

12. You are not acquainted with the western route at all?—No, only that from vantage-points on the road along the eastern route you can get a bird's-eye view of a lot of the country on the western.

13. When visiting that locality did you form any opinion as to the nature of the country, with a view to railway-construction through it? I am not speaking about engineering difficulties, but from a commercial point of view?—From a commercial point of view I think the advantage is in favour of the western route, because it goes through much more agricultural land and it does not reach so high an elevation.

14. You have had engineers' reports from time to time on these two routes, which are available in your Department?—Yes.

15. Have you formed any opinion as to these routes—I mean an estimated-cost point of view?—The engineering reports are, so far, in favour of the eastern route from a first-cost point of view.

16. Is there very much difference?—We have never had a complete estimate yet of the cost of the western route.

17. You cannot, therefore, give any opinion as to the difference in cost?—None other than Mr. Holmes has given just now.

18. I suppose you are not interested in the matter from a "working railway" point of view in your Department, are you?—I think we are very much so. I think it is the business of the Public Works Department to construct railways that will pay.

19. Am I to infer from your previous remarks that, on the evidence before you, you favour the western route?—Yes, from a traffic-producing point of view I do.

20. How long have you been connected with the Department?—Thirty-six years.

21. And that is your opinion, based on experience of the management of the Public Works Department?—Yes. It is not so much my business to consider the engineering point of view as it is the Chief Engineer's, but it is my business to consider the commercial point of view.

22. *Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie.* You are aware that this question was before this Committee last session?—No, I do not think I am aware of that.

23. Are you not aware that the petition in connection with the survey of the western route was before the Committee last session?—If so, I was not called.

24. If this Committee last year recommended the Government to make a survey of the western route, that would no doubt influence Mr. Hall-Jones, as Minister for Public Works, not to allow a station-site to be fixed at Kaiwaka until the survey was finished?—No doubt it would.

25. I will get the exact recommendation of the Committee in a minute. Now, Mr. Blow, when this question was under consideration I gave you instructions to get the statistics for me. I gave you a map with a line drawn right across here [place indicated on map] to within ten miles of the Whangarei Railway?—Yes.

26. And another line drawn across from here [place indicated] to here [indicated]?—Yes.

27. Did I not instruct you to get me statistics from the Lands Department as to the area of land to the east and west of the eastern route?—You did, sir.

28. And also, from the Registrar-General, the population within the same area?—Yes.

29. And from the Agricultural Department the stock within the same area?—Yes.

30. Would you mind telling the Committee what the results were?—As to the area of land, the total area eastward of the eastern route for the railway, but excluding the area served by the Whangarei-Kawakawa Railway, is 313,300 acres. The total area to the westward is 681,000 acres.

31. A difference in favour of the westward of—?—368,000 acres.

32. The area is more than double on the westward?—Yes. As to population, the total population to the eastward of the eastern route—excluding the Whangarei district as before, because, as that country is well served by the present railway, it was not considered that we could fairly take it into account—is 3,316. The total population to the westward of the route is 9,109.

33. More than double the number?—Much more than double. As regards live-stock, east of the proposed route, 1,714 horses, 13,976 cattle, 1,250 pigs, 11,186 sheep; west of the proposed route, 5,075 horses, 44,913 cattle, 3,096 pigs, and 80,940 sheep.

34. Does that cover all the statistical information available for determining the route of the railway?—I think so. We went to the best sources of supply—to the Lands Department, the Registrar-General, and the Agricultural Department.

35. What is the difference in the number of sheep?—There are over seven times as many on the west.

36. And in the head of cattle?—Rather more than three times.

37. So that there is more than double the area of land, nearly three times the population, and seven times the number of sheep?—Yes.

38. I have now the report of the Committee last session: "Petition of A. W. Balderson and 20 others of Kaiwaka, and 39 other similar petitions as per schedule attached.—Petitioners pray for an alteration in the proposed route of the North Auckland Railway. I am directed to report that the Committee is of opinion that before the North Auckland Railway is extended north from Topuni, as at present proposed, the Government be recommended to make an exhaustive survey of alternative routes in order that the best interests of the various districts may be served." In the face of that recommendation would Mr. Hall-Jones, as Minister for Public Works, be justified in suspending the authorisation of any railway-station at Kaiwaka until after that survey was made?—Quite, I think.

39. Did he ever approve of a railway-station site being laid out on the eastern route at Kaiwaka?—This letter that has been read states that he approved of the station.

40. Is there any approval on the files?—I have not got the files here, and cannot say. What was the date of that recommendation?

41. It was at the end of last session?—This letter was written in October, so that probably the recommendation was made subsequently to this.