

Although the legislation which appears necessary for the closing of Cook Street would deal primarily with that subject, the whole title will presumably have to be cleared up, including that to the land occupied in Main Street. (See the opinion of the Crown Solicitor forwarded with your 1917/6001 of 29/4/19, second page, first paragraph, and the second clause of the recommended course of action).

As stated by the Crown Solicitor, the whole position is difficult and complicated. It appears probable that strong opposition will be raised to the closing of Cook Street (which is essential if the station is to remain in its present position), and that the closing will involve the Department in the payment of considerable compensation.

Before going further with the proposals, I recommend that the question of removing the station from the present position altogether be considered.

It appears to me certain that sooner or later the present station site will have to be abandoned.

At the best—and conditional on Cook Street being closed—the accommodation and shunting facilities which can be provided must necessarily be limited owing to the comparatively short distance (about 50 chains) for such a station between the Square and West Street, and I cannot believe that in a growing centre such as Palmerston North the receiving of trains through the centre of the borough and along a main thoroughfare from Longburn to Terrace End (six miles), with the numerous street-crossings involved, can be continued for any length of time.

For these reasons I consider it will be in the best interests of the Borough of Palmerston North and of the country generally, as well as of the railway, to abandon the present site before the very large expenditure involved in providing for the requirements of the traffic at the present site is incurred.

Present Station Site.

A rearrangement plan of the station, designed to provide as nearly as possible for the stated requirements of the Traffic and Locomotive Branches, has been drafted, but even restricting the public road (Main Street) at the approach to the passenger-station, the station-building, and the main platform, to their present inadequate widths, it seems apparent that the accommodation required cannot be provided. To give anything like adequate accommodation for present needs, but without adequate shunting facilities, it will be necessary to provide for the locomotive-depot in some other position.

To deal with the passenger traffic properly without unduly hampering the traffic in Main Street, I am satisfied that this street opposite the station-building and at the approaches thereto should not be less than 100 ft. wide. The necessary accommodation cannot satisfactorily be provided in a building of less than 50 ft. wide, and the main platform should not be less than 30 ft. wide. These widths I consider the minimum possible.

On a print of the draft rearrangement plan (No. 26630) which has been prepared I have shown the effect of providing the widths suggested in different ways: (a) (red lines)—by encroaching on the land now occupied by the railway-station; (b) (green lines)—by the purchase of land on the opposite side of Main Street. If the former method were adopted comparatively little land would be available for sidings, sheds, &c.; in the latter method a very large expenditure in the purchase of property would be involved.

Alternative Proposals.

(1.) *Retention of Present Site for Passenger and Goods Traffic.*—To deal with both passenger and goods traffic at the present site will involve exceedingly heavy expenditure in the purchase of property, and the accommodation which can be provided would be adequate only for the need of the early future. A locomotive-depot would have to be provided in some other locality.

(2.) *Retention of Present Site for Passenger and Local Traffic, with Provision for Separate Yard for Goods Traffic.*—To avoid the necessity for the purchase of private property in widening Main Street, the station-buildings, and platforms it would be necessary to limit the business to be carried on at the station to passenger and purely local goods traffic. The goods traffic which has to pass through this large and growing railway centre would have to be dealt with at some point outside Palmerston North. The nearest available position for such a yard or depot would be about three miles distant on the New Plymouth Railway, and this would have the disadvantage of not commanding directly the traffic to and from the Napier Railway. To deal with the latter it might be necessary to provide a supplementary yard on the Napier Railway. As in the previous proposal (No. 1), a locomotive-depot would have to be provided, presumably at the same place as the marshalling-yard.

The expenditure involved in this proposal would be heavy, and working-charges would be increased.

(3.) *Deviation of the Railway and Provision of a Station thereon.*—The deviation of the railway from Longburn to a point on the New Plymouth Railway about four miles north of Palmerston North Station, with a connection to the Napier Railway, as shown on the accompanying plan No. 26453, would admit of an adequate station being provided without the disabilities of the present site, with marshalling-yard and locomotive-depot.

The expenditure involved would be heavy, but should not, in my opinion, exceed that which would have to be incurred in carrying out either of the previous proposals (1) or (2). In the congested state of Palmerston North Station extensive alterations could only be carried out at considerable expense and with delay to the work and the traffic.

It has not been possible to obtain detailed data in connection with the proposals without causing public comment, which I have considered it advisable to avoid, but, so far as can be judged from an examination of the ground and such information as could be obtained, the scheme is feasible from an engineering point of view, and interference with house property would be comparatively limited. Two roads, one unformed, would have to be closed, but as these are of an unimportant character the opposition to the closing would probably not be serious. The main roads would be bridged.

The principal opposition to be expected would be from—

- (a.) Those of the business firms and residents affected by the greater distance to the station. The station would be on the outskirts of the borough, and the distance from the centre of the Square would be about one mile and a quarter, as compared with about three-eighths of a mile at present. The business centre of the borough is, however, growing towards the west, and therefore in the direction of the suggested site of the station.
- (b.) Those holding private-siding access from the present railway between Awapuni and Terrace End. These include the Manawatu Racing Club's branch (on which I understand it is proposed to establish milk-preserving works at some time), the proposed siding to the Municipal gasworks, McGill's flour-mill siding, and others. The Racing Club's branch might be extended to the new route and possibly it might be arranged to retain a track along the present route from Terrace End to work the various private sidings if the opposition of the owners cannot be overcome otherwise.
- (c.) Property-owners (such as those in Main Street) whose business would be affected by the removal of the station.

Conclusion.

I have no hesitation in recommending the deviation and new station—proposal No. 3—as being in the best interests of every one concerned.

Proposals Nos. 1 and 2 have the serious objection that trains would continue to run at speed along the main thoroughfares, and this objection would be increased by the removal of the locomotive-depot and consequent increased running.

There is no doubt that very serious opposition will be offered to the proposals, but if a change is to be made—and I consider this inevitable—I think it will be better to make the change before the difficulties become greater and before a large amount of money is spent on the present site.