

route—was finally decided on. Before I joined the Ministry, Mr. McNab, who was Minister of Lands, went through that country, and he was satisfied that the survey ought to be made, and he recommended the Government to have it made. Then, last February I was asked by the Government to go up there and look into the matter, and of course I ordered the survey to be made; and that survey is the only information we have to-day. But there was no work of any kind started. We had to discharge men until the question of the survey was settled.

*Mr. Buxton:* You stated, Mr. Vickerman, that you had very great confidence in Mr. Holmes. Seeing that the Committee were told by Mr. Holmes that the western route would cost £50,000 more, how would you get over that?

*The Chairman:* He said it might be £10,000 more.

*Mr. Buxton:* Plus the railway to Pukekaroro.

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* Let me say, in the first place, that we are not going to make the ballast-line to Pukekaroro at all. In the second place, Mr. Holmes told the Committee that when he recommended the eastern route he had never seen the western route at all. He went over it with me last February. Prior to that he had never seen the western route. In fact, the whole idea the Government were previously working on was to make the railway connect with the Whangarei line. Now it is considered advisable to go right through the middle of the peninsula.

*The Chairman:* Has a detailed survey been made from Topuni up as far as McCarroll's Gap, on the western route?

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* It is nearly finished. I think it was finished for one route, but the engineers found it necessary to explore the country, and quite recently they proposed a deviation that will lengthen the line by 42 chains. Whether I approve of that deviation or not I cannot tell you till I have had a look at it. There was no detailed survey of any part beyond Young's Point until last March.

*The Chairman:* So far, your Department or yourself could not give an approximate estimate of the cost of that twenty miles of railway on the western route?

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* Of course the engineers can take the quantities off the plans, as far as they have got the necessary details. Beyond that it is purely a piece of guesswork, but it may be approximately correct.

*Mr. Pearce:* Mr. Wilson said there were men working on the western deviation?

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* Yes, there are 250 now.

*Mr. Pearce:* The question I put to Mr. Vickerman just now was whether he, as an engineer, considered it the right thing to start work on a deviation of which you had not got a detailed plan, and he refused to reply. I think that is a question that an engineer ought to answer.

*Witness:* I told you that I was instructed to do so. I would suggest that you ask the Minister the question.

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* I can answer the question. Of course no railway will be started without having the details. We got the line located, and we are working on it as far as Kaiwaka. We have a 16- or 17-chain tunnel in hand. We have the plans and every detail in connection with it for about two miles. We know what that will cost, almost to a few pounds.

*The Chairman:* What you mean is that you have got a rough survey, but you have not got the working-details?

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* We have the details, and we have issued a Proclamation locating the line. We have to lodge a registered plan when the line is located, and we have every detail as far as Young's Point.

*Mr. Pearce:* But supposing that beyond Young's Point you struck a very bad piece of country that would make it preferable to go by the other route, would you find that out before you started.

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* Of course we know all about that. We have twenty miles that we know about. We are at 77 miles, and McCarroll's Gap is 98 miles. We know all about that twenty-one miles. The law does not allow us to spend any money on any railway until we have the details. The only latitude we are allowed is to deviate 10 chains on either side.

*Mr. Pearce:* But did you not state that you had not decided the route even now?

*Hon. Mr. R. McKenzie:* I meant north of McCarroll's Gap.

100. *Mr. J. Duncan (to witness).]* Do you know what Mr. Knorpp's instructions were with reference to laying off the North Auckland line? Were they just to find out the best central route?—His general instruction was to take the line up the centre. It was to be a central line.

101. And the result was his laying off the eastern route?—He only made a trial survey. He just went through there, and reported what could be done.

102. The purpose, at any rate, was to find a central route, and he recommended the eastern line?—He only went over the one.

103. But those were his instructions?—I understand so. He was sent out as a flying party to prospect the north and see what he could do.

104. For the best central route?—I would not say the best central—the best route.

105. And his recommendation was the eastern route?—No, he varied a good deal from the eastern route. Maungatapere is six miles away from the present eastern route.

106. The red line on that map is not the line that he recommended?—No; it is the line that has since been laid out with more precision than he exercised.

107. Then the red line is the result of subsequent work, by Mr. Holmes and others?—Yes.

108. *Mr. Buchanan.]* I understood the Minister to say just now that when Mr. Knorpp laid off the line, the object was to connect with the Whangarei line. If you were sent on a similar mission and that was the understanding, would you consider the western route at all?—I do not think Mr. McKenzie meant that exactly. Mr. Knorpp's instructions were to go right up the country. He went right up to Lake Omapere, which is away north. He branched off at this place [indicated on map] to Whangarei, because the Whangarei line was then being made. It was just to see what connection he could get with Whangarei.