

PALMERSTON NORTH, FRIDAY, 12TH MARCH, 1880.

MR. HOWARD JACKSON sworn and examined.

81. *The Chairman.*] You are chief surveyor of the Feilding Settlement?—Yes.

82. We are led to believe that you wish to offer some evidence on behalf of the Feilding Corporation?—Yes.

83. I think it would be most convenient that you should, in the first place, make a statement of what it is your wish to advance?—I have brought a plan with me [produced] which shows the different routes of the railway; and I particularly wish to call the attention of the Commission to the producing part of the present line, and to the producing capabilities of the projected lines.

84. Would you point out generally the character of the country, and say whether it could be largely settled, and the traffic grow in consequence?—The construction of the piece of line from Bunnythorpe to Ashhurst affects most directly some 40,000 acres of land. The upper part of the Fitzherbert Block, part of the Manchester Block, the Wanganui Harbour Board Endowment, and any land north of the Wanganui Harbour Board Endowment, would be affected—in fact, any land lying between the two rivers, Oroua and Pohangina. The line is a part of any possible connection between the two coasts, and there was an offer made by the Feilding Corporation to the Government during the last session to construct it on a guarantee of interest on the outlay of 4 per cent. There is a population already at Ashhurst of some thirty or forty families. The area of 40,000 acres I have mentioned is all available for settlement, and is good land. There is another block of 20,000 acres in the immediate vicinity across the river, carrying a large quantity of very fine totara. It is impossible to utilize this timber until there is a cheaper mode of transit. The actual profitable part of the present line is between Palmerston and the Rangitikei River. I may state that the Wanganui line stands third on the list of railways as to the actual working results. That is attributable to the timber traffic between Palmerston and the Rangitikei River. The return for the four weeks ending 29th February at the Feilding Station was £610. There are 140,000 acres of land in the Otamakapua Block, lately purchased by the Government. There is another block of 7,000 acres adjoining—the Kiwitea Block—the natural outlet of which is Feilding. The value of that block would be materially affected by its distance from the port of Wellington. There is no profitable timber on the line from Masterton to Woodville, although the land is of good quality. There is a large quantity of totara north of the Wanganui Harbour Board Endowment, and also on the slopes of the Ruahine, in the immediate vicinity of Ashhurst.

85. Have you any personal knowledge of the country south of Foxton—between Porirua and Foxton?—Yes. Mr. Stewart can furnish the Commission with information as to the area of land between Foxton and Paikakariki. I have gone through the figures with him, and we agree as to their correctness. The main characteristic of the country is a ridge of sandhills at the sea, then a belt of remarkably good land inside that, and then the foot-ridges of the main range.

86. Speaking approximately, what would you suppose might be the average width of that belt of good land?—I should say two miles is a low estimate of the breadth of the belt of good land.

87. *Mr. Wright.*] You spoke of a block of 40,000 acres available land, and another block of 20,000 acres good totara land available for settlement: is that Crown land or freehold land?—Some of it is Crown land.

88. What proportion do you estimate is Crown land?—It is all freehold land.

89. You spoke of 20,000 acres of good totara bush across the river, as an additional block: is that Crown land?—The greater part of it is Crown land.

90. You stated it was impossible to utilize the timber without cheaper carriage—cheaper carriage to where?—To any point of junction with the existing line of railway.

91. The construction of the line from Bunnythorpe to Ashhurst would cheapen the cost of transit?—Yes.

92. You spoke of the returns of the Wanganui line as standing third in point of productiveness of all the railways in the colony: how do you arrive at that conclusion?—By the returns as published by the Traffic Department.

93. You refer simply to the published percentages?—Yes; and I am aided by my actual knowledge of the amount of money actually received at the different stations between Palmerston and Halcombe.

94. You are aware, of course, that the percentage signifies nothing by itself unless placed side by side with the capital cost of the railway?—Yes.

95. And it was not in reference to the capital cost that you made that statement?—No.

96. Does the timber from Feilding go principally to Wanganui or to Foxton?—To Wanganui—seven-eighths of the total product.

97. Can you say whether it is for consumption in the district or for export?—The greater part, I believe, is for consumption in the district.

98. You spoke of a block of 140,000 acres—one of the latest of the Government purchases: is the purchase complete, or is that one of the Native blocks on which the Government have paid a deposit?—They have paid a deposit—a very large one. I cannot tell the exact sum. The last payment was not made, on account of an accident to Mr. James Booth, the Native Land Purchase Commissioner. The main road running through the block was reported by Mr. Carruthers as being the natural outlet for the interior.

99. *Mr. Reid.*] Is there any considerable proportion of open land in this country, or is it all bush?—I might safely say that it is entirely bush. There are petty openings.

100. What is the average height of the hills above the valleys?—I should say the average height would be forty feet. It is a rolling, undulating country, and not abruptly broken.

101. *Mr. Clark.*] You consider the land now referred to, when cleared of stump, fit for agriculture?—Yes, quite so.

102. Do you know if there is any valuable timber on the eastern slope of the Ruahine, north of Woodville?—Judging by similar country on the same line of range, I should say there is not.