

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

# RAILWAYS COMMITTEE:

REPORT AND EVIDENCE ON THE PETITION OF J. KERSE AND OTHERS *RE* WAIPAHI-  
HERIOT RAILWAY EXTENSION.

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*Report brought up 22nd August, 1901, and ordered to be printed.*

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## ORDERS OF REFERENCE.

*Extracts from the Journals of the House of Representatives.*

WEDNESDAY, THE 3RD DAY OF JULY, 1901.

*Ordered*, "That a Committee be appointed, consisting of ten members, to examine into and report upon questions relating to the railways, with power to call for persons and papers; five to be a quorum: the Committee to consist of Mr. Flatman, Mr. Lawry, Mr. Massey, Mr. Morrison, Mr. McGuire, Mr. R. McKenzie, Mr. G. W. Russell, Mr. Tanner, Mr. J. W. Thomson, and the mover."—(Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.)

TUESDAY, THE 16TH DAY OF JULY, 1901.

*Ordered*, "That the petition of Charles Kerse (No. 206) be referred to the Railways Committee."—(Mr. T. MACKENZIE.)

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## REPORT.

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No. 206.—Petition of C. KERSE and 600 Others, of Dunrobin, North Otago.

PETITIONERS pray that the Heriot Railway Extension be carried by Ross's survey to a point suitable to the whole district.

I am directed to report that the Committee recommends that this petition be referred to the Government for consideration, and, together with the report and evidence thereon, be printed; but, as the subject-matter of the petition involves a question of public policy, the Committee has no further recommendation to make.

22nd August, 1901.

R. MCKENZIE,  
Chairman.

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

(Mr. R. McKENZIE, Chairman.)

THURSDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 1901.

CHARLES KERSE, Farmer, residing at Dunrobin, Otago, examined on oath.

*Witness*: I am one of the petitioners in the matter of this railway extension, and the acquisition of Moa Flat by the Government. I am sorry that such a plan of the proposed line as I saw at the draughtsman's office is not produced here. I have made repeated applications to have it produced, but have failed. It would have explained our position more clearly. However, we are here to support this petition from residents of Dunrobin and the surrounding districts. We wish the line of railway to follow the survey made by Ross, which has from time to time been urged by the petitioners. To begin at the very beginning, I must say that this affair commenced about eight years ago, after the passing of the Land for Settlements Act. It was thought then by acquiring the Moa Flat Estate, and putting this railway through it, the districts would be benefited. Fruit-growers and producers generally would be provided with a means of carriage and communication which would be a great saving and convenience. To urge these advantages a very large petition was got up at this time and sent up to this House. A deputation was also sent to support the petition, with the result that in a very short time the Government issued instructions to have this railway surveyed; hence the survey made by Ross. There was not a word about any deviation. Agitation was kept up by the people until the session of 1898, when the first vote of £2,000 to commence this railway was passed. At the end of the session, however, it was found that the Authorisation Bill had not been passed, and consequently the vote lapsed. Right up to the session of 1899 the people were still agitating for the work, and urging the opening-up of the Moa Flat for settlement purposes, and thus provide homes for our increasing population and sufficient traffic revenue for the maintenance of the line. In 1899 another vote of £2,000 was passed for the work, with this proviso: that the land for settlement be acquired in the vicinity—presumably the Moa Flat, as no other land is available in the vicinity. That vote of £2,000 was carried, and during the same session the railway was authorised. The petitioners thought everything was going on all right, being led to believe that the Government were in treaty for the purchase of the Moa Flat Estate. After all, however, the estate was not acquired, and the vote fell through. This brings us up to the year 1900, when the people were still agitating for the acquisition of the Moa Flat Estate, and the construction of the railway through it. In the session of 1900 a vote of £5,000 was carried for the commencement of this work unconditionally, and during the following summer preparations were put in hand for the work. All this time, as I have said, the people believed it was the Moa Flat route which was to be taken. It transpired about Christmas, however, that the line had been authorised to Eddievale. It was only a report, however; nothing definite was known; but the people took the matter up very seriously in order to find out where the railway was really going. The only course open was to make application to the Minister for Public Works, and with that end in view a public meeting was convened. We had all along thought that the Moa Flat route was adopted or authorised, but on our communicating with the Public Works Department the Minister replied as follows:—

Public Works Department, Wellington, 21st November, 1900.

