

1902.

NEW ZEALAND.

RAILWAYS COMMITTEE:

REPORT AND EVIDENCE ON THE PETITION OF W. J. SCRIMGEOUR AND OTHERS *RE* RAILWAY FROM LAWRENCE TO ROXBURGH.

(MR. R. MCKENZIE, CHAIRMAN.)

Report and Evidence brought up 29th September, 1902, and ordered to be printed.

PETITION.

To the Hon. the Speaker and Members of the General Assembly of New Zealand, in session now assembled.

THE memorial of the undersigned, the settlers of Lawrence, Tuapeka Flat, Evans Flat, Tuapeka West, Tuapeka Mouth, Beaumont, Rae's Junction, Island Block, Horseshoe Bend, Miller's Flat, Ettrick, Roxburgh, Coal Creek, and surrounding districts, in the Provincial District of Otago, respectfully sheweth—

1. That it is now twenty-five years since the line from Lawrence to Roxburgh was surveyed.
2. That the country intervening between Lawrence and Roxburgh has been settled on during the last forty years, and during that time, owing to the inaccessibility to markets, the agricultural and mineral development of the districts aforementioned has been seriously retarded.
3. That roading through those districts has been, and is still, a heavy burden on the settlers and producers, and the material available for maintenance is of such inferior character that the recurring yearly expense cannot be met without heavy annual grants from the Government.
4. That the annual expenditure now devoted to the maintenance of the main county road, which during a great part of the year is impassable, would be the means of putting the country roads, now very much neglected, in order, besides relieving both the Government and the settlers of large yearly contributions.
5. That the country to be traversed by such a line of railway consists of agricultural, pastoral, fruit-growing, and mineral lands, the value and productive powers of which would be largely increased if cheap and rapid transit to market were provided.
6. That Roxburgh and Coal Creek are the largest fruit-growing districts in Otago, and at present, under very great difficulties, send large quantities of fruit to the southern and northern markets, between 70 tons and 80 tons per week being carted over forty miles of bad road to the railway during the season. With railway communication, such as your Petitioners request, the industry would be enormously developed, as there are immense areas of land suitable for fruit cultivation which could be profitably utilised for that purpose under cheaper and more rapid conditions of transit to market.
7. That there are also in the districts of Roxburgh and Coal Creek large deposits of coal almost entirely untouched, but which, if tapped by a railway, would suffice to supply at a cheap rate the whole of the districts between there and Lawrence, a distance of forty miles.
8. That the mineral resources alone would become a source of enormous wealth and create a large carrying trade, profitable to the railway and of great benefit to settlers throughout a large extent of country.
9. That there are about thirty dredges on the Molyneux River and the adjacent flats between Coal Creek and Lawrence. The coal required for those dredges for steaming purposes is at the rate of 800 tons per week, which would be all conveyed by rail. In addition, large quantities of building and repairing material are constantly required by those dredges which are now conveyed by road at a heavy expense and delay.
10. That there are also in the Roxburgh and Coal Creek districts large areas of agricultural and pastoral lands which produce stock, wool, and grain, which could be immensely increased if better facilities for despatch to market were provided.
11. That in the Moa Flat and Miller's Flat districts there are large areas of rich alluvial soil on which both wheat, oats, and barley are grown; also root crops of various kinds. At present those lands are not utilised to the extent they would be had the settlers such inducements as a railway would provide.
12. That the lands lying between Miller's Flat and Beaumont, a distance of fifteen miles, are largely auriferous, farming and pastoral industry being also carried on.
13. That the Beaumont is an old, thickly populated settlement, and contains some of the finest

agricultural land in the Province of Otago. Both dairying and fruit-growing industries would flourish here and settlement would be largely increased if railway communication were provided.

14. That from Beaumont to Lawrence, a distance of twelve miles, there is a large area of land under cultivation, as well as pastoral country, the value of which would be materially increased by railway communication.

15. That there is a flourishing, extensive, and thickly settled farming district at Tuapeka West, about eleven miles from Lawrence, which, besides securing the advantages of cheap lime, would be brought considerably nearer the railway than at present, and be thereby saved the delay, expense, and labour of carting their produce over a long stretch of one of the worst portions of the county main road, as well as being brought within easy reach of all those advantages which the facilities afforded by convenient railway communication confer on country settlers.

16. That the traders, business people, and others in Lawrence suffer serious loss and disadvantage by reason of the absence of railway communication with the producing districts throughout the County of Tuapeka, of which Lawrence is the chief town and business centre and at present the railway terminus.

