

be more traffic and general benefit if the terminus could be brought nearer to the settled agricultural country, and by the extension of the line to the crossing of Bowyer's Creek the agricultural centre of Mount Somers is best served, and at the same time the line would be conveniently placed for the carriage of coal, limestone, and timber either to the proposed terminus or to the station at Cavendish, which is the terminus at present.

It appears from evidence given to the Commission that the present line was originally laid out through the forks of the Ashburton, which is pretty thickly settled, and is mostly land of good quality. It was diverted to the south bank of the south branch of the Ashburton River by the advice of the County Council as a matter of economy to save expensive crossings of the rivers, but chiefly on account of the high prices charged by settlers in the Forks for the land which was required for the line. If, at the upper end of it, the line had crossed over into the Mount Somers District the route would have been quite satisfactory, because in its present position it can be made accessible to the country of the Upper Hinds, which would not be possible if it were placed in the Forks, and settlers in the Forks are too near to the Town of Ashburton to make use of the line.

The evidence showed that the present terminus was very much out of the way for the Mount Somers District, and owners of produce often preferred to cart direct to Ashburton rather than take the backward direction and uphill road leading to the station of Anama; while other parts of the line were almost inaccessible, from the nature of the rivers to be crossed to get at it. It seems strange that the railway, after coming so many miles towards the district, should still have the traffic on the roads to compete against it, and I am inclined to believe that the awkward position of the terminus, the want of accommodation at the station, together with the proximity of the Town of Ashburton, and the chance that carters may get a return load, often determine the choice of carriage in favour of carting; and, that being the case, I am of opinion that, if the line were continued to Bowyer's Crossing, and a shed provided to house goods, there would be much less carriage by carts, and the traffic of the line would increase correspondingly.

The area of country which this position would serve conveniently is shown on the accompanying map, and some statistics of land, population, and products, submitted to the Commission by Mr. Hugo Friedlander, is attached to this report. From a table submitted in evidence at Mount Somers it will be seen that there are about five hundred settlers, holding 43,326 acres, of which 7,004 acres are in grass, 3,605 acres in turnips, 2,825 acres in wheat, and 13,613 acres not yet cultivated, total, 27,047 acres of arable land, and 16,279 acres of pastoral land, which includes 5,465 acres of bush; it is also estimated that there are 146 acres of mineral land containing coal or stone.

Mr. Friedlander estimates that there are about nineteen thousand acres capable of yielding over twenty-three bushels of wheat per acre, and the Tinwald line last season carried 34,892 bushels of wheat, 23,540 bushels of oats, and 1,356 bushels of barley, chiefly the product of this district.

In addition to the above resources there are 5,465 acres of forest in private hands, and 8,750 acres of Government bush reserve. The former is a fairly good bush of black birch, and contains a supply of timber suitable for building, fencing, and firewood, that may last for several years, and the land when cleared will produce grass, turnips, and oats. The Government bush has good timber on it, but it is much damaged by fire; nevertheless it still contains a considerable quantity of inferior timber fit for fencing and firewood, for which purposes there is a large demand.

Limestone of good quality, both for building purposes and for burning as quicklime, is found all along the foot of the Alford Hills, and coal crops out in many places between the Rakaia and South Ashburton Rivers, and even beyond it towards the Rangitata.

I was not able to form an estimate of the probable traffic that would be carried by the railway if it were extended to Bowyer's Creek, but I am of opinion that it will considerably exceed the present traffic on this branch. The progress of