SIR,—

*Waipahi-Heriot Railway Extension.*

I am directed by the Minister for Public Works to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 14th instant, asking to what point it is intended to carry the extension of the above-mentioned line, and to state that the point to which the line is proposed to be carried, and to which it has been authorised by Parliament, is about six miles and a quarter from the Heriot Railway-station—namely, to Eddie's.

I have &amp;c.,

H. J. H. BLOW, Under-Secretary.

That reply increased the interest of residents in the district in the question, the result being the holding of another public meeting; but prior to the meeting we sent two gentlemen to Roxburgh to ascertain the feeling of the people there. We found that they were with us most unanimously in our efforts to have the Moa Flat Estate opened up and a railway put through. At the meeting held at Dunrobin a motion was passed setting up a vigilance committee and to generally work up the affair in the interests of the district concerned. And now the petition of these people is here before you. The petition was got up rather hurriedly, otherwise it would have been more numerously signed. You will notice that there are really two petitions; but one supports the other in condemning the extension of the line to Eddievale. The petitions support each other. We take exception to the line going by way of Eddievale, because that route is against the block vote of the settlers interested. A few more cases of fruit may possibly be carried by that route, but that would not materially increase the revenue, seeing that fruit is carried at such a cheap rate. It was very different with regard to farmers' produce and what the farmer wanted. From Rae's Junction to Roxburgh there was comparatively nothing for a railway to do. The traffic advantages are all in favour of the route which we are agitating for. I would like to read a short article from one of our local papers in support of this contention.

*The Chairman*: We cannot accept a newspaper article as evidence.

*Witness*: The newspaper article would only back up the opinions of the petitioners. As to when the petitioners first became aware that the extension of the railway to Eddievale had been authorised, I would like to quote a footnote which Mr. Matthews, secretary to the Roxburgh Rail-

way League, attached to a letter sent to me in reply to a communication. The footnote was as follows: "We have tried to find out where that point is, but so far have failed. People here who know the country say if they knew that they could tell which route the line must eventually come." That letter containing the footnote was dated "Roxburgh, 20th November, 1900." We maintain that Parliament against the evidence submitted by us sanctioned the wrong route for this line of railway, and we would further point out that there has been no counter-petition to that presented by us. We ask you to stay the railway where it is until the question as to the Moa Flat route, which we advocate, is settled.

1. *Mr. Flatman.*] I understand you to say that you do not wish this six miles of railway to go on?—Yes; we oppose its being proceeded with strongly.

2. Until the Moa Flat is bought by the Government?—Yes, that is so. The petition sets out the position.

*Mr. Bennet:* I would like to make a short statement. The witness has said that there would be nothing in the way of traffic at Rae's Junction: well, perhaps witness would be surprised if I tell him that 600 tons of stuff and four teams were kept going that way every morning. If the witness wants evidence as to this I can give it.

*Witness:* Where is this evidence?

*Mr. Bennet:* There has been considerable settlement round about Rae's Junction, and many tons of coal a week are being put out.

*Witness:* I am not aware of this.

*Mr. Bennet:* In the interest of the people of Roxburgh I cannot help but refute the statements of the witness, Mr. Kerse. I say that there is a large area of land at almost a lower altitude than Dunrobin which would not be fed except by running through Miller's Flat. The witness has said that there has never been a petition in favour of the line *via* Eddievale. Would he be surprised when I tell him that he himself signed such a petition sixteen years ago? What has the witness to say to that, I ask?

*Witness:* I do not remember ever signing a petition so worded. Circumstances have altered, but I assert that what I am telling you as to the respective advantages in this matter is correct.

3. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] The position you take up amounts to this: that you think the railway ought to go by way of the Moa Flat?—Yes; only if the estate is acquired.

4. Your object is to force the Government to purchase the Moa Flat Estate?—Not necessarily that.

5. Well, it seems to me that part 4 of your petition implies that; in your statement, too, you urged the desirability of opening the Moa Flat for settlement?—Yes, we urge that.