17. That the various industries in the County of Tuapeka, from Lawrence to Roxburgh, a distance of forty miles, would be developed on a larger and more profitable scale by the extension of the line, leading to a large increase in the industrial population and in the productive output of the land, while enterprise would be stimulated, trade and business extended and improved, the general prosperity of the district secured on a larger and more stable basis, and the revenue and wealth of the colony materially benefited and increased.

Your petitioners therefore pray that your honourable House will take the matters mentioned into your favourable consideration, and will request the Government to accede to the request of your petitioners by authorising the extension of the railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh, and request the Government to have the work undertaken with such expedition as may be possible.

And your petitioners will ever pray.

W. J. SCRIMGEOUR, and 1138 others.

REPORT.

Petition No. 454.—W. J. SCRIMGEOUR and Others, of Lawrence, &c., Otago, praying for the Construction of a Railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh.

THE Committee recommend that this petition be referred to the Government for consideration, and, together with the report and evidence, be printed; but, as the subject-matter of the petition is a question of public policy, the Committee has no further recommendation to make.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 19th SEPTEMBER, 1902.

The Chairman : Who is the first witness?

Mr. J. Bennet : The petition is to the effect that it is now twenty-five years since the line from Lawrence to Roxburgh was surveyed. The country intervening between Lawrence and Roxburgh has been settled on during the last forty years, and during that time, owing to the inaccessibility to markets, the agricultural and mineral development of the district aforementioned has been seriously retarded. Roading through those districts has been and is still a heavy burden on the settlers and producers, and the material available for maintenance is of such an inferior character that the recurring yearly expense cannot be met without heavy annual grants from the Government. The annual expenditure now devoted to the maintenance of the main county road, which during a great part of the year is impassable, would be the means of putting the country roads—now very much neglected—in order, besides relieving both the Government and the settlers of large yearly contributions. The country to be traversed by such a line of railway consists of agricultural, pastoral, fruit-growing, and mineral lands, the value and productive powers of which would be largely increased if cheap and rapid transit to market were provided. Roxburgh and Coal Creek are the largest fruit-growing districts in Otago, and at present under very great difficulties send large quantities of fruit to the southern and northern markets, between 70 tons and 80 tons per week being carted over forty miles of bad road to the railway during the season. With railway communication such as your petitioners request the industry would be enormously developed, as there are immense areas of land suitable for fruit-cultivation which could be profitably utilised for that purpose under cheaper and more rapid conditions of transit to market. There are also in the districts of Roxburgh and Coal Creek large deposits of coal almost entirely untouched, but which, if tapped by a railway, would suffice to supply at a cheap rate the whole of the districts between there and Lawrence, a distance of forty miles. The mineral resources alone would become a source of enormous wealth and create a large carrying trade, profitable to the railway and of great benefit to the settlers throughout a large extent of country. There are about thirty dredges on the Molyneux River and the adjacent flats between Coal Creek and Lawrence. The coal required by those dredges for steaming purposes is at the rate of 800 tons per week, which would be all conveyed by rail. In addition, large quantities of building and repairing material are constantly required by those dredges, which are now conveyed by road at a heavy expense and delay. There are also in

the Roxburgh and Coal Creek districts large areas of agricultural and pastoral land which produce stock, wool, and grain, which could be immensely increased if better facilities for despatch to market were provided. In the Moa Flat and Miller's Flat districts there are large areas of rich alluvial soil on which both wheat, oats, and barley are grown; also root-crops of various kinds. At present those lands are not utilised to the extent they would be had the settlers such inducements as a railway would provide. The lands lying between Miller's Flat and Beaumont, a distance of fifteen miles, are largely auriferous, farming and pastoral industry being also carried on. The Beaumont is an old thickly populated settlement, and contains some of the finest agricultural land in the Province of Otago. Both dairying and fruit-growing industries would flourish here and settlement would be largely increased if railway communication were provided. From Beaumont to Lawrence, a distance of twelve miles, there is a large area of land under cultivation, as well as pastoral country, the value of which would be materially increased by railway communication. There is a flourishing, extensive, and thickly settled farming district at Tuapeka West, about eleven miles from Lawrence, which, besides securing the advantages of cheap lime, would be brought considerably nearer the railway than at present, and be thereby saved the delay, expense, and labour of carting their produce over a long stretch of one of the worst portions of the county main road, as well as being brought within easy reach of all those advantages which the facilities afforded by convenient railway communication confer on country settlers. The traders, business-people, and others in Lawrence suffer serious loss and disadvantages by reason of the absence of railway communication with the producing districts throughout the County of Tuapeka, of which Lawrence is the chief town and business centre, and at present the railway terminus. The various industries in the County of Tuapeka from Lawrence to Roxburgh, a distance of forty miles, would be developed on a larger and more profitable scale by the extension of the line, leading to a large increase of the industrial population and in the productive output of the land, while enterprise would be stimulated, trade and business extended and improved, the general prosperity of the district secured on a larger and more stable basis, and the revenue and wealth of the colony materially benefited and increased.

