

at that time?—No; that was the first estimate given upon anything like information. The next is embodied in the County Commissioner's report, and was £1,180,000. There is an estimate of £500,000 to Middlemarch in 1887.

*The Chairman:* I think it would be useful to the Committee if the witness were to describe the country through which the line passes.

*Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson:* Also if he would give his opinion as to the nature and amount of the traffic likely to pass over the line.

*Witness:* Starting from the chain of hills which is on the edge of the Taieri Plain, the line crosses the plain for four miles. That is the easy, flat country. From thence to the twenty-third mile it is all gorge. We go over a saddle in getting into the Taieri watershed proper from the Taieri Plain. This saddle is not very high—it is about 450ft. Then we go into the Taieri Valley and follow the river. We next come to Deep Stream, which is twenty miles from Chain Hills. Then the line gradually rises to the Sutton when it gets on to the flat, and so continues thence to Hyde Hill. Within three or four miles of Hyde—about the fifty-fifth mile—the line is quite flat. Then we come upon six or eight miles of rough country, but nothing like the gorge below. This rough country brings us near to the Taieri Lake. There may be some ten miles of rough country, but it is comparatively easy when considered in regard to the more difficult country through which the line passes. This brings us on to the Maniototo Plain, which extends from about the seventieth to the ninetieth mile, which is the highest point of the line. Speaking from memory it—the head of the Rough Ridge—is about 1,900ft. above the sea-level. We then drop gradually down the Ida Valley. As we leave it we meet with a curious break in the Ragged Range, which is called Poolburn Gorge—about three miles of rough country, but nothing compared to that in the Taieri Gorge below. This brings us to the Lauder and on to the Manuherikia Valley or Plain: This valley has a considerable fall, and leads to Alexandra and the Clyde, Clyde being 450ft. above the sea-level. From Clyde to Cromwell, thirteen miles, we go through another bit of gorge, but nothing very serious. A little distance above Cromwell we open on a flat country again, which continues all the way to Hawea. To all intents and purposes the worst part of the line is finished now. The other portion will be under the ordinary average of cost in New Zealand. The part that we have passed through and finished is greatly above it, though not quite so bad as the ten miles from Port Chalmers to Blueskin. There was a large quantity of rock-cutting to be done. The country on the western side of the Taieri Gorge is a plateau 900ft. or 1,000ft. above the railway. It is comparatively flat, and so also is a portion on the eastern side, the Silverstream back country. These flats are, however, at a considerable elevation, about 1,400ft. above the sea-level. The country around Middlemarch is about 700ft. or 800ft. above the sea-level. The Maniototo country is somewhat higher. Lake Taieri is nearly 1,000ft. above the sea. The Manuherikia Valley is low, the highest point being Rough Ridge. At Lake Hawea the line terminates, at an elevation of about 800ft.

204. *Mr. J. McKenzie.]* What do you say of the Hindon country?—The Hindon country is about 1,000ft. above the level of the line. We have made a very good road there. The distance is only three miles and a half from the line to the township.

205. Would you have a station at this road?—Yes.

206. That would give access to the Hindon country?—Yes.

207. As far back as Shand's country it would bring produce down?—Yes; possibly it would.

208. With reference to the state of the works, do I understand you that the whole of the formation is finished up to the thirty-three miles?—Yes; and the whole of the bridging of the line will soon be completed. In fact, in a month or two the rails will be laid across the Taieri River. The whole of the bridge-masonry is in progress, and it is all finished to Deep Stream. The superstructure is also in progress, and finished to that point. Beyond that, the only work requiring to be put in hand is the superstructure of nine bridges and some platelaying—that is, between Deep Stream and the thirty-three miles.

209. *Mr. Ormond.]* What is the amount required to finish it?—£52,000.

210. *Mr. Whyte.]* That is, there is still £52,000 to be expended to get to the thirty-three miles?—Yes.

211. *Hon. Mr. Ballance.]* Does that include permanent-way?—No; exclusive of permanent-way.

212. *Mr. Jones.]* What would be the probable cost of the work to Sutton if it had to be done now?—It could not be done any cheaper than it has been done. The "unemployed" work was done remarkably cheap. It was all, or nearly all, piecework. It is the cheapest work that we have got done. We had at one time, I think, eight hundred men engaged on it, and only 3 per cent. of the men did day-work, so that the bulk of the work has been done by the piece.

213. *Mr. R. Thompson.]* Then, suppose the Government were to call for tenders now, it could not be done for less money?—No.

214. *Mr. O'Callaghan.]* Not even in the present state of the labour-market?—No.

215. Does it interfere at all with mining, or the rest of the land from Middlemarch upwards?—No, I think not. I do not think there is more than one place in the Taieri Valley where the line comes near to the mines.

216. *Hon. Mr. G. F. Richardson.]* That applies only to the railway-line itself?—That is so.

217. Would you tell the Committee what idea you have formed as to the probable traffic-requirements of the district?—My notion as to the line was that for many years it ought to stop at Taieri Lake. Then, after stopping there until settlement should have advanced, it should go on to Manuherikia and stop there for an indefinite period. I think the returns would mainly depend upon settlement. There would be a certain amount of tourist traffic; but the settlement of these plains will determine the result as to the general return.

218. You think that it should have been taken to Taieri Lake?—Yes. My idea was that the first stage should be the Taieri Lake, which would bring it on to the Maniototo Plains.

219. You mean for seventy or seventy-five miles?—Yes. Afterwards you could go on to Lauder,