

18. About half of the country to the westward of the Stratford route would include land that would bring traffic to the railway?—Yes.

19. And where would the other half find an outlet?—That is already supplied by the road through Ngatimaru, and that road will no doubt be continued.

20. Then, on the east side of the Ngaire route, how much of the traffic from the district between the two routes would flow to the central route if the other were not formed?—I think that all the land, practically speaking, that is coloured would go into the Stratford route, or all the land between the Stratford route and the Upper Wanganui River. That is hardly as much as is coloured, but it is near enough.

21. Of course, a portion of that is traversed by the central route?—Yes; that between the Ngaire route and the Upper Wanganui River to within fifteen miles of the central route would go to the Ngaire route, and from the Wanganui River in a south-west direction, keeping about fifteen miles from the Ngaire route. The average of the land is quite as good as the hill country around Eketahuna and Pahiatua. I was up there a month or two ago at both places, and saw a great deal of the clearing going on. The hill land lying between Eketahuna and Alfredton is about on a par with the land on the Stratford route, so is the hill land at Pahiatua.

22. How does it compare with the land in the Hawera district?—Well, there is no comparison with the open country at Hawera—that is all flat. I should say that the soil in this country is equally rich and lasting. I would rather have it as a permanent thing than the Hawera land; it is safer country. I have never gone into the hill country at the back of Hawera. The average is just about as good as the people have been taking up within the last few years east of Stratford. People have taken up land about thirty miles from Stratford, and are felling the bush on the hills, and are well satisfied.

23. It is adapted to carry a large population?—Yes; as we look at it in the colony. I dare say in the future it will be very densely populated, because I believe it will be a great fruit-growing district. The nature of the soil and climate point in that direction. I would not be afraid to take up a farm of 300 or 400 acres there, and make money out of it.

24. Perhaps you might pass to the central route and tell us what you know of the country on that route, starting from the same point?—Well, starting from the point of divergence, there is no first-class land on the central route until you get to a place called Ohakune. It is seventy-five miles on the lithographed Public Works plan—that is, just about sixty miles from Ongarue. There is a block there a few miles in extent—I do not know how far it goes east and west; it is very good country. Then, from Ohakune to Kerioi is very fair land, I think. Then, from Kerioi to Turangarere is very inferior land as regards quality of soil. From Turangarere to Huntville is beautiful country—very good, indeed. It is all forest land, but I do not think you can beat the soil in New Zealand.

25. Then we are to understand that the land from Turangarere to Huntville is superior to anything on the Ngaire route?—Well, I should say that it is about a tie, taking it all in all. I think the quality of the soil would be found to be just about the same.

26. You have referred to there being no good land between Ohakune and Taumarunui?—There is no good land there except Ohakune.

27. But how far on the east or west of the line does your knowledge extend?—It does not extend west at all. I have only been along the line on the east. I have been over the country from Rotoaira Lake, near the south end of Taupo, to the Upper Wanganui River. I have been from Tokaanu to the Pungapunga, a tributary of the Wanganui River; it runs in just about 120 miles by the railway line from Rangatira. I have been from Tokaanu, at the south end of Taupo, to Kerioi by the east side of Ruapehu, about forty miles, and know the country pretty well. I have not been on the west side, excepting down the Wanganui River. I have not been through the country. I have been down the Wanganui River from Taumarunui to the sea.

28. What is the character of the land bordering on the Wanganui River from Taumarunui to Pipiriki?—The soil is very good. You cannot see it, except the hills, when on the river. The country is broken evidently, but it has the appearance of land that will carry a great deal of stock some day when it is cleared.

29. Does it carry forest or good bush?—Yes, most of it is forest. A good many patches along the immediate river bank are old Maori clearings, on which the scrub and bush has grown again.

29A. *Mr. Blake*: What is the nature of the land about Taumarunui?—It is not really good land—not first-class. There is some very fair land—good second-class land.

30. *The Chairman*.] Then as to facilities of railway construction on the two routes. You will have a fair knowledge of the facilities offered by the character of the country on the two routes. As a surveyor, to which of the two would you give the preference?—It is much easier to make the Eltham route than the central route, provided that the grades are allowed to be a little steeper. That is one thing. I do not think that there is any definite information that warrants the assertion that you can get a 1-in-70 grade along the central route. It was said in the report from Mr. Rochfort that you could get a 1-in-70 grade. If that is so there is no difference in the two routes in regard to grades. The preliminary survey of the Stratford route by Mr. Holmes is more reliable. This lays down the grades as 1 in 50, I think. There is not the slightest doubt that it could be made easier and cheaper. If the grade must not be steeper than 1 in 70, then I do not think you could make the Stratford route. It would be an immense work, Sir; but if you are not wedded to a 1-in-70, then there is no comparison. This Stratford route could be made very much easier than the other—easier than a 1 in 50 on the central route. There are steeper grades than 1 in 70 in the Manawatu line.

31. *Mr. Blake*: Would the grades be the same over to Eltham from Marton?—No; they are not so easy—1 in 35 or 1 in 40.

32. *The Chairman*.] Would the country opened up for settlement on the Ngaire route be equal in extent to that opened up by the central route?—Yes; it will exceed that. I think it is of little use