

81. Most of the bush land is capable of carrying two sheep and a half to the acre?—You are alluding, I suppose, to the land near Raetihi. Is it quite as good at Ohakune?

82. I am speaking of bush land that is felled and sown in grass?—The land near Ohakune certainly improves the further you get into the bush, and where the bush has been felled it is being utilised for dairy purposes. I was referring more particularly to the Waimarino Forest, which is the great forest along this line. When I speak of forest lands I speak more particularly of that forest.

83. *Mr. Field.*] When you speak of replanting, what trees would you plant?—I do not speak as a forester, and my evidence on this point will, I fear, not be of any great value; but, amongst others, I should plant ironbark, jarrah, and the blue-gum, all of which timbers, I believe, would stand the climate and thrive.

84. *The Chairman.*] There is also American redwood, which is a valuable timber for texture and durability?—I have heard of it, but it is not a timber we are using for public-works purposes. I am therefore not acquainted with it. If the Government decided to plant, the advice of experts would, of course, be taken.

85. *Mr. Field.*] You would suggest making inquiries at an early date in order to be ready to plant this area and other similar country?—That would be my plan, and I believe the Lands Department is doing so now. Private lands have been planted by persons in New Zealand, and they are doing well.

86. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] You do not get totara close to the sea?—There are large totara forests not far from the sea in the districts north of Auckland. It grows to a large extent at Dargaville.

87. *Mr. Field.*] Going through Wanganui I found the gum-trees were not doing well?—Possibly sea-water gets to their roots.

88. *The Chairman.*] Gum-trees will grow in pumice. Now, Mr. Blow, with respect to the rival routes, have you had a complete survey made of the route *via* Stratford from Ongarue?—Yes. That survey was completed some time ago.

89. What is the estimated difference of cost per mile by that route compared with the Central route?—That is given in the paper I have submitted to you.

90. I am asking you the question because, as this evidence is very valuable, I want to have it all under one head?—The average cost per mile is lower by the Stratford route than by the Central route. The total estimated cost of the former between Stratford and Ongarue is £865,997, and the length is 103 miles 5 chains. That gives an average cost per mile of £8,403. The average cost per mile to complete the Central route is £8,610.

91. That is £200 per mile in excess of the Stratford route?—Yes.

92. What would be the cost of altering the curves and grades from the junction at Marton to Stratford, so as to make it nothing less than ten chains radius, and no steeper grade than 1 in 50?—I can supply the information, but I have not got it with me this morning. It has been published in the blue-books.

93. Approximately, would it be £100,000?

94. *Mr. Lethbridge.*] Eighty thousand pounds has been stated?—I should think it would be more than either. I am speaking from memory only; but I think the amount is nearly £280,000. (It is actually £271,130.)

95. *The Chairman.*] I think that is so, Mr. Blow. Do you consider that the present line from Stratford to Marton would be sufficiently safe to run a fast train over if the line were made to Auckland without any alteration?—It would be unwise to run a faster train over that line than is run at present. The Wellington-New Plymouth express is timed to traverse that distance in about as short a time as is reasonably safe. Time might be saved by omitting stoppages, but the running-time between the stations should not be materially accelerated.

96. In the report which you received from the surveyors who surveyed the line *via* Stratford, have you any detailed information with respect to the quantity of land that would be made available for settlement?—Yes; and the information is in the blue-books. Speaking generally, the land that would be opened for settlement by the Stratford route is of better quality than that on the interior portion of the Central route; but the Stratford route does not serve the Waimarino Forest, or open up the interior of the Island in the same way that the Central route does.

97. Giving your own opinion, irrespective of your official capacity, but as a gentleman who has had a long experience of the public works of this colony, which route do you think would be the better of the two, the Stratford or the Central route?—I think the Central route possesses greater advantages than the other. On page 113 of Appendix F to the Public Works Statement, 1899, Mr. R. W. Holmes gives a dozen reasons for preferring the Central route to the Stratford route, with all of which I agree. They are as follow:—

The following are the chief reasons for constructing this line as the means of communication between Wellington and Auckland instead of *via* Taranaki:—

1. It is the shortest distance by fifty-one miles.
2. It avoids the heavy grades of opened line from Turakina to Waitotara, and the lesser grades between the latter place and Hawera.
3. There are less rises and falls by 1,128 ft.
4. The journey between Wellington and Auckland can be performed in a very much shorter time, because: (a) The distance is shorter; (b) there are fewer rises to haul trains up; (c) the line is a better running one, as the grades and curves are easier, thus allowing of greater speed.
5. The grades are flatter over the greater part of the distance.
6. It passes nearly through centre of North Island, thus opening up the interior, which can only be effectively accomplished by a railway.
7. That the country is excellent on both sides of line up to the 61st mile from Marton, and is capable of supporting a line without regard to through traffic. That the country is good to the westward of line for remainder of distance. That the country to the eastward, although inferior, is capable of providing considerable freight, such as wool, stock, &c.
8. That it is the only means of tapping the large forests in the Waimarino Block.