

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

TUESDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 1900.

Mr. H. J. H. Blow, Under-Secretary for Public Works, examined.

*Mr. Blow* : Mr. Chairman, I shall make my statement very brief, but, of course, if there are any questions that the Committee would like to ask, I shall be very pleased to answer them. The total length of the North Island Main Trunk Railway from Marton to Awamutu is 210 miles. Of this length there is open for traffic sixty-nine miles and a quarter, and rails are laid on a further two miles. The formation is practically completed on an additional nineteen miles, and is in hand on a further fourteen miles, making a total length finished or in progress of 104½ miles. The line is quite ready for opening to the Makohine Viaduct, and we are using it for our own purposes, but there is no other traffic. As regards the remainder of the distance, the final survey has been made on ninety-eight miles, and the balance of seven miles and three-quarters will be surveyed immediately. We cannot carry on the survey work advantageously in the winter, as so much time is lost through bad weather; but the survey party is under instructions to resume work the first week in October. The amount expended on the line up to the 31st March last was £692,300; but the whole of the loan specially raised for the construction of this railway has some time since been expended.

1. *Mr. Field.*] What is the amount of that?—The whole of the loan specially raised for the construction of this railway has some time since been expended. The amount of the loan was £1,000,000. The rents received from the land purchased out of a portion of the sum amounted to £17,581, making a gross total of £1,017,581. The amount expended out of this on railway construction was £564,078. That is not the total expenditure on railway construction, but is the portion spent out of the £1,000,000 loan. All the money expended on the line since the loan was exhausted has been provided in the same way as for other lines. There was also expended in roads giving access to the railway £161,156. The departmental expenditure was £20,572; costs and charges of raising the loan, £51,788: that is a total of £1,017,581.

2. *Mr. Hogg.*] I think there is expenditure on land purchase?—Yes, I omitted that; the amount was £219,987. The railway works are actively in progress at both ends. At the north end they extend from the completed railway at Poro-o-tarao to Ongaruhe.

3. *Mr. Field.*] About what distance is that?—The distance is thirteen miles and a quarter.

4. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] That is at the north end?—At the north end. I have already stated that at the south end two miles of the line has been completed as far as Makohine, and the work is in progress from Makohine to Paengaroa. That is twenty-six miles and nine chains.

5. *The Chairman.*] From Makohine to Paengaroa?—Yes. Between six hundred and seven hundred men are at present employed on the line, and the number is increasing every month.

6. That is at both ends?—At both ends.

7. As regards the part unsurveyed: of the seven or eight miles of which you speak between Waimarino and Taumaranui. Is there any special engineering difficulty along this part which is unsurveyed?—No. From Waimarino to Taumaranui the line is falling; there is a nearly continuous 1-in-50 grade for twenty-five miles, and the part unsurveyed is the lower portion of that grade.

8. *Mr. Field.*] Is there any proposal to alter the route from that originally intended, so as to place it on lower ground and nearer to the Wanganui River?—It is out of the question. The same proposal was made years ago, and the department spent considerable time and money in testing the route. But the report showed that it was not practicable. The line would be longer and much more difficult and costly.

9. Does it extend into bad country?—The main object in suggesting a diversion was to avoid the rise from Waione over the Waimarino saddle; but, instead of accomplishing this, we found that the deviation meant rising to a greater height than the saddle. Then the cost would be much greater, and a large part of the Waimarino Forest, which should be one of the chief feeders of the line, would be missed.

10. *The Chairman.*] Have you any estimate of the timber forest that would be tapped by the line on its completion?—There is a great deal of information about this in the Public Works Statement of last year. Amongst others there is a report by Mr. Murray, the Road Surveyor to the Lands Department, who was specially sent to examine the Waimarino country and report upon the forest. Mr. Murray's report read as follows:—

In the Waimarino country the quantity of valuable timber is enormous. The labour of preparing this land for grazing purposes is very great, and, as a rule, the soil and climate do not allow of sufficient grass to make this labour remunerative. The cost of felling the bush is from £1 15s. to £2 5s. per acre. The timber is so large and so durable, and there is such a quantity of it, that the ground is littered with logs, and it takes many years to make a good clearing.

A very large area of this fine forest has been already taken up by settlers—in the great majority of cases in areas of 200 acres. Most of the settlers are working-men, and can barely contrive to comply with the clauses of their leases, which compel them to improve so much a year—i.e., to destroy so much timber every season. After it is destroyed, the settlers have not the means to stock or fence their clearings; still, hundreds of acres are being felled and burnt every year.