

*Mr. Weston* : Of course you have the reports of several engineers upon the various routes, and I think Mr. Blair, reporting on Arthur's Pass, refers to the commercial value of the line. We have also Messrs. Thornton and Brown's surveys; and Mr. O'Connor's report also touches upon its commercial worth. It occurs to me, and to the members of the deputation, that if you should think fit to inspect that line, with all those data before you, we should be very glad on your return to supply you with further information, which may assist you in estimating its business worth, and so forth. We are not prepared with a bundle of statistics at this moment, as it was only a day or two back that we heard you would be here very shortly. Unless you were prepared to make a recommendation upon it for the consideration of the Government and of Parliament, it would be scarcely worth our while to take the very great trouble that the preparation of these statistics would give us, or indeed to trouble you to read them.

*Mr. Howland* : I understood you to say that the Commission would be prepared to receive information on any of the lines, and would report on the information, but not on the lines; that you could not report on any line that was not marked out as a trunk line.

*The Chairman* : I have stated that the duties of the Commission were confined absolutely to reporting upon the best route for a trunk line to connect Canterbury with some northern port in Cook Strait; that the West Coast line, properly so called, was not included in our Commission, and would be entirely out of our jurisdiction. I may say moreover that the West Coast line proper has not been, so far as I understand, contemplated by the Legislature at all, inasmuch as no specific appropriation has been made for a West Coast line. That being the case, before the mind of the Legislature was known on the subject, it might not be competent for the Government, except for the sake of collecting information on the subject, to issue a Commission for the purpose of determining that question. What we have to do is outside of that. It is possible that, in exercising the jurisdiction which has been confided to us, you might be able to show us that it would be exceedingly desirable to take the line northwards on the west side of the range. I think, if that could be accomplished, the interests on the West Coast would be very considerably promoted thereby. At any rate, I think it would be worth while to get those persons interested in the subject to assist us in the way proposed by the resolution of the committee of the League, by giving us all the information and statistics to show that such a deviation was desirable. Once the railway was made through the best available part of the ranges on the West Coast, all the rest would follow as population increased and the necessities of the districts arose. No doubt Parliament would take care that the interests of the West Coast would not be neglected in the future as they have not been in the past. Members have hitherto been active enough in the discharge of their duties in protecting the interests of their constituents, and no doubt in the future there will be opportunities of getting something more done. If so much could be done, and if it could be shown to us that this portion of the West Coast line could properly be regarded as part of the trunk line northwards, a great deal of that which the West Coast people advocate might be attained. It is in that direction, I think, it would be wise for the deputation to act. They should apply themselves to that particular point, and give us such information as will help us to come to a proper decision on that subject.

*Mr. Howland* : I understand that the Commission would be prepared to receive information in regard to a line which is considered a main trunk line—any information regarding the West Coast line.

*The Chairman* : We must not fence with words. I have endeavoured to make myself understood. The Commission have no sentiment, no prejudice or preconceived opinion upon any possible line. We seek to do the best we can, and we shall feel obliged to any one who will render us assistance so as to enable us to come to a proper conclusion. I shall be very plain in saying that the West Coast line proper is entirely outside our jurisdiction. We have nothing to say to it. There is no provision for making it, and it cannot be made just now.

*Mr. Button* : You have to report on the way to get to Cook Strait.

*The Chairman* : Exactly.

*Mr. Inglis* : I presume that if we could put before you information regarding the East Coast line to show that the probable traffic in that direction would be extremely small, whereas another route might be pointed out which would bring a certain amount of traffic very much in excess of that on the East Coast, you would be prepared to receive any information with regard to that other line.

*The Chairman* : We would be happy to receive such information from you.

*Mr. Inglis* : With regard to the East Coast line, the general opinion in this part of the Island is that there cannot be any paying traffic upon it for many years to come. With regard to the line direct by the Hammer Plains and by the Tophouse, as to the engineering difficulties of course we know very little, but at all events it is known to be a somewhat impracticable line, inasmuch as it is subject to snow to a very great extent, and that the nature of the country itself is not such as would be likely to produce any trade whatever. Then, on the other hand, leaving the third route, which is merely a slight alteration of the East Coast line, there is the route to Reefton which I understand has been proposed as far back as 1873 or 1874. This is supposed to start from the Red Post, as it is called, on the Waiau, go up the Waiau, and over one or other of the saddles, and find its way to Reefton itself. If the League can show that along a considerable part of that route there is a great quantity of timber, coal, gold, and minerals of all kinds, which would be carried by the line and produce a traffic, then I presume it would not be unreasonable for the League to expect that the Commission would receive such information in the direction of connecting Christchurch with Cook Strait. I know something of the route myself, having been over a considerable part of it, and by getting to Reefton we meet the railway which is proposed to go to Nelson; and at the Tophouse, if funds are available, there will be no difficulty in connecting with Blenheim. We are narrowed down very much to this position: that if we can show that there is a route that practically takes us north the Commission will be prepared to receive all the information we can give them on the subject.

*The Chairman* : Certainly.

*Mr. Inglis* : I shall be glad to help the Commission in any way, and I can do so by producing the evidence of gentlemen acquainted with the country to show that a direct route to Tophouse is quite