

5. You referred to the difference in the length of the routes, and to the western being the shortest route?—I think it is, but the western route has not been, and could not be, so thoroughly surveyed as the eastern route, partly because the western route is so much covered with forest, and therefore it is not so easy to examine the country, and also because the survey of the eastern route was in operation at the time when the very strong pressure was brought to bear in order to have the western line examined. I think that at Maungakaramaea three, if not four, different lines were traversed in order to find the best way of surmounting the difficulty. I do not think that on the western side many alternative routes were examined, but I think that if the surveys had been made further improvements might still have been made in connection with the western side.

6. You think that the country on the eastern side is rougher than that on the western side?—That is my belief.

7. Have you been through both parts of the country?—Yes; almost along the whole of both routes.

8. What amount of land has been disposed of out of the 1,000,000 acres you spoke of?—Speaking roughly, I would say that the Crown still owns from 50,000 to 80,000 acres.

9. Is there any Maori land amongst it?—Yes, but not much, with the exception of one block in the neighbourhood of Kaikohe, where there is a block of 123,000 acres.

10. Has there been much land bought up by syndicates in the 1,000,000 acres you referred to?—There are several blocks, but most of the blocks bought by syndicates have been subdivided.

11. Are there any large holders amongst them?—The Omano Block, held by Mr. Riddell, consists of 12,000 acres, but it is the general opinion that as soon as this question is decided, if the railway goes through it, that land ought to be bought by the Government. I hope the Commission will make a note of that fact. Then there is the Maungaru Block, which was bought by Alfred Harding ten years ago. It consists of 21,000 acres. He is now subdividing the whole block, and has disposed of his interest in a portion of it to fifteen small settlers. How much that leaves him I cannot say. Again, there is the Nukutawhiti Block, up the Mangakahia Gorge.

12. Is all of that land unimproved?—No; the bulk of the Omano Block is improved. At the time that block was owned by the syndicate it would carry nothing, but now it is carrying many thousands of sheep and cattle.

13. Apart from the Maori land and the Crown land, how is the rest of the land you refer to held?—By small settlers.

14. And how much by syndicates?—I could not say, because almost the whole of the land purchased by syndicates has been subdivided.

15. Are there 700,000 acres held by small settlers?—Very nearly.

16. You say that some of the syndicates are improving the land they hold themselves?—Taking the Omano Block, up by the Wairoa, at the time the syndicate purchased it it was undeveloped bush country. Its present condition you will see when you go through. It is carrying a very large quantity of sheep and cattle.

17. Do you think that nearly all the goods would go by rail instead of by steamer to Auckland if the railway were made?—From the centre of this country, certainly.

18. How do you account for so much produce being imported if the land in this district is reported to be so very good?—In the first place, this country has been almost entirely neglected until within the last few years. Consequently those who have taken up land, with the exception of one or two syndicates, have not been farmers, but men who have saved money and invested it in sections. Another difficulty has been that wages, owing to the gumfields and to the sawmills, have been extremely high. It has paid men who have taken up bush sections better to leave their sections and go and work for wages, and the syndicates who have taken up these lands have been unable to secure labour at a remunerative rate for working them.

19. Do you think the western railway, if constructed, would pay any interest over working-expenses on the capital cost for some years to come?—I believe it would be a paying line.

20. What would make it pay?—The increasing development of the country. There is a large amount of stock which at present finds its way to market by various methods. If they could be given an opportunity to get to the market a very large proportion of the country would be brought into cultivation. Again, dairying companies would be formed, as the larger amount of the land will be turned at once into dairying country, whereas it is impossible under present conditions to get produce to market, on account of the want of means of transport.

21. Do you not think the steamer freights would be reduced where water carriage is available when the railway was started?—Not sufficiently to permit of profitable carting to the coast on the eastern side.

22. *Mr. Ronayne.*] Can you give the Commission any idea as to the amount of timber that would be available for traffic on the railway by either route?—I think one or two other witnesses would get nearer to it, but I understand that in the forest reserve at the head of Kirikopuni there are something like 200,000,000 ft. in that reserve and the adjacent one.

23. Would the western route serve that trade better than the eastern one?—Undoubtedly that trade would go by the western route.

24. I understand you are advocating the speedy completion of the central route as against any expenditure being made on branch lines, which I take to mean a branch line as between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei, and the connection between the Kaihu line and Kaikohe. Am I correct?—Not as regards the extension of the Kawakawa line to Kaikohe. I believe that that extension was a most judicious procedure on the part of the Government.

25. It is understood that the line is going on from Kawakawa to Hokianga. I referred particularly to the connection between the Kaihu line and the Main Trunk and the Main Trunk