Mr. J. C. ARBUCKLE examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—J. C. Arbuckle.
2. Where do you live?—At Lawrence.
3. What is your occupation?—I am an auctioneer and general merchant.
4. You desire to make a statement before the Committee on the subject-matter of the petition?—Yes. Well, as a resident of the district for nearly forty years, I am well conversant with the wants and disabilities of the settlers beyond Lawrence. The main road between the two places—Lawrence and Rae's Junction—is now in as bad a condition as it was thirty years ago. As a proof of that, I could give you a personal instance that happened to me this winter. About two months ago I had a small quantity of merchandise to send to Miller's Flat, which is about twenty miles from where I live. There are not many wagons on the road at the present time, and, the roads being so bad, they are fully occupied with the general loadings for the merchants they are supplying. I tried to get this small quantity of merchandise up by the wagons, and could not do so. To get it up in time I had to hire a special trap, which costs £3, to send up $4\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. a distance of twenty-six miles on this main road. The difficulty in keeping the main road in repair is the want of proper material within the county; the material is no good. It is only the rotten rock, that will stand no wear-and-tear. It is a continual recurring expense every year. The main road, as I say, is just as far back as it was between thirty and forty years ago. The district of Teviot is a large fruit-growing one, and Roxburgh and Coal Creek. It is also a large mining district. The trade at the present time causes an enormous traffic on the road owing to the consumption of coal. There is coal at Coal Creek, which is carted down a little more than half-way to Lawrence, and from Lawrence again it is carted nearly half-way up again. Miller's Flat is an agricultural district, and a good barley-growing district. There is a limited amount of barley grown there now which would be very largely increased if there were facilities for getting it into the market. The same remark applies to the fruit-growing industry all along from the Teviot down. There would be a very large industry opened up in that way, and this railway that we ask for would also run adjacent and through a number of runs on this Teviot Station. It would tap Moa Flat Station within a reasonable distance. It would be very useful for that, and Beaumont, and various other stations, so that there would be a considerable amount of traffic in wheat, coal, grain, and dredging material going up and down. If there are any questions that members of the Committee would like to ask me with reference to it, I would be glad to answer them. I may say that the distance between Lawrence and Roxburgh is forty miles. From Roxburgh to Dunedin *via* Heriot would entail a further distance of about thirty-seven miles. It would be further to go that way to Dunedin than it would be from Lawrence.
5. Is that all you wish to say?—I do not think there is anything else I need say.
6. Have you got any statistics in connection with this work—of the probable amount of passenger traffic or of the approximate cost of the railway?—No; I have no idea of the cost of the railway. It would depend altogether upon whether a light line of railway were constructed, which is a matter I could not go into at all. I should say, if there is a light line of railway constructed at a less cost than the ordinary railway-line, the mere saving of keeping up the main road would go a long way towards paying interest on the line—the saving of expenditure on the main road would go a long way towards paying interest upon the construction.
7. What is the distance?—Forty miles.
8. What population would be served by it: what is the present population?—Well, the population of Lawrence and the surrounding districts—that is, immediately adjacent—would be about eighteen hundred.

9. But you have railways to Lawrence now. You cannot say that this would be another benefit to Lawrence?—Not to Lawrence, but it would open up trade between these other districts and Lawrence to a certain extent.

10. How long have you been connected with this petition, or in getting it up?—Oh, it is a few months since the matter was first mooted.

11. And did you not get up any statistics to show the probable traffic that would accrue to the railway? The petition states in general terms that there would be a large traffic, but——?—I do not know that there have been any exact statistics compiled.

12. How many horses are employed doing this work now, do you know?—I mean engaged in the through traffic from Roxburgh to Lawrence?—Oh, I suppose at the present time there would be about eighty horses—that is, the regular carriers on the road.

13. Are they employed all the year round?—Oh, yes. The number is considerably less now than it was twelve months ago. The quantity of dredging material is not going up now.