6. And the position you take up is that until the Moa Flat is purchased the proper thing is to make a railway a few miles and then wait for the estate to be purchased before finishing the line; Is that so?—Decidedly not. We say, as I have already said, that the people of Dunrobin and Eddievale have no complaint *re* railway accommodation, being only six to eight miles from Heriot Station. We say that by way of Eddievale practically only one family is benefited. There are only two or three other local people about Eddievale who would be slightly benefited, but there are many people close up to both sides of the proposed Eddievale terminus—lands adjoining, in fact—who sign against taking the line to Eddievale.

7. Is there as good land at Eddievale as at Moa Flat, do you think?—Yes, equally as good perhaps, but not as much.

8. What is the difference in the quantity?—I do not know; but it is easy to find that out if you have the map handy. The petition says there are 30,000 acres at Moa Flat, and I am prepared to back that up.

9. As far as I can understand, you ask the Government to go back on the legislation of 1890: you ask this Committee to recommend the Government to repeal the law in the Act of 1899 so that your wishes may be given effect to and another route selected?—Practically that is so?

10. *The Chairman.*] You want the Government to buy Moa Flat, and to make a railway through it?—That is the position.

11. Are you a farmer?—Yes, and I have been in the district about twenty-three years.

12. *Mr. Tanner.*] What did you mean when you said that £2,000 was spent on a survey?—I said that the £2,000 was to be expended on the making of the railway, not on a survey. The route had already been surveyed.

13. Where was that proviso to be found in any resolution of the House?—It is in *Hansard*. It was a statement to the effect that the £2,000 had been voted, but would not be expended unless land was acquired in the vicinity for settlement. The statement was made by the Minister for Public Works.

14. But there is other land for settlement about that part, is there not?—Not that I am aware of.

15. Is there any land fit for settlement in the whole district which might be served by the railway, whichever route was taken by it?—There may be some land, say, on the Teviot Station, but I am not acquainted with those parts so well.

16. Is Eddie's land fit for settlement?—Yes, certainly the greater part of it is; but that land is already settled, and only six miles from a railway-station.

17. And the route taken by the Government serves that land?—Yes.

18. *Mr. Blow* (Under-Secretary for Public Works).] What gave you the impression that the line would be taken in a direct course through Moa Flat?—Well, the people have been agitating for that for the last ten or twelve years, and the votes passed by the Government led the people to believe that this was to be the route.

19. You are aware that people in the colony often agitate for something which they do not get?—Perhaps so.

20. Did the formation of a railway league at Roxburgh lead you to conclude that the line should be a direct one, and to ignore the possibility of any other route?—I am not aware that and one came to such a conclusion. I do not hold that conclusion myself.

21. But you are endeavouring to show that either a vast engineering mistake has been made or that the route has been diverted from its original line?—Yes, I say that is the position.

22. Why do you say that is the position?—Well, it is an actual fact.

23. How can there be a diversion when there has been no pledge given?—There has been an implied promise. The route was surveyed at the instigation of the people, and two votes were granted for it, the people believing all the time that the direct route was to be taken.

24. What is there in the Appropriation Act to lead you to suppose that it would be a direct line?—I have already stated what the people had been doing for years in the matter, and also what the Government had done.

25. But the Government never said the route was to be in a direct line to Roxburgh?—Perhaps not. The people did not find out for some time which way the line was going.

26. Do you mean to say that although there were two leagues at work you did not find out which way the line was going until trains were running?—That is hardly the position. We did not find out which route had been authorised.

27. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] Has a survey ever been made for a railway through Moa Flat?—Yes.

*Mr. Blow:* That was only a trial survey.

28. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] When was that survey made?—I think about five or six years ago.

29. Is it not a fact that a trial survey was made before that?—Yes, twenty-three or twenty-five years ago.

30. You had reason to believe that if the line was made it would go that way?—Yes, we had every reason to believe so.

31. You have a good opinion of the Moa Flat Estate, and believe it is suitable for settlement?—Yes.

32. You think it so good, that the Government would be justified in purchasing it?—Yes.

33. Owing to the surveys made, and other things, led you to believe that, if the Government purchased this land, a railway to Roxburgh would run through it?—Yes.

34. And you believe that is the best thing that could be done?—It would be a blessing to the whole colony. It would be a payable line in every respect.

35. *Mr. Blow.*] Did I understand you to say that one reason which led you to assume that the line would be constructed by way of Moa Flat was that a trial survey had been made?—Yes, that was one reason.

