

the addition of lime to the soil as a manure. In the meantime, however, the cost of carriage makes lime such an expensive article that it is quite prohibitive, so far as using it for manure is concerned.

332. You think that before very long farmers will use it as a manure?—If it can be obtained at a reasonable price. I have been looking forward to that for years.

333. I have been told by farmers that the land in this neighbourhood requires lime more than any other manure?—That is my experience. I am told, also, that lime kills the grub with which farmers are so much troubled.

SATURDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 1884.

Mr. WILLIAM CAMPBELL WALKER, Chairman of the Ashburton County Council, examined.

334. *The Commissioner.*] Have you any evidence to bring forward?—I beg to hand in the report of a committee of the Ashburton County Council, dated the 29th November, 1882. [Report read and put in; see Appennix E]. In support of that report I wish to state that the County Council took a great deal of trouble in going over the district, and they endeavoured to find out from all concerned what was the best and fairest way of meeting the traffic. They were unanimously of opinion that the route should be—crossing the South Branch of the Ashburton at or near the traffic bridge, and going as far north as Bowyer's Stream. They found, from the evidence of all interested, that no more traffic from the south could be brought in by continuing the line further up the south bank: that any further extension up the south bank simply meant making a mineral line; and, as there were minerals on both sides of the river, and also taking into consideration that it might be a fair matter for owners of minerals to make such a line themselves, they declined to recommend that a purely mineral line should be constructed up the south bank of the river. They were of opinion that no agricultural or passenger traffic could be secured by extending the line any farther in that direction; and, in proof of that, I may state that all the settlers on the Rangitata Plains and the Gawler Downs—in fact, all those gentlemen who signed the petition against the extension of the railway northwards—were already served and did not require any further extension.

335. What petitioners do you refer to: many of the petitioners representing property to the south and west are not residents on the Plain at all?—I refer to their petition, as there is no other. We took the evidence of Mr Baxter, our Engineer, as to the feasibility and the economy of carrying the line across the present traffic bridge, and I would suggest to the Commission that he should be called in to give evidence on that point, as it is a purely professional one. He advised us that it was both practicable and economical; and we therefore recommended that the line should be taken across the traffic bridge, and extended as far north as Bowyer's Stream. Shortly after that report of the committee was handed in and forwarded to the Government the late Minister for Public Works, Mr. Johnston, made it known to us officially that the department objected to combined bridges, and that, as far as economy was concerned, they had ample funds at their disposal to extend the line across a bridge of their own. That being so, the County Council did not wish in any way to press the matter of the combined bridge, as it was purely on economical grounds that they had brought it forward. Now, however, the present Minister for Public Works, advised by Mr. Maxwell and the officers of his department, has stated that economy is a matter of great consideration, and that the vote of the House will not be sufficient to extend the line across the river if a bridge has to be built. I should like, therefore, to lay great stress on the recommendation of the County Council to take the line across the traffic bridge, on the economical ground of saving a second bridge; and I should also be glad if the Commission would hear Mr. Baxter's evidence on the question of cost. Speaking as a settler, I do not think there can be any hesitation in recommending that course, because, although a combined bridge is exceedingly inconvenient and even dangerous in a locality like the neighbourhood of this town, where we have daily instances of both, yet in a locality like Mount Somers, where the railway traffic will be two or three trains a day at a maximum, and the dray and wheel traffic will be reasonable, there need not be any real conflict between the two, and I should say that economy in such a case should certainly decide the question. As regards the traffic of that district, I see that several estimates have been given in the evidence you have already had before you. I do not think that any of the evidence I have seen gives sufficient indication of the irregular trade, if I may so speak, between the Alford Forest and Ashburton and its neighbourhood. I am in a position to speak from personal knowledge, having lived for five or six years on the direct line between Alford Forest and Ashburton. For two years I lived at Greenstreet, on the Forks Road, and since at Valetta, and I can say that at certain seasons of the year, when the ordinary work of farmers is slack, as, for instance, before harvest, the number of drays travelling backwards and forwards, for nothing but timber, is astonishing. The trade is in so many hands that it is exceedingly difficult to get any reliable statistics on the subject, but I am quite certain that, if the railway were extended as far as Bowyer's Stream, instead of the timber being sent for by farmers with their own drays, it would all come to Ashburton, where there would be depôts. The statement of any Ashburton timber dealer as to the timber trade is exceedingly misleading, and I would ask you to receive such evidence with caution, as likely to mislead.

336. You have stated all the objections you see to the extension of the line up the south side of the South Branch?—The only properties such a line would benefit are pastoral, and are fairly served already; or mineral, which might fairly make their own line.

337. Can you tell me whether taking the line round by the traffic bridge would increase the length of the line?—I have no doubt that it would, slightly.

338. To such an extent as would counterbalance the saving gained by using the bridge?—As far as I recollect, Mr. Baxter stated that the cost of altering the bridge would be £700, and I do not think a railway bridge could be constructed for less than £4,000 or £5,000. The length of the line would not be increased by more than half a mile at the outside. There is another point which I might state—I do not know whether it has been brought before you—that the traffic at present is small.