14. There would be at least the number I say continually employed, and even for a number of years to come—that is, ten teams of eight horses?—Yes.

15. What is the population of Roxburgh, do you know?—Oh, I think it would be about four or five hundred. Then there is Coal Creek, a distance of only a mile and a half or two miles, with a fair population.

16. What is the intermediate traffic such as this coal which you refer to? You say there are 800 tons of coal you supply to the dredges: do you think that would be a permanent traffic?—I think it is about the most permanent part on the river. The dredging there has been more successful than on most parts of the Molyneux. Miller's Flat is known to be very steady. There have been dredges working on that part for the last twenty-five years.

17. How long do you consider, yourself, that this dredging is likely to last?—Well, judging from my experience of that district, it might last another fifty years.

18. You say it might last?—Well, I think it will, because there are a great many of those who hold claims that have bank claims in addition to the river claims, and some are only just now starting to go into the bank claims.

19. What quantity of wool do you carry?—Well, I really could not give you an estimate of it.

20. Do you mean to say that the ten wagons on the road all the year round carry the wool as well as the ordinary goods?—Yes, I think about that.

21. Do you mean to say the ten eight-horse wagons will carry all the trade that is in the district all the year round?—Yes, I think so.

22. You were saying the main road is very expensive to maintain: do you think your county would contribute anything if a railway were constructed?—I should think they would be only too glad to do so.

23. You have no authority for saying so?—No; but we were in hopes of having the Chairman of the county up with us, but he was unwell, and could not come up. From what I have heard from him they would be very glad to do so.

24. Has this line from Lawrence to Roxburgh ever been authorised by Parliament?—It was surveyed as far back as thirty years ago.

25. You are not aware whether it has ever been authorised to be made?—I cannot say that it has ever been authorised. I remember the survey. Whether it was simply a flying survey or a survey simply for forming an estimate of the cost I could not say.

26. Do you think it would be a difficult line to construct?—No; with one exception. There is one hill, about six miles from Lawrence, and with that exception the grade is remarkably easy.

27. You say that Roxburgh is a dredging centre?—Yes, a large dredging centre, and also one of the largest fruit-growing districts in the South Island.

28. The development of the dredging industry during the last three years has led to a great deal of traffic up to Roxburgh?—Yes.

29. Has it been an unusual and abnormal traffic?—For a time it was.

30. Has that time nearly passed?—Yes.

31. It was a temporary pressure and strain, which has now almost disappeared?—Yes. But I do not think that that has affected the roads to any extent, as this year when the traffic had ceased they were very much worse.

32. Has that been owing to the congested traffic on the road or owing to the neglect of the County Council to keep the road in repair?—I cannot say that it is the neglect of the County Council. They could not do it.

33. I suppose it was a case of a chronic state of impecuniosity?—It would be a matter of impossibility.

34. *Mr. Tanner.*] Do the County Council rate up to the full limit of their powers?—That I could not say. I think $\frac{3}{4}$ d. is the present rate.

35. You are aware they can levy up to 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.?

The Chairman: Unless there is a Road Board.

36. *Mr. Tanner.*] Is there a Road Board?—No.

37. The County Council levies just half the rates it can levy?—Yes.

38. You speak of a saving to the county authorities by making the railway: would not that be transferring the expense? Would not that be transferring the expense to the central authorities—the Government? Would not the County Council be saving themselves in their expenditure by not having the roads to keep up?—To some extent it would. I think that is a matter that the County Council would be willing to meet the Government in.

39. You cannot give us any estimate of the amount of fruit at Roxburgh which requires to be transferred down by rail?—Well, during the fruit season there is a continual fleet of traps coming down every night; the road is lined with them. It is on a very large scale, but last year, owing to want of proper communication, many tons had to be thrown away altogether.

40. Then, each settler runs his own fruit down as far as possible?—As far as possible. They have a sort of system of mutual co-operation. There is now talk of their forming a jam-factory there also, to try and evade the loss of fruit.

41. Is the cultivation of fruit extending?—Oh, yes; they have planted an additional number of trees during the last year or so.

42. Then, the traffic is likely to be permanent?—Oh, yes, much increased as far as the fruit is concerned.

43. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] Have you any idea how much money is spent in keeping the road in repair—I believe it has been in a bad state for some years past?—No; I have not prepared any statistics showing that at the present time. I was up the road the other day. I should think between thirty or forty men are employed on the road—on the first sixteen miles of the road.

44. *The Chairman.*] How many?—Between thirty and forty men. The road was really so bad that they were working in quarries, and carting the stone and pitching it into the biggest holes they could find in order to allow the traffic to get through.

45. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] I understand the road has been fairly bad since the dredging commenced?—It has been bad, but it is always bad every winter.

46. Owing chiefly to no good metal being on the line?—That is one of the drawbacks no doubt. Every year there are so many wet months that traffic is nearly impossible.

47. You believe there would be a great trade if there were communication by railway between these two places?—I believe there would.

Mr. F. N. BYRNE examined.

48. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—F. N. Byrne.

49. Where do you live?—At Lawrence.

50. What is your occupation?—I am a journalist.

51. You can give us what you know on the subject-matter of the petition before the Committee?—Well, the previous witness has said so much about it that he has left me very little to say. There was one point, however, and it is a very material point—that is, as regards the traffic. The traffic was abnormal during the time the dredges were being built, and that has largely disappeared, of course; but the traffic is as large now as then, but it does not arise from the same cause. At that time the dredging material all came from Dunedin, and now the traffic comes from Coal Creek. There are thirty dredges on the river, and they have to be supplied with steam-coal.

52. Where is Coal Creek, on the Forty Mile Road?—It is two miles on the other side of Roxburgh, so that there is the same heavy traffic continuing, and it is impossible to say how long it will last. Nobody dares say that the Molyneux will ever be exhausted of its gold. People have been prophesying for many years about it. The general belief among experts and people who have studied the question is that, after the present appliances and the present machinery is dispensed with, there will be new appliances and new machinery brought to bear on the river, and it is a well-known fact that they are not now getting anything like a fair quantity of gold at all, so that the gold will always stand; and, besides, the coal from Coal Creek can be brought down into Lawrence and sold for about 12s. a ton. Well, coal is a very big item to working-miners about the Lawrence district. With the railway this could be brought down and sold for 12s. a ton. As regards the prospective possibilities of the district, of course they are very large, because there is splendid land right down to Lawrence, and it is all capable of being converted into fruit-growing areas right away down to Beaumont, which is twelve miles from Lawrence.

53. Where is the market?—Oh, as far as Christchurch and Dunedin. If they had good regular facilities for conveying the fruit to the market I believe they could supply the whole of the markets of the South Island. It is a splendid paying industry, but, as I say, the enterprise of the people is cramped and hindered by the fact that they cannot rely on getting the fruit to market, and the loss in consequence is very heavy. The cows and cattle are turned into the orchards. They have formed a jam-factory in the district for the purpose of converting the fruit into jam, and so that the district might have the benefit of it, though it would be better and safer for them to get the fruit to Dunedin some way and have it manufactured into jam there. It would be better to do that than to attempt to bring the different compounds up from Dunedin, as the cost would be too heavy on them. In bringing the fruit to market the great difficulty fruit-growers meet with is that they cannot send it down in large consignments. They have to send it down in light spring vans.

54. Do not they put it up in cases?—Yes; but they could not put it in wagons. It would get bumped into pieces. Those wagons sometimes get bogged and cannot get out for twenty-four hours. That arrangement would not do in our district. The fruit-growers in the district at the present time are the actual sufferers, and they would be the large beneficiaries by the railway; and then there are the prospective benefits that would accrue to the wool season, and the stimulus which would be given to the dredging. The fruit industry is a national industry. Then you have large quarries and mountains of coal. That coal might and possibly would go far beyond the limits of Tuapeka in the course of time, when its qualities were ascertained and proved. The whole land right down to the Beaumont is splendid fruit-growing country. I rely upon the great benefit the colony would derive from this railway by the vast expansion of the fruit industry. That is a thing the colony is very badly in need of—namely, fruit at a cheap price.

55. It is lying rotting all over the country?—It is rotting all over the country, but it is almost at a prohibitive price. Those are the two permanent industries—the wool and the fruit. The latter is capable of enormous expansion. Then there is the dredging and mining industry; these, in my opinion, will be there for all time, practically speaking. The Molyneux is fabulously rich in gold, and it has never been exploited to any extent. The railway through would be the first thing to attract the prospector and people of means, in order to ascertain the mineral wealth of the district, and give it a trial which it has never really had before.

56. How many trains run from Dunedin to Lawrence now?—Well, there are, from Dunedin to Lawrence, and *vice versa*, two regular trains.

57. Could the same men run the same trains and work the line, and would the rolling-stock do?—Well, the engines that are now in use certainly could.

58. Could the same men do the work?—I think so. They might require a little extra assistance.

59. Are you familiar with the fruit-growing industry throughout the colony?—Oh, well, I have read a great deal about it, of course. I am not speaking from observation.