36. Do you know that a survey of a very complete character was made as far as Eddie's?—Yes, but it was twenty-three or twenty-four years ago.

37. The better the survey, surely the better assumption?—The circumstances have very much altered.

38. Is the land of the Moa Flat more broken than the land about Eddie's?—I think it is scarcely so broken, if you mean the railway route.

39. Here is a plan of the section of the line to Eddie's: you will notice there are no tunnels, no bridges, no banks, and very few cuttings?—Yes, but that is only at Eddievale.

40. Now we deviate to the Moa Flat, and you see it is a great deal worse: yet you said that the Moa Flat was not quite so broken as Eddie's?—Yes, I think so, as far as the railway route is concerned.

41. Now, then, look at the plan again along the route you are advocating: here is a tunnel, here are banks of from 60 ft. to 90 ft., the 90 ft. cutting being one of the deepest in New Zealand; here, again, is a viaduct 90 ft. high, 600 ft. long, costing £17,000 or £25,000. All these are on the Moa Flat route. After seeing this plan do you change your opinion as to the respective merits of the two routes?—I think the comparison should be confined to the six miles and a half in question. You are putting the whole length of the line to Roxburgh as against a small section.

42. Then, as regards the quality of the land: I think you said the land at Eddie's was as good as that at Moa Flat?—I say there is land in the Moa Flat Estate equal to the land at Eddievale.

43. Is it as good as the land round Eddievale?—Not as a whole perhaps. Eddievale is mostly agricultural country.

44. You said something about the trade in fruit: is any fruit at all grown on the Moa Flat Estate?—I understand that some of the fruit-growers have leases on the top end of Moa Flat.

45. You cannot say from your own knowledge that any fruit is grown on the Moa Flat?—No, I cannot say that.

46. *The Chairman.*] You know the country about here?—Yes.

47. Is there a main road?—Yes.

48. Is it a fairly level road?—Yes, but only partly so. It is pretty level to Rae's Junction, being through a gorge; then there are some sharp rises.

49. But there are no big hills?—No; it is comparatively level all the way up the river.

49A. You said that the people down in your district knew that the Minister promised you this £2,000, and that the Moa Flat was to be purchased before going on with the railway?—He did not mention the Moa Flat Estate. Land for settlement in the vicinity was mentioned.

50. You said the people were not aware of the railway being authorised to Eddievale?—I never saw it in *Hansard* that it had been authorised to Eddievale. We were not aware of it until sixteen months afterwards.

WILLIAM FRASER, M.H.R., examined on oath.

*The Chairman* : Perhaps Mr. Fraser will make a statement?

*Witness* : I was in the room and heard the evidence given by Mr. Kerse with regard to the respective merits of the two lines from Heriot to Roxburgh *via* Eddievale or *via* Moa Flat, and no one who knows the country well would doubt that Mr. Kerse was correct in his statement. The route he advocates is much better than going by way of Rae's Junction, which is a longer route. I do not think the Committee quite understands why the people in the vicinity of Dunrobin regarded it as settled that the line was to go by way of Moa Flat. It is true that no proper survey had been made, but the route was always spoken of as going in a direct line through Moa Flat. The other route was never contemplated, to come round by Rae's Junction. The people in the district always thought of the line as a line to go through Moa Flat, because the hope and the idea of the people about there was that the Moa Flat property would be purchased by the Government. To go to Roxburgh by way of Eddievale is to go away from Roxburgh only to come back to it again. I know the country so well, having ridden over it scores of times. Mr. Blow, in asking questions of the witness just examined in regard to the relative difficulties of the two lines, referred only to a small section, on the one hand, as against a plan of the whole line, on the other. That was not a fair comparison, and I must say it though I am not so competent to judge of the respective merits as to cost of the lines as Mr. Blow. Mr. Kerse has told you that if the line is to be taken round by way of Eddievale the hope of the people round about Dunrobin to have the Moa Flat Estate purchased by the Government will be gone. The Government is not likely to buy that estate unless the railway is made to run through it. I have no personal interest in the matter either way, but the people of the district had asked me to come here and speak as to what I knew of the country and the position.

51. *Mr. Flatman.*] Were you asked to appear before the Waste Lands Committee yesterday in reference to the value of the Moa Flat Estate?—No.

