

6. It passes nearly through the centre of the North Island, thus opening up the interior, which can only be effectually accomplished by a railway.

7. The country is excellent on both sides of the line up to the sixty-first mile from Marton, and is capable of supporting a line without regard to through traffic. The country is good to the westward of the line for the remainder of the distance; while to the eastward, although inferior, it is capable of providing considerable freight, such as wool, &c.

8. It is the only means of tapping the large forests in the Waimarino Block.

9. The royalty derivable from these forests, if properly conserved, will pay for the cost of construction.

10. These forests will be a perpetual source of revenue.

11. It will enable country between these forests and the Wanganui River to be suitably settled, which would otherwise remain to a great extent unproductive.

12. It will enable the San Francisco mails to reach Wellington and the South Island in the shortest possible time. The construction of this line is indispensable for the purposes of defence in the case of invasion by a foreign enemy.

Mr. Marchant in his evidence shows that the country that will be opened up comprises 620,675 acres of Crown lands, valued at £318,200; Native, 843,355 acres, value £699,800; leasehold, 190,400 acres, value £39,600. This land being unimproved, it will be observed, is capable of being increased in value fourfold at least, after the timber growing upon it has been utilised, as the values here given represent no part of the value of the timber.

The land lying between Mangaonoho and Paengaroa is subdivided into areas averaging about 300 acres in extent. This affords unquestionable evidence of its suitability for close settlement.

From Paengaroa to Ohakune the land is of good quality and well suited for settlement in areas of about 400 acres for each holding. That portion, however, lying to the east of the line as far as Waione railway-station is generally of a light character and suitable only for grazing sheep.

Mr. Marchant, in his description, states that the land for some distance along the eastern side of the line is of light quality and only suitable for sheep; but it does not pass through a desert, nor does it touch the desert at all. There is a large dairy-factory at Raetihi, and a creamery at Ohakune. He looks forward to a very extensive development of the dairying industry, and it is believed that many hundreds of thousands of acres of land will become thickly settled, and so provide a large intermediate traffic for the line.

Your Committee are of opinion that, so soon as the line has been completed to the Waimarino Plain, there will be a tourist traffic created between this point and the Tokaanu, where there are valuable thermal springs, and at which place an excellent sanatorium can be established. Such a place will be convenient for residents in the southern portion of the North Island and the people of the South Island, the distance from Wellington being about half of that to Rotorua.

Mr. J. W. Ellis, of Otorohanga, has supplied the Committee with some information respecting the character, suitability for settlement, and extent of the forests lying along and near that portion of the Central line between Poro-o-tarao and the Waimarino Plains, a distance of about fifty miles. Mr. Ellis, who has been residing in the King-country during the last twenty-six years, has an expert knowledge of land, and thoroughly understands the art of breaking in and grassing country. He says: "From the present terminus of the Central route at Poro-o-tarao to Waimarino Plain, a distance of about fifty miles, I know this country well. I have been over all the main tracks, both east and west of the proposed railway-line. Generally the land in the immediate vicinity of the line is poor country; but it runs almost on the western edge of that class of country, and a very short distance takes you into good country, the bulk of which is papa formation, and it is therefore good grass country. I have sown down about 800 acres of this country in grass near the Okuru River, about twenty-five miles from the railway, and the result has been most satisfactory. It is surrounded by a large area of Crown land of equal quality, and it may not be out of place to suggest that your Committee should draw the attention of the Government to their large estate in this district, and to suggest that, as the rails are expected to be laid as far as Kawakawa within a year hence (where the Okura road leaves the Main Trunk Railway), it would be in the interests of the line if some of this land were opened for settlement in the near future, so that it may be opened for disposal as soon as the line has been opened to that station, from where a good dray-road extends for thirty miles into the Okura country. On the eastern side of the line the country is of a mixed character, but there are some large blocks of useful country, more especially about the Pureora and Puketapu hills. There is also a good deal of papa on this side. Since I first saw it large areas have become grassed simply by stocking. The chief value of this side of the line consists of the timber forests. I am satisfied that there are large and valuable forests easily accessible from the line, and I feel assured that the intermediate traffic from this country will warrant the construction of the line independently of the through traffic."

Your Committee are pleased to observe that the Government have determined to prosecute the construction of this important colonial work with greater rapidity than has hitherto obtained, believing as your Committee do that the work will be fully justified by the vast tracts of land which will be made accessible and opened up for settlement. It therefore trusts that every reasonable expedition will be used in securing the early completion of the line. This should be accomplished within four years from the present date.

In conclusion, your Committee desire to tender their thanks to Messrs. H. J. H. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works; J. W. A. Marchant, Commissioner of Crown Lands; and Mr. J. W. Ellis, settler, Otorohanga, for the valuable evidence tendered by them, thus enabling a report to be drawn up which, it is hoped, will be of some service in showing that the Government were justified in determining to construct the Marton-Te Awamutu Railway on the Central route.

JOHN STEVENS,

Chairman, North Island Main Trunk Railway Committee.