

Had no definite scheme been gone into prior to 1919 for the purpose of permanently improving the station accommodation at Palmerston North?—The only schemes that had been considered prior to 1919 were, as I have said, tentative schemes to provide for the position as it existed at the time.

And prior to 1919 the Department had not considered any scheme for the permanent improvement of the conditions?—In my opinion none of the Railway Engineers prior to 1919 had ever contemplated that the schemes they were then putting forward were anything more than temporary schemes.

Do you mean to say that the departmental Engineers had never taken into consideration the things which they took into consideration in 1919 during all the time before that when there was so much pressure from all sides?—The Railway Engineers in making the proposals they did at the time were providing reasonably for the business as existing at that time and for reasonable expansion, but none of those Engineers, as far as I am aware, ever regarded the proposals as being more than tentative—that is, they were not to be permanent.

Then they never attempted any scheme of permanent improvement prior to 1919?—I have not said that. They put forward schemes which in their opinion were sufficient to meet the requirements of the traffic at the time, and for a reasonable period afterwards.

That is all you could do under ordinary circumstances?—No, you could do more than that. All railway people have to profit by their experience and by their knowledge of the business and the altered conditions, and the conditions in this country so far as the railways are concerned have altered materially—and very rapidly—during the last ten years.

And particularly in Palmerston North?—Not only in Palmerston North, but right throughout the North Island system. What has taken place since 1908 right through the North Island is going on everywhere. Facilities that were thought amply sufficient to provide for many years in 1908 are found insufficient everywhere to-day.

Is not that the experience of managers of railway systems in a great many countries?—Yes; but it is not any reason why this Department, or any other railway management, should sit still and not make proper provision for the future.

No, it is a reason the other way?—Well, that is what we are doing.

What I am surprised at is that something in that direction had not been done prior to 1919?—Prior to 1919 the Engineers submitted proposals which they considered were sufficient, having regard to the traffic they had to deal with and the traffic in sight; but the conditions, as I have already said, have materially altered since then, and what would have been and was a good and sound policy in 1908 or 1912 would not be a good and sound policy in 1919.

But nothing actually had been done in the matter of improving the accommodation at Palmerston North, and although that land was taken about ten or twelve years ago, practically nothing has been put on it since?—For the reason that it was becoming evident then that there were grave difficulties in the way, and that any money that was spent there would have to be wasted, as the accommodation cannot be provided on the land available.

Then, as a matter of fact, they have been practically standing still for a long time in Palmerston North?—You want us to stand still now and we want to get on.

No, we suggest there is another method which is an improvement on that submitted by the Department, which we say should be given effect to; but the Department has practically done nothing for twenty years?—That is no reason why we should sit still for another twenty years and do nothing.

But this is a sudden discovery of the Department's that something very drastic is necessary?—It is not a sudden discovery on the part of the Department.

From the point of view of railway management you consider that after the report of 1919 nothing else will be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the Railway Service in that neighbourhood?—I consider that from our past experience, and looking to the future, nothing short of what is proposed will meet the position.

And the chief thing that is required as far as the Railway Department is concerned is adequate additional accommodation for the purpose of providing passenger-station accommodation, facilities for handling goods, dealing with engines, and the want of the necessary additional area?—The chief and main thing is the provision of adequate railway terminal facilities at Palmerston North.

And that is largely a matter of area, is it not?—It is a matter of general lay-out, and sufficient area to make a lay-out.

Does it not come back to the question of satisfactory accommodation and area?—It comes back to the question of satisfactory accommodation and proper facilities for working.

It is mostly a matter of area?—No, it is not mostly a matter of area. You may have an area of 500 acres, and if you do not know how to lay it out you might as well have no area at all.

That is a matter for the railway experts who know best how to lay it out; but it is really a matter of area, and necessarily the amount of accommodation you can get on that area?—It is a matter of accommodation and facilities.

You were concerned with the negotiations which took place relative to the closing of Cook Street and previous to that the closing of Pitt Street?—I do not know that I was concerned. The correspondence passed through my hands, and I discussed the matter at various times with the responsible officers of the Railway Department, of whom I was one at that time.

The same methods of improving the railway facilities at Palmerston North were in the mind of the Department, at any rate, from 1889 to 1912, when Cook Street was first closed in 1889 and when last closed in 1912?—The necessity for making reasonable provision for accommodation at Palmerston North was in the minds of the responsible officers of the Department.