

103. Then you can give no decided opinion as to whether, in the event of a railway being opened between Bunnythorpe and Woodville, a trade for timber with the Napier District would spring up with the country you have just referred to?—I think there is no doubt there would be a large trade at once opened up.

104. *The Chairman.*] Can you say whether a trade would spring up with Napier for timber?—Yes, a trade would spring up.

105. The timber in the Manawatu District would find its way to Napier?—It would be the source of supply for Napier.

106. And would, in your opinion, be a very large trade?—Yes, a very large and directly profitable trade.

107. *Mr. Wright.*] Are you aware of the existence of the Seventy-mile Bush between Woodville and Napier, and, if so, do you think that that district is incapable of supplying Napier?—I think there is not a sufficient quantity of marketable timber in the Seventy-mile Bush to supply the Napier District. I know of one very valuable totara bush at Tahorite. That is the only totara I know on that side. The greater portion of the Seventy-mile Bush is so broken as to be unavailable until the country is opened and made available by the construction of a railway and roads, and placed in the position which the Manawatu District occupies.

108. Do you consider that the valuable timber on the eastern slope of the Ruahine could not be sent to Napier with advantage and profit?—I cannot answer that question.

Mr. JOHN T. STEWART sworn and examined.

109. *The Chairman.*] What is your official designation?—I am District Engineer of the Public Works.

110. I believe you are acquainted with the character of the country between Paikakariki and Foxton?—Yes.

111. Will you be good enough to tell us what your opinion of that country is as a country fit for settlement?—I have a map here which will perhaps assist you. [Map produced.] There is a belt of light sandy soil—used for grazing purposes chiefly—running along the sea-coast. The area is about 40,000 acres. It is in the hands of Natives, settlers, and under negotiation to Government for sale by the Natives. Portions of it are used by the Natives for their cultivations—that is, the better quality of it. Inland of that light-soil belt there is a belt of very good land, the most part of it bushland, comprising an area of about 50,000 acres. That land is also in the hands of the Natives, settlers, and under negotiation for sale to the Government. Inland of that, on the slopes and the lower spurs of the hills, the Government, I believe, have got most of the land. The Government purchases extend a long way inland upon the main ranges. About 40,000 acres in the front slopes would be available for settlement as second-quality land. It is covered with bush. The proposed railway runs through the belt of good land described as lying between the hills and the front light-soil country. The proposed railway from Paikakariki northwards for 30 miles would be under the average cost of construction. It then reaches the Wereroa clearing, about one mile inland of the Horowhenua Lake. This is the point of proposed divergence of the line to Foxton and to Palmerston North. The branch to Foxton is between 10 and 11 miles long. Three miles of it is through good bush land. Four miles more is through light sandy soil. This part of the line is of easy construction. It then crosses the Manawatu River, where a large bridge would be required to be constructed, with an opening for navigation. Then there is 2 miles of heavy construction over a swamp liable to floods. It reaches Foxton Station in another mile. The branch to Palmerston North, leaving the same point of junction, would be 25 miles long to its point of junction with the present railway, about 4 miles below the Palmerston Station. This line would be probably of the average cost of construction, also requiring a large bridge over the Manawatu River. The land opened up from the junction by the Palmerston branch will consist of good land, in the hands of the Natives, settlers, and under negotiation for sale to the Government, of about 35,000 acres; and of additional land in the large swamp, which would be good when drained, consisting of 15,000 acres; and also of land on the lower slopes of the hills, of second quality, and covered with bush, consisting of about 30,000 acres. Thus there would be about 130,000 acres of the above different qualities of land opened up between Paikakariki and Foxton, and about 80,000 between Horowhenua and the crossing of the Manawatu River below Palmerston, making a total of about 210,000 acres. The difference of length of new lines requiring to be made between the point of junction at Horowhenua to Foxton and to Palmerston respectively would be  $14\frac{1}{2}$  miles.

112. *Colonel Pearce.*] When you speak of settlers' land, do you mean land held by them under Crown grant?—Partly so, and partly by the settlers who have purchased from the Natives. There is a portion between Paikakariki and Waikanae which was Crown land, sold to settlers long ago. The settlers have acquired certain blocks by private purchase from the Natives.

113. Has the Crown any land at all for sale with a complete title?—I could not say, except that they have land in the Township of Fitzherbert, which is referred to in the previous statement in regard to the Palmerston branch.

114. That is Crown land?—Yes.

115. *Mr. Wright.*] Can you say, approximately, what is the total area of freehold land that would be opened up by the line of railway between Paikakariki and Palmerston—freehold, or bought from the Crown or from the Natives—land in the hands of the settlers?—I should think not more than 20,000 acres. That is merely an approximate estimate, as I have no data.

116. You spoke of a belt of good land between the hills and the sandhills: what is the character of the soil?—It is something like bush land—good, loamy soil, and there is a certain quantity of good timber on portions of it.

117. Is there not a very large proportion of it in the condition of swamp land, requiring to be drained?—Not much in that belt of good land. I have referred to the swamp land separately. There are swampy tracts in it, but they could be easily drained.

118. *Mr. Clark.*] Can you mention the approximate distance from Greatford to Foxton by Bulls and Sanson?—About 28 miles, of which  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles are already made.