60. I suppose through Canterbury, and even Otago, there is a good deal of fruit-growing. At the present time how many trains do you think would be required every day to carry this fruit during the season?—I suppose a good deal would depend upon the capacity of the train.

61. Would there be 200 tons for each train?—You have in the petition 700 tons in the season.

62. The petition says, "That Roxburgh and Coal Creek are the largest fruit-growing districts in Otago, and at present, under very great difficulties, send large quantities of fruit to the southern and northern markets, between 70 tons and 80 tons per week being carted over forty miles of bad road to the railway during the season. With railway communication such as your petitioners suggest the industry would be enormously developed, as there are immense areas of land suitable for fruit-cultivation which could be profitably utilised for that purpose under cheaper and more rapid conditions of transit to market." So that under the present conditions the fruit-growing industry would not pay to make a railway?—Not alone, of course.

63. Do you agree with the opinion that ten eight-horse wagons could carry all the traffic of this district all the year round—that they could carry everything?—I certainly do not.

64. What horse-power do you say is required to carry on the traffic?—Unless I made inquiries I could not give you a reliable answer. My answer on that point would be very approximate. I know the traffic is very large. There is an immense traffic.

65. What population do you consider would be served by this railway, then?—It would serve the whole population through forty miles of country from Lawrence.

66. There might not be another forty or fifty people in the whole forty miles of country from Lawrence?—Oh, yes, there are.

67. How many do you think there are?—I could not say exactly; it is a very large district.

68. Can you say approximately?—Between four and five thousand people.

69. This is the Tuapeka County?—Yes.

70. What is the population of the county?—Over five thousand.

71. That includes Lawrence?—Yes, in which there are about eighteen hundred.

72. What is the nature of the country through which the line would go: is it level?—Yes, level country, and sheep country, I should say, through which the railway would be constructed.

73. *Mr. Flatman.*] Can you tell the Committee what is about the average weight or approximate weight that is carried by each of the ten-horse teams that you say are working on the road?—Their loading is very light owing to the state of the roads. A ten-horse team will not carry a large load owing to the state of the roads.

74. How much do they carry—give us an average, approximately?—3 and 4 or about 5 tons.

75. And how many teams are there? Do they traverse the road each week?—Their stopping-point is not at the end of this proposed railway-line; they go right up country.

76. To Alexandra: do they go as high up as that?—Yes.

77. You could not say how many teams there are?—Oh, no.

78. *Mr. Sidey.*] How long have you resided in Lawrence?—I have been there for twenty-four or twenty-five years.

79. Were you there before the present railway was constructed?—I was not there.

80. Have you a good knowledge of gauging the feeling of the people of Lawrence?—Yes.

81. Do you think that this railway would be of great advantage to Lawrence itself?—I do, and especially to the business-people there.

82. Is it not a fact that when a township is the terminus of a railway it receives even greater advantages than if the railway was carried through, because, once a railway is carried through, the traffic instead of stopping there goes right on?—I do not think so in this instance. The people will be recouped by those who will come down for years. Owing to the state of the roads people never attempt to go up.

83. Do you not think that the people would go right into Dunedin then?—Oh, no.

84. How about the feeling in Roxburgh? Are you in a position to know what are the feelings of the Roxburgh people?—They have been active in agitating for bringing the railway from Heriot. They took up that position because they believed the most of the people were opposed to the extension of the line to Lawrence. At the present time I should say they are quiescent.

85. You think the Roxburgh people have no feeling with regard to the route?—They prefer the Lawrence route, certainly.

86. You referred to the traffic—the traffic that has hitherto passed through Lawrence: does that traffic not come right down from Alexandra?—Going where?

87. Has not the merchandise and the produce of the country that has come down to Lawrence and been sent on to Dunedin in the past come not only from Roxburgh, but from higher up?—No; the chief stream of traffic is going up country. What comes down is comparatively small.

88. Has not a very large amount of the traffic going up been not necessarily for Roxburgh, but for places beyond Roxburgh?—Oh, some of it has.

89. A good portion of it has?—It is light.

90. Do you not think it is a fact that this has been the only means of getting up to the Lake—up by Cromwell: is it not a fact that those who used to go up to the Lake *via* Lawrence went by this way?—Oh, yes.

91. Are you aware that by pushing along the Otago Central line better it will tap Alexandra?—Yes.

92. Well, now, that will stop all trade practically beyond Roxburgh. Anything for some distance beyond Roxburgh will be done by that way?—It will go *viâ* Roxburgh. This line should ultimately communicate and join with Alexandra, and the traffic will then go down and join with Lawrence through to Dunedin.

