

41. Do you know the land from Maungatapere to Poroti along the Mangakahia?—Some is good and some is poor.

42. Is all that settled?—The good has been settled for a long time, but the poor parts want settlement yet.

43. Have you been over the Ruatangata Parish between the eastern route and the Whangarei-Kawakawa line?—I have only ridden through it by the main north road from Whangarei.

44. The land on Maungaru is owned privately, but not fully developed?—That is so.

45. Are there settlers on the other route all the way?—It is taken up much the same as the other is, but in rather smaller holdings.

46. Is there any Crown land on the eastern route which could be taken up between Mangakahia and the Tangihua River?—It has already been settled.

47. Is there any open for settlement which has not been taken up?—Not that I know of.

48. It is eight miles from Omano to Mangonui Bridge?—Yes.

49. Does that road go through one estate?—Not for the whole distance.

50. What other estates are served by it?—A few small settlers.

51. What land lies to the west of that piece of land?—The Girls' High School endowment, which is taken up under leasehold, and occupied by a lot of small settlers.

52. What is the next block?—Mangarata, held under freehold by four settlers. The area is 5,000 acres. The next block is Te Kohuroa, 6,000 acres, held by one owner, Mr. Bailey.

53. Coming farther south the land is divided?—Yes, it is held in small holdings.

54. *The Chairman.*] The route that is common to both sides runs as far north as McCarroll's Gap, and from there divides and meets again at Mangakahia Bridge: which of these routes is the shorter?—The western.

55. In connecting the western route with a point opposite Dargaville, have you any idea of the cost of a bridge to cross the river?—No: I have not gone into that question.

56. Would it be a large sum?—It would be a considerable sum.

57. Would not the other connection you speak of from Kirikopuni to Dargaville be a more reasonable route by which to connect the western system with the Main Trunk?—That is, I consider, the more reasonable, cheaper, and valuable route.

58. Of the three routes you have mentioned, that is the route you would yourself advocate?—Yes.

59. If the line goes to the east of the Tangihuas, what do you think is the best connection between the eastern system and the Dargaville-Kaihu Railway?—From opposite Dargaville to Paparoa *via* Raupo, a distance of 27½ miles, in a straight line.

60. You would be confronted with this big bridge across the Wairoa?—Yes: either that or a ferry, which latter I think would be the cheapest.

61. Are there any estates on the western route which could be acquired by the Crown?—I consider Omano Estate should be acquired. It comprises 12,000 acres, and is owned by Mr. Riddell.

62. Which lands would carry a closer settlement—along the west of the Tangihua Range or on the east of the Tangahua Range?—I think, on the western route.

#### HENRY JAMES SLADE examined. (No. 23.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am Chairman of the Hobson County, and reside on the opposite side of the river to Dargaville. I am a farmer. I may say that I had intended giving evidence showing the centrality and the shortness of the western route as against the eastern route, and I had also intended to give evidence showing the class of country to the east and west of the Tangihuas; but Mr. Hammond has already traversed that ground very ably, and, as you have suggested that we should not duplicate evidence, I will not touch on those matters.

2. Do you corroborate what Mr. Hammond said?—Yes. I feel that a strong argument in favour of the western route as against the eastern route is the cheap freights that exist on the east coast as against the high freights that exist on the west coast. Mr. Hammond has shown that the eastern route passes within six miles of Mangapai, on the east coast, and the freight to Mangapai by scow, I understand, is 5s. a ton, while the steamer freight to that port is 7s. 6d. per ton from Auckland direct. The freight from Auckland to Tokatoka, on the Wairoa River, is about £1 10s. a ton. The freight to Kirikopuni or Tangiteroria, where the proposed western route will cross the Wairoa River, is £1 15s. a ton. The freight from Auckland to Whangarei is 7s. 6d. a ton. I have heard it said that it will be detrimental for the railway to touch deep water on the Wairoa at Tangiteroria, but I am satisfied that if the railway is permitted to reach that point, that prophecy will be found to be altogether contrary to fact. The position of the settlers at the present time is that if they wish to send stock to Auckland from there they have to send it by steamer or scow, by punts. Those punts have to be towed down the river across the dangerous Kaipara Heads, and then the stock or cargo has to be transhipped at Helensville and sent on to Auckland. I say it is only reasonable that when the railway touches deep water at this point, and the settlers have direct railway communication with Auckland, the whole of their produce and stock will go by the direct route, instead of having to be transhipped to the railway at Helensville. I feel satisfied that if the Main Trunk line is allowed to touch deep water on the east coast—say, at Mangapai or Whangarei—any freights from the far north coming down the line will be transhipped at Whangarei to Auckland by water, as I am satisfied that the railway could not compete with cheap freights that exist on the east coast. On the other hand, the effect of the railway touching deep water on the Wairoa River would be that the river would act as a feeder of the railway for all time. Another point that I wish to bring forward is