52. *Mr. Blow.*] Would it not cost more to construct the line by the route you advocate?—I say that if you go through the Moa Flat you pass through a certain amount of country which would be settled, and would have produce to carry. Along the other route, from Roxburgh to Lawrence you must go through a gorge.

53. Do you know the position sufficiently well to compare the Moa Flat with the country affected by the extension to Lawrence?—I know there is better country between Roxburgh and Heriot.

54. But is not the country in some places about there exceedingly rough—so rough as to present great difficulties in the construction of a line?—I do not know that. I am expressing no opinion as to that. I am assuming that a practical route can be obtained.

55. You cannot have studied the plans?—No, I have not.

56. Well, here you see two alternatives are possible—one an extension from Lawrence to Roxburgh, and the other from Heriot: which is the most advantageous?—Certainly, the Heriot, because it would pass through country more suitable for settlement. I am assuming that a practical line at a moderate cost can be obtained.

57. Even if a line could be obtained at a moderate cost, it would still be an important consideration whether stations could be put there owing to the grade?—I know nothing about that.

58. Does the trade of Roxburgh at present gravitate towards Dunedin or Invercargill?—Towards Dunedin.

59. Would it not be terribly circuitous to take the route by way of Heriot?—It may be.

60. Well, I will tell you the difference. The distance from Roxburgh to Dunedin *via* Lawrence is ninety-seven miles, as compared with 131 miles *via* Heriot. Do you still think the Heriot route would be an advantage, seeing that thirty-four miles additional railage would have to be paid?—No; but better to have that than no railway communication.

61. Leave out of consideration for the moment the likelihood of the Lawrence line being constructed, and deal with the abstract question: If it is possible to construct a line of ninety-seven miles, is not such a line likely to suit the people better than a line of 131 miles?—Yes, certainly. It would suit the Roxburgh people, but it would not be the best thing for the colony.

62. Why not for the colony?—Because a line from Roxburgh to Heriot would pass through more closely settled country, which would eventually make the railway pay. What would pay the colony and what would suit the people of a district are two different things.

63. A line from Lawrence, being practically on the same land, would not that take the traffic as well?—Of course, I have not seen the plans, and am still going on the assumption that a practical line can be got on the other route.

64. *Mr. Bennet.*—Have you any idea of the extent of the traffic between Roxburgh and Lawrence?—There has been considerable traffic, but I could not say what it really amounts to.

JOHN EDDIE, Jun., examined on oath.

*Witness* : I am a surveyor and farmer, residing at Eddievale. If it had not been for the heading on the petition which has been presented to you I would not have been here now. The petition sets forth that the carrying of the line in question to Eddie's will be conferring a benefit on practically only one family. I suppose that is the Eddie family, and I assert that such a statement is not correct. I have been acquainted with the district affected by this petition for twenty-five years; I am thoroughly conversant with the whole of the district, and I may say that the agitation for this railway has been going on for twenty-three or twenty-four years. A survey was made from Kelso to Eddie's, and a petition was presented by the Tuapeka County Council praying the Government to carry on the railway to the point known as Eddie's. That would be about eighteen or twenty years ago, and from that time up to the present there have been requests urging the Government to continue the line to that point. The people in the district seeing that the Government would not

push the line on from Heriot's thought they would try Moa Flat as a lever to force the hand of the Government. With that end in view the petition was got up. I am still of the opinion that if the Government can purchase the estate at a price at which they can let it to the people, all good and well; and if the railway can be taken through Moa Flat at a cost which would not be enormous, then let it be done. If the Government could see its way to do that, then, as I said, we would withdraw all opposition. But we want the Government to clearly understand that they must not pay too big a price for Moa Flat, as it is not fit for close settlement. There are 64,300 acres, of which only 7,000 acres are fit for close settlement. By close settlement I mean for farms up to about 400 acres each. The rest of the land is fit only for runs. There is a great deal of Crown land to the west of the Moa Flat Estate, and that would have to be dealt with by the Government in some way if the estate was cut up into small runs. You can see by the plan here produced that the country as a whole is not fit for close settlement. If the Government are merely making a railway to Eddievale for the benefit of the Eddie community, then I say let them stop it at once. I myself have gone over the plan of the railway route urged, and, speaking as a surveyor, I am perfectly satisfied that it is utterly impracticable to take the line through Moa Flat. There are no places there where stations could be erected except at a very excessive cost. A railway by way of Rae's Junction would be much more convenient, and would enable coal to be carried at low cost and the dredges along the river to be supplied much easier.

65. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*—How many ploughable acres are there on the Moa Flat?—About 7,000.

66. Would that ploughable land be of good quality?—It is of fair quality. I think it would yield 60 or 70 bushels of oats on an average to the acre easily.

67. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] You said you are not opposed to the Government purchasing the Moa Flat Estate at a price?—Yes, at a price.

68. What do you think the land is worth?—My outside estimate is that it is worth from £1 to £1 2s. 6d. per acre. The Government valuation is 18s. 9d. per acre.

69. *The Chairman.*] You know this district?—Yes.

70. Do you think a railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh would serve the upper end?—Yes.

71. Would it serve it to better advantage than the other route, do you think?—I do not know about that. I do not know if that route is feasible.

JOHN BENNETTS, Fruit-grower, of Roxburgh, examined on oath.

Witness read the following copy of a letter:—

DEAR SIR,—

Roxburgh, 20th July, 1901.

A very representative and enthusiastic meeting of the Roxburgh Railway League was held here last evening, when the following prominent settlers and business people of Roxburgh, Coal Creek, and Teviot district were present: Messrs. John Inglis (president), A. Birch, J. Bennets, R. Smith, D. Parker, W. Manuel, T. Michelle, Jabez Burton, H. Veale, S. Wren, J. H. Waight, Joseph Tamblin, E. Hart, S. Toms, R. Wilson, R. Glendinning, James Parker, M. Campbell, Thomas Andrew, E. Bennett, and W. P. Matthews (secretary).

The following motions were proposed and carried unanimously:—

(1.) That the Minister for Public Works be notified by wire that the Roxburgh Railway League repudiate the representations made to the Government by the Dunrobin people *re* arresting or stopping the present extension of the Heriot Railway towards Eddievale *via* Rae's Junction to Roxburgh.

(2.) That a deputation be sent to Wellington from this league to urge the Government to push on the line towards Roxburgh with all possible speed, and to give rebutting evidence, if necessary, and that Mr. John Bennets be the deputation.

(3.) That a letter be sent to the Minister for Public Works setting forth the position fully as to why we are sending a deputation, and authorising Mr. John Bennets to give evidence on behalf of the league.

We desire to draw your attention to the fact that the petition which has been presented by the Dunrobin people, asking for the construction of the line to be stopped until the Government acquired the Moa Flat Estate, emanated from people who are within five or six miles of a line at present; also, that the headings to the petition represent them as coming from the residents of Roxburgh, Coal Creek, &c. This is a matter which we take strong exception to, as the residents about here had nothing whatever to do with the getting-up of those petitions. There was no public meeting called here, and the Roxburgh Railway League was not consulted in the matter at all. Yet the headings to the petitions imply that they originated here. Even those people who signed the petition in this district did so under a misapprehension, as they were told that it was for the opening of the Moa Flat Estate and the bringing of the line through it, which is misleading, seeing that the Government are asked to stop the work until they purchase the estate, which may be never. And, as you are doubtless aware, few people take the trouble to carefully read the heading to a petition of that sort.

What we want here is a railway, and having been told by the Government (through our member) that they will not purchase the estate, and will not bring a line through it to enhance the value of private property, we simply fall in with the Government's proposal to bring the line in the direction they think will be most suitable—*viz.*, *via* Eddie's and Rae's Junction.

Yours, &c,

Hon. W. Hall-Jones,  
Minister for Public Works, Wellington.

WM. P. MATTHEWS,  
Secretary Roxburgh Railway League.

