

WILLIAM PARK sworn and examined. (No. 17.)

1. *Mr. Weston.*] You are a bookseller and stationer carrying on business in Palmerston North?—Yes.

2. How long have you been resident here?—Thirty-four years.

3. You came from Hokitika?—Yes.

4. You are an ex-Mayor of Palmerston North?—Yes.

5. What attitude do you take up with regard to the Foxton Harbour?—I consider the Foxton Harbour should be under the control of the Foxton Harbour Board. It is practically the heritage, if one might put it so, of the district it serves. I crossed Foxton Harbour thirty-four years ago, and at the present time it is in a worse condition than it was then. We get our goods via Foxton. Stationers' goods being heavy, we naturally get them via Foxton, but owing to the bad state of the Foxton Harbour there are constant delays. I have here a letter from my agents in Wellington—the New Zealand Express Company—dated 29th March, 1916. It reads, "With reference to two cases of blotting-paper ex 'Rimutaka,' the 'Queen' has been unable to get out of Foxton for the last few days, but we understand she is due in Wellington to-day. Owing to the congested cargo the agents cannot give us any definite promise that your goods will go forward by this trip. In the event of us not being able to get them on board, if you wish to have them railed, to avoid further storage, kindly advise us, and we will arrange this." That is an indication of the delays that the stationers have to put up with. The letter came quite unsolicited, and at the time I received it I did not know that it would be evidence at the present Commission. As a business man here I can say that practically the whole of the commercial community consider that the harbour should be handed over to the Harbour Board for management. Owing to the position the Railway Department has taken up all these years in not expending money upon the harbour and improving it, in my opinion as a citizen, the Railway Department might just as fairly have commandeered the Wellington wharf thirty or forty years ago and refused to expend any money on that wharf for all these years. What position would Wellington have been in to-day if the same course had been followed as that which has been taken in the case of Foxton?

*Mr. Weston:* That concludes my evidence so far as this district is concerned. I may have four witnesses in Wellington, where, I understand, the Commission intends to sit and take the evidence of the railway officials.

*The Chairman:* Do you propose to call evidence, Mr. Myers?

*Mr. Myers:* No, not here, sir. I will call evidence in Wellington when the other side has finished.

[Plans relating to Saunders's contract produced and put in.]

[Further evidence relating to the Foxton Wharf branch of the inquiry was given in Wellington by the following witnesses: Gerald Fitzgerald, Captain E. J. Harvey, W. E. Fuller, R. Edwards, G. M. Deck, and R. W. McVilly.]

PALMERSTON NORTH, TUESDAY, 23RD MAY, 1916.

The branch of the inquiry relating to the Sandon Tramway and Main Trunk deviation was opened.

Statement by Mr. SKERRETT. (No. 18.)

*Mr. Skerrett:* I appear, with my friend Mr. Luckie, for the Manawatu County Council, Rangitikei County Council, Horowhenua County Council, Marton Borough Council, Levin Borough Council, Foxton Borough Council, and Bull's Town Board. There are two questions upon which we desire to call evidence. Those two questions are separate and distinct, and, indeed, involve in the main separate considerations, though they are not wholly disassociated from one another. The first question is whether the local authorities interested in the tramway should be permitted at their own cost to extend the existing tramway-line or light railway running from Himatangi, on the Palmerston-Foxton Government railway-line, to the Pukenui, on the left bank of the Rangitikei River, nearly opposite Bull's, so that the line should connect with the Government railway-line at or near Marton at some convenient point.

*The Chairman:* Why not at Greatford—that is the nearest point?

*Mr. Skerrett:* There are objections relating to grades which on a casual inspection make the junction desirable at a point about equidistant from Greatford and Marton, but no attempt has been made to fix the precise point of deviation. Now, connected with this question, but not differing from it, and practically the same in principle, is the subsidiary question whether the Government should itself take over the existing light railway and itself make the connection with the Government railway-line; or, alternatively, what rights of purchase or option of pre-emption over the line should be conceded to the Government as a condition for the permission to connect it with the Government railway-line at or near Marton. I want to make it clear at the outset that the main proposal of the local authorities which I represent is to construct at their own cost the proposed extension. They seek no aid from the public purse. They are prepared themselves to find the cost of the extension, and, as will be seen hereafter and as I have said, they are prepared to give the Government reasonable rights of pre-emption over the existing