

SESS. II.—1879.  
NEW ZEALAND.

---

PETITION OF RESIDENTS AND OTHERS INTERESTED  
IN THE HURUNUI, CENTRAL AMURI, AND UPPER  
AWATERE DISTRICTS.

*Presented by Mr. Saunders, 21st October, and ordered to be printed, 29th October, 1879.*

To the Honorable the Speaker and the Honorable the Members of the House of Representatives of the Colony of New Zealand, in Parliament assembled.

THE PETITION OF THE UNDERSIGNED RESIDENTS AND OTHERS INTERESTED IN THE HURUNUI, CENTRAL AMURI, AND UPPER AWATERE DISTRICTS.

HUMBLY SHOWETH,—

THAT, in "The Railways Construction Act, 1878," provision was made for the construction of a railway from Amberley to Brunnerton, to connect the East and West Coasts of the Middle Island, the computed distance between these two stations being 110 miles.

That, in "The Immigration and Public Works Appropriation Act, 1878," a sum of £30,000 was appropriated for the commencement of the line from Amberley, and, in terms with such appropriations contracts have been let and are now being proceeded with from Amberley to the Waikari Valley, over a distance of fifteen miles, and this section of the line, or the greater part of it, may reasonably be expected to be opened for traffic in the course of a few months.

That, in carrying forward the railway further to the west from Waikari, there are differences of opinion as to what would be the best route to adopt through the central chain of Alps, but the two routes most in favour is one by the Hurunui and Hope Saddle, called the "Hope route," and another by the Waiau and Hope, or Doubtful Saddle, known as the "Hammer Plains route."

That both these routes have been thoroughly examined and reported upon by Mr. Foy, an engineer of high standing in the employment of the Government, during the years 1876 and 1877, whose reports upon the same have been laid before your honorable House in 1876 and 1878.

That, on the second reading of the Railways Construction Bill in last session, the Hon. the Minister for Public Works proposed that the question of route should be left open until the Engineer in Charge, Middle Island, could make a personal examination of the country and the various lines proposed. At the same time he submitted to the House a statement showing the sums proposed to be spent upon the line from year to year till the railway was completed.

That, from a report of the Engineer in Charge, Middle Island, of date 21st June last, your petitioners observe with much surprise that he has not confined himself to an examination of the various proposed routes between Amberley and Brunnerton, but he has gone into the whole general question of railway connection between the East and West Coasts, and has recommended lines from Otago and Canterbury to other parts of Westland which are in no wise related to the Amberley-Brunnerton line sanctioned by the Legislature.

That your petitioners have no wish to enter into the engineering and economic reasons given by the Engineer in Charge for his recommending that the trunk lines from south to north and west should be suspended for a time, but they beg humbly to submit, for the favourable consideration of your honorable House, a few particulars in connection with the extent and capabilities of these districts—of Hurunui, Amuri, and Upper Awatere—in which the Crown and your petitioners are interested, which will speak for themselves, and which are, in your petitioners' opinion, of sufficient importance to justify the immediate continuation of the railway from the Waikari Valley to meet the railway now making from Brunnerton into the Grey Valley at Ahaura. By the table of statistics and map accompanying this petition it will be observed that the Districts of Hurunui, Central Amuri, and Upper Awatere form a portion of the intermediate country between Amberley and the Grey Valley.

That these districts comprise all the country northwards to Tarndale and Upper Awatere in Marlborough, and all the country from the watershed of the Grey basin and Amuri to within about ten miles from the coast on the east. This extensive tract of country, being cut off by ranges of hills from communication with the sea, has no other outlet or means of traffic but by road and railway. Ever since the gold discoveries on the West Coast, much of the meat supplies required there have gone from these districts by tracks which have been cut along the old Native passes in the watershed; and up to the present time it has been a generally recognized fact that the easiest and cheapest line to connect the East with the West Coast is by one of these passes referred to.

All the Engineers who have examined the country agree that the line from Amberley to Brunnerton would open up more good country for settlement than any other; but it was a question whether the "Hope route" or the "Hurunui Plains route" would be most for the general good, the former having in its favour a shorter distance between two points—Christchurch and Brunnerton; but the latter, although twenty or thirty miles longer, serving two objects—the connecting the West with the East, and at the same time opening up for settlement many times the quantity of good land than the other.

Upon this subject the Engineer in Charge remarks "that the Hanmer Plains route passes through the most good country of any of the West Coast lines, and in this respect it has a decided advantage; and also that the engineering difficulties are at the minimum, and the gradients as good as can be got." Mr. Foy also speaks in equally favourable terms of the country and of the proposed lines. And here your petitioners may be allowed to observe that, according to Mr. Foy's surveys and reports, he considers the best line to Cook Strait from the south would be from some station of this West Coast line in the Hurunui and Waiau Plains, by Green Hills to Kaikoura, and thence following the East Coast to Picton. This, however, is a question for the future, when the Cook Strait line is finally determined upon; and your petitioners merely allude to it now, as the Engineer in Charge has recommended another route, which, in the opinion of your petitioners, would not be of the same public benefit as the one recommended by Mr. Foy. Nearly the whole of the land in these districts of Hurunui and Amuri has for many years past, and is still, occupied as sheep and cattle runs; but a large portion is fit for farming purposes, and would long ere this have been cultivated had there been better communication with markets.

Of the land within these districts, 992,335 acres under lease and license to tenants belong to the Crown, out of which 34,000 acres are estimated to be fit for cultivation, the remainder being pastoral country only. Of the rest of the land, 402,940 acres belong to private individuals, 161,000 acres of which could be cultivated, the remainder also being pastoral land only.

The live-stock within the district consists of 586,658 sheep, 1,162 horses, and 2,636 cattle.

The assessed value of the land for land-tax purposes, exclusive of improvements, has been set down at £1,091,488.

In consequence of expensive land-carriage these districts have been necessarily held in large individual blocks for pastoral purposes only, and the chief produce is wool and tallow, and the surplus stock is, in most instances, boiled down and wasted.

The few thousand acres which have already been put into cultivation for the local supplies of the district give ample proof of the fertility and corn-growing capabilities of the soil and favourableness of the climate.

Amongst the many reasons for carrying on the line to Brunnerton, through the centre of these districts, may be summarized the following: The line would connect the two sides of the Island at a point which is nearest to Brunnerton from the East Coast, and where there is the most good land for settlement on both sides of the watershed. For at least twenty-five or thirty miles from Waikari it would be easy of construction, as it is all through flat country, and the cost would be at the minimum, with the exception of a bridge across the Hurunui River. The Hanmer Plains Reserve and Hot Springs, so favourably spoken of in Dr. Haast's report accompanying this petition, which belong to the Government, would be utilized, and attract large numbers of people, if there were better means of access to them. The land on all sides for many miles from Waikari is good agricultural land, and would be brought into more profitable account than what it is used for now, and a paying traffic would be developed, which would not be done if the railway were to stop at the Waikari, or taken to Brunnerton by the Hope route. It would lead also to a much larger internal traffic, as the one district could supply the other with what each is in need of—cheap food on the one hand, and timber and coal on the other.

For the above and many other reasons your petitioners hope that your honorable House will take their petition under your favourable notice, and that, in the further carrying of the line from Waikari to Brunnerton, you will sanction its being taken through the centre of the Hurunui and Waiau Plains by the Hanmer Plains route.

And your petitioners will ever pray, &c.

September, 1879.

J. CRACROFT WILSON, Culverden,  
(and 405 others.)