

ran special trains with 50 tons, would it not be possible to fix a lower figure?—I fear not, because, in a sense, we would require to run the vans one way empty. There is not sufficient traffic on the railway to fill up the vans, which would require to go back partially empty. And there is a further difficulty of arranging with the Manawatu Railway Company. I may mention that we had some difficulty in getting the company to agree to the through rates now established. It was only arranged after a correspondence extending over some months.

154. *Mr. Walker.*] Is the traffic so heavy that it costs so much to take empty vans back to New Plymouth?—Yes; the line is a difficult one to work on account of its grades and curves.

155. And it costs something to carry an empty van?—Of course it does. As long as you have plenty of engine-power a carriage or two more or less does not matter much on a level straight line; but on the Wanganui line, with its steep grades and sharp curves, one extra carriage more might stick up the train on a steep bank.

156. So we must take into account the carriage of empties?—You must take it very much into account. We are always carrying, even when the vans are well loaded, from 3 to 4 tons of dead weight against 5 or 6 tons of paying weight. The vans empty weigh about 4 tons each.

157. *The Chairman.*] By an arrangement with the Manawatu Railway Company for night-trains, would it not be the case that your night-train starting from New Plymouth in the evening would not mean an additional train on the Manawatu line. You would take the morning train from Palmerston?—But you run into as great a difficulty as regards the transit of butter during the cool hours. The train you refer to leaves Palmerston at ten minutes to 7 in the morning, and it gets in, according to the time-table, at a quarter to 1; but sometimes it is later. You may say it is 1 o'clock when it reaches the Manawatu station here. The handling of the butter between there and the steamers at the Queen's Wharf would require to be done during all the hot hours of the afternoon, so that it would be under very unfavourable circumstances. At the present time, when it comes through by the express on Tuesday or Friday, the butter leaves New Plymouth at 7 in the morning, and is due at the Manawatu station here a little before 10 o'clock at night. All the while—and mark this, as it is very important—the ventilated van, being in motion, is constantly replenished by currents of air, keeping everything cool during the journey. There is no harm in its remaining in the ventilating-van during the night; the thing is to get it away in the morning to the ship's side, in the absence of a cool-chamber on shore.

158. Those remarks apply to the Taranaki portion of the train?—The same van goes right through.

159. In the case of butter sent from the Wairarapa, would there be any difficulty in a night-train coming from the Wairarapa?—There is no difficulty in arranging a night-train anywhere; it is simply a question of cost.

160. *Mr. Walker.*] You state that £2 8s. per ton is charged from New Plymouth right through to Wellington?—Yes.

161. Do you charge proportionately, according to distance, between New Plymouth and Wellington, or is it only from the one point you charge £2 8s.?—The one point, or any other point in the Taranaki District. A man sending butter from Hawera would pay exactly the same as a man sending butter from New Plymouth—all along the line as far as Nukumarū, which is the point at which the rates begin to lessen. In the whole of Taranaki, Patea, on to Nukumarū, they are all on the same footing as regards the rate charged. It lessens after that proportionately, according to distance.

162. What is the distance from New Plymouth to Nukumarū?—Eighty-six miles.

163. Is that not hard on the settlers?—No; it is a cheap rate, and being uniform over a certain distance enables us to simplify the working of the railway.

164. *The Chairman.*] This inquiry is not limited to this particular district; it refers to the whole of New Zealand. Are we to understand that the same facilities for running night-trains with a minimum of 50 tons are available all over New Zealand?—Yes, if there is traffic to warrant it.

165. *Mr. Walker.*] Are your butter rates the same on all your lines now?—No; this rate we have been speaking of is a special rate between Taranaki and Wellington.

166. Have you not been asked for butter rates in other places?—We have cheap butter rates on other lines, in which we discriminate between butter for local use and butter for export. For instance, on the Waikato line we have a cheap rate.

167. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] You charge the gross weight?—Yes, on the gross weight.

168. *Mr. Marchant.*] Does not your experience as Chief Commissioner of Railways impress you with the necessity for the State acquiring the Manawatu line, in order to manage the whole railway system of the North Island economically and afford facilities to settlers?—I think so. It would be specially valuable to settlers, because they would then be able to have the benefit of the through rates. And this will apply to the East Coast as well as soon as the line is through the Gorge.

Mr. NEWTON KING examined.

169. *The Chairman.*] You are President of the Taranaki Chamber of Commerce?—Yes.

170. And a merchant dealing largely in butter?—Yes.

171. You were deputed to represent the Chamber of Commerce?—Yes. The difficulties we have to contend with are chiefly in the carriage of the butter—getting it to the port of shipment. We have either had to send it by the sea or by the railway to Wellington, and the last year's results were, in fact, disastrous altogether to the butter. Very few shipments turned out right. Shipping by the sea we have to send it down by the train to the breakwater in non-ventilated trucks. It sometimes remains there for many hours, and is then put into the steamer and shipped for Wellington. Then, again, its storage in Wellington is unquestionably bad. I came down here specially last year to see about this question. I found one shipment particularly of Taranaki butter in one of the Harbour Board's so-called cool-sheds. They had a skylight in the roof,