93. Once Alexandra is tapped by the Otago Central line you cannot expect that the Alexandra people are going to be favoured with a line through Lawrence as well. Do you not think, then, that the traffic will be diminished simply by the extension of the Otago Central line to Alexandra?—No doubt it will affect it to some extent, but at the present time it does not, because a lot of stuff goes round.

94. It does now, but that is only recently—since the line has been carried some distance up?—Yes.

95. Well, as regards the dredging, how long do you think it will be before the present system of dredging is worked out—I mean before the present claims are worked out?—I do not think the Molyneux River will ever be much what you call “worked out”; the old dredging claims are doing splendidly.

96. Are they not at the present time covering much the same ground by the operations with these large dredges that they used to do years ago?—Yes; but they are not working the ground at all. They are leaving more gold behind than they save.

97. Do you know much about the roads? Where do they get the metal from: is it shingle?—It is shingle out of the river-beds; sand and light gravel.

98. *The Chairman.*] I notice this petition is from Lawrence, and not from Roxburgh?—Well, sir, it is from the farmers and the miners throughout the district. They cut Tuapeka up into districts and took the petition round themselves. It was taken in hand by the farmers, and it was signed in very little over a week.

99. It is not signed in Roxburgh?—You have Coal Creek signatures there. You could hardly expect the Roxburgh people to throw themselves into this agitation at once.

100. Do the Roxburgh people favour this route or the Heriot route?—This route, certainly.

101. Last year they came here with a petition favouring the other route, and they have not signed this petition?—Well, of course, I speak from my own personal knowledge. I have had letters from the league up there, and they told me their policy would be to remain quiet and allow the petition to work out whatever was possible.

102. I think I would have taken an active part in supporting it if I had been them?—They considered that they might be stultifying themselves.

103. When the Otago Central line gets to Alexandra will it cut off the up-country traffic you refer to?—I do not think so. Of course, that is a remote possibility too. There is still a vast amount of traffic.

104. Do you think that the railway should stop at Roxburgh or continue on to Alexandra?—I think it should continue on to Alexandra.

105. With this line?—Yes.

106. Do you think there is sufficient traffic at Alexandra to warrant the country putting two railways through in the future?—In time.

107. You think there would be sufficient traffic to warrant the two lines being constructed to Alexandra?—Yes, in time.

108. Do you mean a thousand years hence or within a reasonable period?—When the population largely increases and time has been given to develop the country in various ways. I should not think it would take that time.

Mr. Arbuckle: With reference to the traffic on the road with the ten eight-horse teams, when giving my evidence I did not mean to convey that that was the whole of the traffic upon the road. For instance, they do not touch the coal trade at all.

The Chairman: I understood that from you.

Mr. Arbuckle: The coal traffic is a separate thing altogether.

Mr. J. BENNET examined.

Mr. Bennet: I should like to add something with regard to the wool trade. These gentlemen who have given evidence were asked about what quantity of wool would be likely to come from the stations. There is the Moa Flat Estate, from which there would be from 1,000 to 1,300 bales of wool.

109. *The Chairman.*] Which way does that wool go?—It would be taken through Teviot or Heriot.

110. You think this would divert it?—Yes, I am certain of that, and they would be thirty miles nearer from Dunedin. Well, there is Moa Flat, and Mount Benger is the name of another station, I think, which is just at Coal Creek. The next is Teviot Station, then Ormaglade and Beaumont Stations, and there are all the settlers around. There is a great deal of the country now put out in small agricultural leases. Nearly as much wool would come from the settlers as from these larger stations. With reference to the question asked by Mr. Sidey—viz., would not the traffic be diminished on account of the Otago Central line being completed—at the present time the Otago Central line is not only taking the traffic, but also that from Roxburgh, because the road has been in a bad state. The traffic has been going up twenty-eight miles from Alexandra rather than round from Roxburgh and Lawrence at the present time. I have been looking up the returns for Alexandra, and I think they will have a bearing on this Committee. The gold got was 3,330 oz.—that is, over twelve thousand pounds' worth of gold—and it is pretty well all coming out of that district: it is pretty well all from the Tuapeka electorate. That shows the importance of the railway, and that there must be an enormous quantity of traffic to keep that going. That has been kept up for months and months. Any gentleman in this room will observe the importance of that to the country at the present time. As regards the claims being worked out, dredging was

supposed to be done there twenty years ago. There are about seventy large dredges on that river now—at least, the greater portion are there now. They are getting ten times more gold now than then, and there is every prospect of its continuing. In regard to dredging claims being worked out, my opinion is that they will all be worked over again with more up-to-date dredges than they have at the present time.

