government.

75. Is not a great bulk of the land along the route in the hands of private individuals?—Not between Hanmer Plains and Tophouse; it is nearly all Government land. On your journey you would hear all sorts of statements about the inclemency of the weather, and about the land there being of no value. From my knowledge of it, it is what is called a fattening country, and is exceedingly valuable. It is a country that will fatten stock, and, as I say, most of it is still in the hands of the Government.

76. *Mr. Thomson.*] In advocating the central route which line do you take, the line by Tairāhema or by Maruia?—By Tairāhema; but either one or the other is much preferable to the one on the East Coast.

77. But the Maruia route is even better than the East Coast one?—Yes.

78. Which terminus, Nelson or Picton, would you recommend?—I would have two termini. Let the Nelson railway join on at the Tophouse and the Picton railway come up from Blenheim to Tophouse.

79. Have you calculated the distance between Christchurch and Nelson?—I have not.

80. By either route?—I have not calculated the distance; that would be a matter for an engineer.

81. Do you know the height above the sea to be overcome?—Yes, 3,400 feet.

82. Have you calculated the mileage of agricultural land through which this line would go?—I was asked to do so, and I refused to make any estimate. I could give an opinion of the quantity of good land on each run, but as I might displease many of my own friends if I did so I declined to do it. I have not reckoned the quantity of agricultural land on either route, but I can say that between Hawkeswood and Flaxbourne, with the exception of a few thousand acres at Kaikoura, there is not one single run in this part of the country that could spare an acre for agricultural purposes. Every hilly run must have a certain quantity of level land, and most of these runs have not got sufficient level land to work their hills upon.