

is reached at about 8.30 in the evening. This arrangement is convenient, and a railway service via the proposed new line would present no advantages over it from a service point of view. It is true that at present rates the through fare from Westport, say, to Christchurch by rail would be less than the fare by road from Westport to Greymouth, thence by rail from Greymouth to Christchurch. Experience has shown, however, that in such cases the service cars can adjust their fares to approximate very closely to the through rail fare, and that the advantage of service and established practice is a very material factor. The Board is therefore of opinion that passenger traffic would not afford a substantial contribution to the revenue from the line.

The principal classes of goods traffic that may be expected to pass over the line are coal, live-stock, and general merchandise. The indications are that the coal traffic would be largely confined to screened coal for stations in Canterbury. Other classes of coal from the present mines are not likely to be diverted to the railway to any substantial extent. In regard to the possibilities of new coal-measures being opened up on the route of the line, the Board is not sanguine that any considerable development in this direction would take place within a reasonable time. The mines that are already opened in New Zealand would be in keen competition with any new ventures; and, as the coal-market has shown a marked shrinkage since the development of electrical power, the successful opening-up of new coal-measures is likely to be slow. Moreover, the fact requires to be taken into consideration that there are very extensive coal deposits already served by railway-lines that are quite sufficient to meet the present and prospective demand for coal for many years to come. Viewing the coal position from a national standpoint, there is no necessity for the construction of the proposed line.

There has been a suggestion that the linking-up of the Westport district with the main South Island railway system would enable Westport coal to be railed to Lyttelton for the purpose of bunkering ships. The best information that can be obtained is that there is no likelihood of the development of any substantial business in this direction. Other possible traffic would be live-stock, but this would be practically confined to butchers' requirements in the Westport district. These requirements are at present met principally by sea from the North Island, but it is probable that if the line were constructed supplies would be drawn by rail from Canterbury. This traffic is, however, limited. Figures which were recently taken out indicate that it would amount to approximately three trucks of live-stock per week.

The traffic in general merchandise would be towards Westport, and the indications are that a fair proportion of it would pass over the new line. The great bulk of this traffic at present comes into Westport by sea, but with the institution of road services operating from Inangahua in conjunction with the railway there has been a development of general merchandise traffic from Canterbury into the Westport district by rail and road. In view of this development, it appears probable that some portion of the traffic now entering Westport by sea would be diverted to the proposed line. It is difficult, however, to forecast to what extent this would take place. It was urged that if the line between Inangahua and Westport were completed the same increase in traffic as was experienced on the Otira line might be expected. The differences in the distances from the points on the Greymouth line and on the Westport line, respectively, to Christchurch make the position of the Westport line much less favourable than that of the Greymouth line in relation to competition between Westport and Christchurch, and the Board concludes that there would not be an increase in traffic by rail from Westport to Canterbury such as was experienced in the case of the Greymouth line. So far as transport costs are concerned, the sea route would have the advantage, while, on the other hand, from a service point of view the advantage would rest with the railway. It may be quite safely concluded that competition by sea would continue, and that this would operate as a factor limiting the traffic in general merchandise that would pass over the railway-line.