111. *Mr. Sidey.*] They might adopt the suction process later on?—There is no telling what they might adopt in the future. We have not got to go very far back. Up to the Moa Flat is all gravel plains, and there is just as much gold there as on the bed of the river. The traffic on the road has actually increased more since the dredges were built than before. There is a perfect mountain of coal at Coal Creek that would be taken down to Lawrence and everywhere else. It costs £1 2s. 6d. to get down overland. Then the train could run right up into the beds. The railway would carry coal up and down for 5s. a ton. The whole of the river would then be flooded with coal.

112. *The Chairman.*] How far is this coal carried down from the pits?—They bring it down to the people and down to within about twelve miles of Lawrence. From Coal Creek, roughly speaking, to the lower end it would be over twenty miles. Then a considerable portion would be going up from Lawrence.

113. After they had it on the train how far would they have to cart it from the station to the dredges?—The railway could run right up to the bank of the river.

114. You would want a station for every dredge then. How far, on an average, would they have to cart it from the railway-station to the dredges?—They could leave it anywhere. They could stop the train and run a truck or two off. Some of the dredges would take two teams to keep them going.

115. What would the average carting probably be, say there were three stations within the forty miles? How far would they have to cart the coal from the station to the dredges?—It would be difficult to tell. The dredges are all along the river. It is lined with them. You would get five or six dredges almost close together. If there were sidings here and there that would do. The ground is almost level right down from the Beaumont to Coal Creek, and there is only one tunnel that would be needed on the whole of the line. It is all practically level.

Mr. H. J. H. BLOW examined.

116. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Blow, can you tell us whether this proposed railway-line has ever been surveyed?—Yes, there has been a very good trial survey.

117. What is about the probable estimate of the cost of the railway?—About a quarter of a million.

118. *Mr. Sidey.*] The chief cost would be for the first part of the distance, up to Rae's Junction?—No; I think the chief cost would be at the other end. You are in the course of the river for some miles.

119. Are there forty miles to be covered?—Thirty-eight miles. On the whole, it is not a difficult line, though it is not all quite level.

Mr. Sidey: It is level after you pass Rae's Junction?

120. *The Chairman.*] Do you know the district yourself?—Yes.

121. What is your opinion? If a railway were constructed, would it cost a quarter of a million pounds?—I am afraid the railway would not pay. Although railways have already been constructed in districts where it seemed at present there would be little traffic, yet they have created their own traffic; it has been a complete surprise to us.

122. Do you think there is a sufficient area of country there to be developed by a railway to warrant the construction of it?—I am afraid not.

123. *Mr. Sidey.*] Have you any idea as to the prospect of the increase of traffic or of the production which might be induced by the railway tapping the district?—I think the only traffic that would be largely increased would be the fruit traffic. That probably would increase. When in Roxburgh recently I was quite surprised to find that the fruit-growing industry had not progressed anything like what I thought it ought to have done in the past few years. Fruit is dearer in Roxburgh than it is in Dunedin.

124. You say that the reason why it has not progressed might be due to the lack of facilities for getting the fruit to the market?—Yes, I think that is certainly one of the reasons. Fruit is carried on the railways irrespective of distance. The whole of the carting in between would be absolutely saved to fruit-growers, so that they are very much interested in having railways no doubt.

125. *Mr. Tanner.*] Then, the railway would get no more money through fruit-growing?—No.

126. *The Chairman.*] From a colonial point of view or in the interests of the colony, which do you consider the most perfect route for the railway to be constructed—from Lawrence or from Teviot?—If ever a railway is constructed I think it ought to be from Lawrence.

127. *Mr. Bennet.*] Would it not be possible to construct a light line at much less cost?—Yes; but it would not be possible to work it economically. The grades on the existing railway between Lawrence and Milton are up to 1 in 35—the steepest grades on any railway in New Zealand except one—and to haul trade of any weight up those grades requires a train with a heavy locomotive, and that prevents light railways being constructed.

128. In the event of a trial of light-line railways being given, would not this be a very suitable line for it?—It would require a separate engine service, as an engine would have to stop at Lawrence. The heavy engine that comes from Milton could not go over your light line. I do not think that this would be a suitable place at all for a trial of a light line of railway.

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