

222. I wanted something of that kind. You say that while the Massey Government was there you had no chance?—I did not say that.

223. Do you look upon the Rotorua-Taupo Railway as a rival to yours?—No. Again one cannot answer this question by "Yes" or "No." It is not a legitimate rival to us.

224. Do you look upon it as a future menace to your own district?—I do not, if the facts are investigated. It has to be ascertained what that line, from the Mokai district to the Rotorua-Taupo line, is going to cost; then, if the timber can be taken more cheaply to the Rotorua-Taupo line, it should be taken that way. We want to know—

225. I do not want a speech in reply to a simple question. I ask you again, If the Rotorua-Taupo Railway was built, would you consider it a menace to your own railway?—Not necessarily.

226. It would have no detrimental influence upon your railway?—Not necessarily.

227. *Mr. Lye.*] Have you at any time advocated the building of the Rotorua-Taupo Railway?—No.

228. In your evidence before the Commission of 1922 you did not advocate the immediate building of that line, but rather said that if the Government proposed building a standard line of railway, that the proposed line was the best available route?—That all the expert evidence I had seen was in favour of it. I relied upon that, as a business man.

229. Are you of opinion that if it is absolutely necessary to develop this pumice country it is immediately necessary to build a railway-line?—It depends upon the amount of capital you have available for the development of the country.

230. It depends upon the size of the scheme of land-settlement?—Yes.

231. You have referred to the Tongariro line. Would the Tongariro Railway have served extended areas in the pumice country?—Yes.

232. Would it compare favourably as regards results with the proposed Rotorua-Taupo line?—It would be a payable line from the start.

233. Would it go as far as the Rotorua-Taupo line from the point of view of settlement and development?—It would probably be better, because it would open up the whole of the lake district, and then the Tongariro line would connect with the Main Trunk system in the centre of the North Island.

234. Of the two proposals, I take it, you would favour the prosecution of the Tongariro line rather than the Rotorua-Taupo line?—Certainly. As a business proposition there is no comparison between them.

235. There would be a greater chance of an immediate and payable return from the Tongariro line than from Rotorua-Taupo?—Yes. On the Tongariro there is a certain profit, so far as any enterprise can be certain.

236. Is it absolutely essential to have a railway-line made immediately for the purpose of the development of this land?—Yes; you must have transport.

237. Would a good road serve the purpose, on the line of the Rotorua-Taupo Railway, in assisting the development of the land?—That is a question for experts. I am not an expert.

238. Would you consider that inability through shortage of finance to secure fertilizers is a greater factor in keeping back settlement than the building of a railway-line?—What is wanted is the fertilizers, and cheaper carriage of heavy goods.

239. Has the difficulty of finance been an important factor in keeping back settlement?—Yes.

240. Equally as much as the need of a railway?—The two things hang together.

241. *Mr. Makitanara.*] Has the country where your railway runs more native bush within reach than the Rotorua-Taupo line?—Yes. The advice of our experts is to the effect that there is no indigenous timber that can be profitably dealt with by the Rotorua-Taupo line in so far as the west side is concerned. I do not know anything about the east side.

242. Have you been over the Rotorua-Taupo route?—Not the railway route, but I have been by road.

243. Did you notice any native bush there at all?—There are clumps of native bush all about, but they are not millable propositions, and would not justify tramway or railway extension.

244. In other words, it would not be profitable for all the native bush there is at present?—Certainly not.

245. How does your soil compare with the soil along the Rotorua-Taupo route?—From my own experience in watching soils, and from the advice I have from farmers, the soil in Reporoa is better than anything in our country. It is the same at Hautu. Those two areas are mature country. Our district and the other areas on the tramway are not mature in the same degree. The expert evidence is that what they call the plant-foods are available in the pumice soil, but you need fertilizers, and turning them to the atmosphere, before these become available. That, according to Mr. Aston, has a double advantage—that you can get a payable crop, and at the same time develop your soil.

246. Would you consider that the freight under present conditions—I am not speaking of the probable future conditions, but taking your bush and your soil, and leaving your own country out—would give any likelihood, in the event of the Rotorua-Taupo Railway being constructed—would give any likelihood of such revenue as would meet the expenditure?—Certainly not, unless they go on with the development scheme at the same time.

247. Never mind about the development scheme: I am speaking of the facts as they are?—All our experience is against it.

248. *Mr. Jenkins.*] Is not the Tongariro area about the same distance from the Main Trunk line as the proposed line would be? Is it reasonable to assume that the cost of building it would be no greater?—The Rotorua-Taupo route is longer. About eight or ten miles of the Tongariro line goes through a gorge, and would be expensive construction. The rest would be as easy as the other country.