72. *Mr. Flatman.*] Was your league definitely informed that the Government would not buy the Moa Flat Estate?—We were making inquiries and were given to understand that the Government would not buy, and therefore we had no hope of the railway through it. We have been agitating for many years to get railway communication, and were exceedingly pleased to find that Government had voted money for the purpose of constructing six miles and a half in the direction of Roxburgh. Then we were very much surprised to find that there was this agitation to stop the work. I take it that it is the people in the back blocks whom the Government intend and wish to benefit. This present agitation has arisen amongst people who already have a railway close at hand, and it would be most unfair for them to stop a railway which would greatly benefit those who have no line at all. As a fruit-grower, I may say that as things are now we have to travel forty miles by road, which is very tedious and expensive, and is the cause of our produce being often considerably damaged in transit. Furthermore, this sort of thing greatly handicaps us in competing with other growers nearer to the seaboard. And now, seeing that we are about to have a line constructed, I for one would exceedingly regret to see the work of construction stopped in the manner now attempted. I know the Moa Flat Estate well, having been all over it. We have no

objection to the Government purchasing the estate, but it is the business of the Government to see that they do not pay too much for it. Even if the Government finish the line as they have now commenced it, I believe it will serve people who settle on the estate should it be eventually purchased and cut up for settlement. Another thing I should like to point out, and that is that we have very large coal-deposits up above Roxburgh which will be utilised in time to come. At present the trouble in the way of developing these deposits is the excessive cost of bringing the coal down on wagons. There are other resources lying undeveloped in our district, and just now we cannot afford to have a decent outhouse built because of the excessive cost of carting timber from a distance by wagons. Thus the district is kept backward, and we are not much further ahead than the people in the centre of Africa. My main point, however, is to urge the Government to push on with the construction of the line in the direction of Roxburgh.

TIMOTHY WILKINS, Farmer, of Dunrobin, made a statement on oath.

*Witness* : All I have to say is that I know it will be a great loss to the people of the Dunrobin district if the line is taken by any other way than through Moa Flat. If the line goes through the Moa Flat it will be made a profitable line and settle hundreds of people. It will be a great disappointment to those people who have been expecting the line to go through the flat for the past six years if it is not taken that way after all. I can only confirm what has been already said by Mr. Kerse in supporting the petition which we have presented.

PATRICK JOSEPH DUNNE, of Wellington, Journalist, made a statement on oath.

*Witness* : I was for some four or five years resident at Roxburgh. I think the Roxburgh people are entitled to consideration in the matter of the railway, as they are forty miles from the railway at the present time. I know nothing of the relative value of the routes or as to the cost of construction. The idea of the Roxburgh people is to get a railway by the best route that the Government can find.

H. J. H. BLOW, Under-Secretary for Public Works, examined on oath.

*Witness* : The extension of the Heriot Railway was authorised in 1899, the Act under which it was authorised stating that it was to go in the direction of Rae's Junction to a point on the eastern boundary of Section 10, Block XII., Crookston Survey District; length, about six miles and a half. The route is therefore fixed by Act of Parliament, and the Public Works Department has no volition in the matter at all. We are bound to construct the railway where Parliament has directed it shall go. A vote on account of its construction was passed in the Appropriations of 1899, stating it was for a railway between Heriot and Eddie's. We have no authority to spend money on a line that will go anywhere else. I am not aware that the construction of the line to Eddie's was intended to settle the route to Roxburgh. I think the petitioners have come to that conclusion without very much warrant. If Parliament ever sees fit to authorise a line to Roxburgh it will probably be found that a different route altogether will be desirable in the interests of all.

73. *The Chairman.*] Why did you name your plan the "Heriot-Roxburgh Railway" then?—Because they are the plans of a survey which extended from Heriot to Roxburgh; but we are not constructing the railway according to that survey. There was an agitation for some years for a survey to be made for a line between Heriot and Roxburgh, and the Government gave ear to the agitation to the extent of authorising such a survey.

74. Which, in your opinion, is the most beneficial route of the two in question for the colony?—Well, the question raised in this petition is as to whether this railway now in process of construction should be stopped.

75. But Roxburgh is the objective?—I do not officially know that.

76. But, as far as this petition is concerned, I think it is our duty to ascertain which is the most beneficial line for the colony?—I have no objection to saying that, in my opinion, any line constructed to Roxburgh should go from Lawrence. It would be thirty-four miles shorter to Dunedin, and would cost no more money than a line by way of Eddie's or Moa Flat, and would be in quite as good a position to command the traffic as either of those lines.

77. *Mr. Bennet.*] Which of these lines would be the easiest to maintain when constructed?—I should think the Eddievale line, because there is a shorter length of rough country. It would be an easier line to maintain.

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