

WILLIAM FRASER, M.H.R., examined on oath.

*The Chairman* : Perhaps Mr. Fraser will make a statement?

*Witness* : I was in the room and heard the evidence given by Mr. Kerse with regard to the respective merits of the two lines from Heriot to Roxburgh *via* Eddievale or *via* Moa Flat, and no one who knows the country well would doubt that Mr. Kerse was correct in his statement. The route he advocates is much better than going by way of Rae's Junction, which is a longer route. I do not think the Committee quite understands why the people in the vicinity of Dunrobin regarded it as settled that the line was to go by way of Moa Flat. It is true that no proper survey had been made, but the route was always spoken of as going in a direct line through Moa Flat. The other route was never contemplated, to come round by Rae's Junction. The people in the district always thought of the line as a line to go through Moa Flat, because the hope and the idea of the people about there was that the Moa Flat property would be purchased by the Government. To go to Roxburgh by way of Eddievale is to go away from Roxburgh only to come back to it again. I know the country so well, having ridden over it scores of times. Mr. Blow, in asking questions of the witness just examined in regard to the relative difficulties of the two lines, referred only to a small section, on the one hand, as against a plan of the whole line, on the other. That was not a fair comparison, and I must say it though I am not so competent to judge of the respective merits as to cost of the lines as Mr. Blow. Mr. Kerse has told you that if the line is to be taken round by way of Eddievale the hope of the people round about Dunrobin to have the Moa Flat Estate purchased by the Government will be gone. The Government is not likely to buy that estate unless the railway is made to run through it. I have no personal interest in the matter either way, but the people of the district had asked me to come here and speak as to what I knew of the country and the position.

51. *Mr. Flatman.*] Were you asked to appear before the Waste Lands Committee yesterday in reference to the value of the Moa Flat Estate?—No.

52. *Mr. Blow.*] Would it not cost more to construct the line by the route you advocate?—I say that if you go through the Moa Flat you pass through a certain amount of country which would be settled, and would have produce to carry. Along the other route, from Roxburgh to Lawrence you must go through a gorge.

53. Do you know the position sufficiently well to compare the Moa Flat with the country affected by the extension to Lawrence?—I know there is better country between Roxburgh and Heriot.

54. But is not the country in some places about there exceedingly rough—so rough as to present great difficulties in the construction of a line?—I do not know that. I am expressing no opinion as to that. I am assuming that a practical route can be obtained.

55. You cannot have studied the plans?—No, I have not.

56. Well, here you see two alternatives are possible—one an extension from Lawrence to Roxburgh, and the other from Heriot: which is the most advantageous?—Certainly, the Heriot, because it would pass through country more suitable for settlement. I am assuming that a practical line at a moderate cost can be obtained.

57. Even if a line could be obtained at a moderate cost, it would still be an important consideration whether stations could be put there owing to the grade?—I know nothing about that.

58. Does the trade of Roxburgh at present gravitate towards Dunedin or Invercargill?—Towards Dunedin.

59. Would it not be terribly circuitous to take the route by way of Heriot?—It may be.

60. Well, I will tell you the difference. The distance from Roxburgh to Dunedin *via* Lawrence is ninety-seven miles, as compared with 131 miles *via* Heriot. Do you still think the Heriot route would be an advantage, seeing that thirty-four miles additional railage would have to be paid?—No; but better to have that than no railway communication.

61. Leave out of consideration for the moment the likelihood of the Lawrence line being constructed, and deal with the abstract question: If it is possible to construct a line of ninety-seven miles, is not such a line likely to suit the people better than a line of 131 miles?—Yes, certainly. It would suit the Roxburgh people, but it would not be the best thing for the colony.

62. Why not for the colony?—Because a line from Roxburgh to Heriot would pass through more closely settled country, which would eventually make the railway pay. What would pay the colony and what would suit the people of a district are two different things.

63. A line from Lawrence, being practically on the same land, would not that take the traffic as well?—Of course, I have not seen the plans, and am still going on the assumption that a practical line can be got on the other route.

64. *Mr. Bennet.*—Have you any idea of the extent of the traffic between Roxburgh and Lawrence?—There has been considerable traffic, but I could not say what it really amounts to.

JOHN EDDIE, Jun., examined on oath.

*Witness* : I am a surveyor and farmer, residing at Eddievale. If it had not been for the heading on the petition which has been presented to you I would not have been here now. The petition sets forth that the carrying of the line in question to Eddie's will be conferring a benefit on practically only one family. I suppose that is the Eddie family, and I assert that such a statement is not correct. I have been acquainted with the district affected by this petition for twenty-five years; I am thoroughly conversant with the whole of the district, and I may say that the agitation for this railway has been going on for twenty-three or twenty-four years. A survey was made from Kelso to Eddie's, and a petition was presented by the Tuapeka County Council praying the Government to carry on the railway to the point known as Eddie's. That would be about eighteen or twenty years ago, and from that time up to the present there have been requests urging the Government to continue the line to that point. The people in the district seeing that the Government would not