

giving directions for the preparation of statistics, instructed that the population on this railway-line and ten miles on either side should be omitted from the figures, because it is really a Kawakawa-Whangarei-Auckland railway. It was the intention of the easterners at the beginning that that should be the North Auckland railway, but this agitation has shown to the people that that will never do for a North Auckland railway. We have been successful thus far in preventing that scheme from being carried out, and Mr. Mander himself will not support that scheme now. He says that it is unfair, but he acknowledges it is what they first wanted. They still want to get it as near Whangarei as possible, though they know Mr. Mander will not support it. When we come to discover which is the more central they call ours the western and theirs the eastern. If you stand at Kaiwaka you are within eight miles of the east coast and thirty miles from the west coast. [Witness went on to explain by reference to the map where the two routes would go, and relative distances.] I think I must leave the other points, as time is so limited. What I want you to remember is that Ministers—the Premier, Mr. Fowlds, Mr. Millar, Mr. McKenzie—have all been to the district, and Cabinet has come to a unanimous decision in favour of the western route, after having the engineer's reports before them. I am sure they would not otherwise come to such a decision. But now you are asked, after Cabinet has come to a unanimous decision, that that unanimous decision and the fixing of the line—the Premier said that the line was definitely fixed—shall be upset or questioned by a Royal Commission. You see at once the position you put the Ministers in. It would really be an inquiry into the unanimous decision of Cabinet on a certain point. I do not fear a Commission, but I say, as was said by many of the petitioners to Mr. McKenzie, "Do not delay the construction of the line; for if you look into the matter we know you will come to a proper decision. I may say that I was not able to accompany the Minister beyond McCarroll's Gap, and Mr. Mander did not accompany him.

*Mr. Mander:* I accompanied him most of the way. I went as far as I could go in my buggy.

*Witness:* Well, this is the position: The Minister, a stranger to our district, has gone thoroughly into the question, and he has recognised the fact that the western route is the best. We have been told by Mr. Mitchelson and others on that side that the line should keep away from the water. I say that what we ought to do is to touch the waterways. We have boats from the south coming to the Kaipara. They come with produce and go back with timber. The people on the waterway are thus able to get produce from the south. If the railway is taken to Young's Point, the vessels with southern produce will be able to touch there, and many persons in the north will be able to secure produce from the south, which at present they cannot do. Mr. Mitchelson himself tells us that the Wairoa by-and-by is going to be such a district that it will have large freezing-works, and Home steamers will call there. Well, if that is going to be the case, the time must come when the country must connect Wairoa ports with the railway, and I say this is the proper time to do it.

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THURSDAY, 2ND DECEMBER, 1909.

JAMES STEWART examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr. Stewart?—Civil engineer, practising in Auckland. At one time I was District Engineer for nine years odd in Auckland.

2. Will you state, briefly, what you have to say about this line?—Yes. It is more particularly detailed in a report which I made to the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Auckland. I made an examination of both lines extending over about nineteen miles—from 78 miles to 98 miles on the index map of the Otamatea County. These lines were furnished by the Hon. the Minister for Public Works. The first thing that I noticed as against the western route was the very large amount of bridging required over salt-water creeks, the Otamatea especially having a very large depth of water, stated to amount to 40 ft. I did not measure it myself, but there was a staff of men engaged in measuring, and that was the information I got from them. The width of the Otamatea is something like 17 chains at high water. I estimated the cost of a cylinder bridge there to be £30 a foot, and that I considered to be a very low estimate. I took 1,200 ft. at £30 a foot. I took 400 ft. of approach spans—principally on the eastern side—at £10 a foot. I considered also that a swing bridge is absolutely necessary there. At an interview which we had with the Hon. the Minister for Public Works on this subject some six weeks ago, he took exception to that length of bridging, and said that only 8 chains of bridging was intended, the rest to be solid embankment. Now, I think that that could hardly be indorsed seriously by his staff. As an engineer of some considerable experience in bridging, I would no more think of making solid end embankments on the Otamatea Bridge than I would if I were bridging the Waikato, for instance. But, with the depth of 40 ft. of water, and a height, say, of only 10 ft. above formation-level, I should think that his side embankments, necessarily being of stone, would cost just about as much as the bridge would. At all events, there is that amount of bridging required, whether it is solid or open. Then there are two other bridges required—one on the main line over the Kaitara, and one on a branch line—which I consider absolutely necessary for the ballast—at Pukekaroro, over the Kaiwaka. For these two I make 1,180 ft. of ordinary salt-water bridging. That I put at £12 a foot. The next thing I took notice of in the extra cost of the western line is the distance from the ballast. I took it that six miles and a half would be required. A line could be made from Pukekaroro, where the Department has been investigating by making several drives to bring ballast to the main line. That would be six miles and a half. That virtually means a certain additional length of line; but in regard to the length of line altogether, I find by the map I have mentioned that the eastern route extends at its 98-mile peg half a mile further to the north than the western route. Hence it is that distance shorter than the western route.