

69. Can the eastern line be straightened in order to reduce the curves?—I think the eastern line is fairly well located in that respect. I do not think the curves would be much reduced on the permanent survey.

70. *Mr. Evans.*] Then the climatic conditions on the east are more favourable than those on the west?—Yes.

71. *The Chairman.*] Might the branch line that you say can be put into the ballast-pit on the Waipu Range eventually be used as a branch line to Waipu, which is situated about eight miles from the Main Trunk line at McCarroll's Gap.—I believe it could be so used, but I have not been through there.

72. Taking into consideration all matters—railway-construction, subsequent maintenance of the line, the class of country to be opened up, and the trade to be obtained—which route are you in favour of?—I think the advantage is with the western route.

73. *Mr. Evans.*] You have taken the question of the population also into consideration?—Yes.

ROBERT WEST HOLMES examined. (No. 65.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Engineer-in-Chief of the Public Works Department, and reside in Wellington?—Yes.

2. Do you desire to make any statement to the Commission in reference to this matter?—I have no statement to make.

3. *Mr. Coom.*] You know the country on the east and west of the Tangihuas?—I know it as far as Tangiteroria. I have not been across the Wairoa River north of that.

4. Do you know the route east of the Tangihuas?—Yes, I have been over the country, but I have not been actually over the surveyed line.

5. Did you form any impression as to which route, from an engineering point of view, would be better?—I do not think there is very much to pick and choose between them.

6. Did you see the slippery ground Mr. Wilson referred to in his evidence?—No.

7. Have you inspected the plans and sections of the trial lines?—Yes, I saw them in Wellington some time ago. I have not seen them lately.

8. Did you make any detailed comparison between the eastern and the western route?—I did at that time as near as I possibly could from the plans.

9. Do you recollect how the results you arrived at compared with the results Mr. Wilson has given the Commission?—I cannot tell you from memory, but I know there was very little difference between the two routes.

10. That is both as regards costs and engineering aspects?—That is so.

WILLIAM FREDERICK THOMPSON examined. (No. 66.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are District Valuer, residing at Whangarei?—Yes. My district covers the seven northern counties.

2. What we want to know is how can the land be divided up into agricultural, pastoral, and land of poor quality on these two routes from McCarroll's Gap to about Parakau, where the two routes junction?—I may say, I have been over every section more than once. There is very little Native land at all at the start. I do not think there is any from McCarroll's Gap, except a small piece, until you get to the Wairoa River. There is no agricultural land between McCarroll's Gap and the Wairoa River following the route of the railway. It is all very good pastoral land. There are a few bits when you get to the river that are fit for agriculture, but you would not call it an agricultural district. I believe the little Native blocks are now under negotiation for lease. I valued them a little while ago. The pastoral land can be cut up into small sections and dairied upon—say, into 300-acre sections.

3. Have you anything further to say of the country from the Gap to Kirikopuni?—There is no Native land when you get across there—not until you get to Parakau. I feel quite confident there is no Native land on the western side of the western line.

4. Still, from Kirikopuni northwards to the junction—is that agricultural land, pastoral land, or land of poor quality?—It is good pastoral land.

5. Of even quality?—Fairly even. It is not first-class land, but it is what you would call good grazing-land. It would winter one to two sheep to the acre if cleared. That would apply to the country right through from McCarroll's Gap.

6. Is there anything further you want to say about that country?—It is all well watered, which is an important thing in dairying. It could be cut up so as to have plenty of water in every section.

7. *Mr. Becroft.*] Would you say that from Kirikopuni to Parakau 300 acres would be sufficient?—Yes, between 300 and 350 acres.

8. *The Chairman.*] Now I will ask you to take the eastern side?—The land is similar in quality starting from McCarroll's Gap. Following the line along the eastern route northwards for the first five miles you go through fair land, similar to that on the western side. Then from that on for about six miles it passes through poor fern and open country. That is on the route of the line itself. It is not far to the left of it before you get to very fair land at Waikiekie, which is neutral to both routes. From there you go for about three miles through very good volcanic land at Maungakarama, some of which is first-class agricultural country, but of no very great extent. From there down to Waiotama Valley, about nine miles from Maungakarama, there is fair pastoral land.