

*Mr. Luckie :* That is not correct.

*Mr. Myers :* But it is correct according to the evidence. Mr. Fulton says it was quite lately that he was approached upon this matter ; Mr. Maxwell says the same ; and Mr. Fulton says that it was not until the 16th of this month, after this Commission had sat at Palmerston North and evidence had been given, that he went into this question at all, and as a result formulated the scheme which he has submitted to this Commission.

*Mr. Luckie :* That was done under instructions received from us, acting on behalf of the Palmerston North residents.

*Mr. Myers :* Well, it does not matter very much, but I can only act upon this statement that Mr. Fulton himself has made. The inference that I suggest is deducible from all the facts is that the real opposition to the scheme proposed by the Railway Department emanates from the league of which Sir James Wilson is the head and forefront—the league that year after year have been doing all they can to see that the Main Trunk line is diverted and deviated from Levin to Marton. That, I suggest, is their main consideration, and the real object that lies behind the opposition to the Railway Department in the proposals which they are making in connection with the facilities at Palmerston North. Now, gentlemen, I want to put this position : Mr. MacLean has dealt exhaustively, to the best of his ability having regard to the difficulties that he or any one else in a similar position is necessarily faced with, with the estimates of cost that would be incurred in the carrying out of the departmental scheme, and in the carrying-out of the scheme propounded by Mr. Fulton. According to Mr. MacLean there appears to be not very much difference in the cost. Let me put it this way : Supposing it would cost £100,000, or £150,000, or £200,000 more to carry out the departmental scheme than to carry out Mr. Fulton's, the mere question of cost does not conclude the matter. Of course, the Department says it is in a much stronger position. The Department says that there is not that difference, if there is any difference, in the cost between the carrying-out of the two schemes ; but I go further and say, supposing the cost of the departmental scheme would be greater than that of carrying-out Mr. Fulton's scheme, would Mr. Fulton's scheme be sufficient ? Would the Department be able to close West Street, to close Kairanga Road, without giving any facilities in the shape of overhead bridges ? And the moment we commence talking about overhead bridges for those streets we are adding very greatly to the cost of Mr. Fulton's scheme, quite apart from his underestimates in other respects, and the one or two omissions from his scheme of which Mr. MacLean has spoken. The original Commission asks, first of all, this question : "Whether the facilities now existing at Palmerston North for the conduct of the business of the Government Railways Department are sufficient and suitable for that purpose." I do not desire to waste the time of the present Commission upon that point.

*Mr. Luckie :* We both agree upon that.

*Mr. Myers :* Even if we do our agreement is not binding upon the Commission. All I intended to say was that we have led all the evidence available to us, and we submit we can do no more than that, and that the answer is a plain one. Then, the next question is : "If such facilities are not sufficient or are not suitable for such purpose, what alterations therein (whether in respect of situation or otherwise howsoever) are necessary and desirable and best adapted to enable the business of the said Department to be carried on with the greatest degree of safety, efficiency, economy, and convenience." So that the Commission has to consider four factors ; not only the one factor of expense, but the factors of safety, efficiency, economy, and convenience. There is one point I do desire very briefly to stress, and that is this : that the officers of the Railway Department have no object in carrying out a scheme at greater expense if some other scheme at less expense would be sufficient. The scheme which has been propounded by Mr. Fulton is not a new scheme. It is not brought before this Commission and submitted to the Railway Department for the first time. I thought when we were at Palmerston, when Mr. Luckie was telling us how he was going to show us that we could do all that was required in the neighbourhood of the present site, that he was going to explode some bomb when we came back to Wellington. I thought that he must have some scheme, or that his engineers had placed before him some scheme of a surprising nature, and so simple that it would at once surprise us to see that we had overlooked it ; but when the scheme comes to be placed before the Commission and comes to be examined, we find that it had already been anticipated by Mr. MacLean even so far as this Commission is concerned, because its main features are set out in the second alternative scheme referred to in Mr. MacLean's notes. It is quite true that in that scheme Mr. MacLean sets down the sum of £350,000 for overhead bridges. I am quite content for the purposes of the present argument and for the purposes of the consideration of this Commission that the item could be altogether eliminated. When I say that I do not for a moment suggest to the Commission that these level crossings are at all satisfactory, I do not want to exaggerate the importance of having these bridges that Mr. MacLean provides for, and I therefore suggest that so far as that particular scheme is concerned, all those level crossings could be eliminated and the estimate reduced by the sum of £350,000. You still have a cost involved in that scheme of something like half a million of money. And be it remembered that Mr. MacLean gave that estimate and made that report before Mr. Fulton and Mr. Maxwell gave their evidence. Since then Mr. MacLean has had the opportunity of considering much more fully Mr. Fulton's scheme, and of considering the question of cost and the figures given by Mr. Fulton, with the result that Mr. MacLean shows, after making due allowance for the differences between Mr. Fulton's scheme and the alternative No. 2 scheme previously placed before the Commission by Mr. MacLean, that the cost of Mr. Fulton's scheme would be something like £400,000 instead of £200,000, and to that would have to be added a sum of £50,000 or thereabouts for the additional line between Palmerston North and Longburn. Well, the Commission, of course, if it comes to the conclusion that the officers of the Railway Department are all wrong, will say so without any hesitation ; but is there any material upon which such a finding could be made ? The