

MAIN TRUNK RAILWAY LINE.

Under the fourth order of reference we were directed to make inquiry into any matter which arose out of or was connected with the main object of the Commission, and presumably we are desired to report thereon. We therefore call the attention of the Government to the fact that when the Dargaville-Pohoatua and Waiotira-Whangarei branch lines are opened, together with the Main Trunk line south of Pohoatua, there will be eventually a through-railway communication not only from Auckland but also from the Dargaville district by the Whangarei-Kaikōhe line of railway to Mangamuka, and that by this line, when completed, the far North will be brought into direct communication with Auckland and the south. Under these circumstances we respectfully express our opinion that the Main Trunk line between Pohoatua (near Pukehuia) and Ngapuhi will to a great extent duplicate the existing railway system, and there would be, if it should be constructed, three parallel lines of railway in a portion of the country having a total width of less than fifty miles—the Kaihu Valley Railway, the proposed Main Trunk line (Pohoatua-Ngapuhi), and the Whangarei-Opua Railway.

We are of opinion that the construction of this line of railway (Pohoatua-Ngapuhi), having a length of some thirty-seven miles, may easily be postponed for many years to come until more labour is available and materials are cheaper. We hold that the money which would be expended in the construction of this portion of the Main Trunk line ought to be diverted to the completion of other railways, including the connection from the Kaihu Valley line to Pohoatua (near Pukehuia), to the construction of the Main Trunk line to Mangamuka, and to the construction of roads leading thereto, as being of more benefit to the Dominion as a whole.

We also consider that it is desirable that at an early date a first-class service road should be constructed on a line somewhat parallel to the proposed Main Trunk route between Pohoatua and Ngapuhi. The construction of this road would bring all the intervening district within a moderate length of communication with the railway, and would, in our opinion, fulfil all requirements for many years to come.

HARBOURS.

Under the third order of reference we were instructed to inquire into and to ascertain to what port or ports the North Auckland Main Trunk Railway north of Te Tio should be connected, and the extent to which such line of railway should now be constructed in the interests of settlement.

In pursuance of our investigations we visited Rangaunu Bay, at Unahi; Doubtless Bay, at Mangonui and Taipa; and Whangaroa Harbour; and we have decided that for many years to come there will be no need for any extension northwards of the Main Trunk line to either one or other of these harbours. We are largely guided to this conclusion by the fact that there is railway communication—which will shortly be connected with the Main Trunk line—to Opua, on the Bay of Islands; and that there is now under construction near Otiria Junction, a few miles from Opua, freezing-works which should, in our opinion, provide ample means for many years for the handling of the meat produced in the northern districts. The number of cattle and sheep produced or likely to be produced for many years in the district to the north of the Hokianga River and the Bay of Islands will not warrant the construction of other freezing-works in the far North which would require railway connection with a deep-water harbour.

Rangaunu Bay is the best situated of the three harbours in respect to the shipment of the further production of the district, but owing to shoal difficulties in connection therewith it is unlikely that it will ever be made a port for the use of ocean-going vessels.

Doubtless Bay, including Mangonui Harbour, is more favourably situated. But of the three harbours there is no question that Whangaroa Harbour would be the most suitable for ocean-going vessels. If Imperial or other reasons should render it necessary at any time to obtain further deep-water accommodation connected with the railway system of the North Island at a point north of the Bay of Islands we are of opinion that Whangaroa Harbour should be the point selected. In the absence of any demand for the connection of Whangaroa Harbour with the