

agricultural land in the Province of Otago. Both dairying and fruit-growing industries would flourish here and settlement would be largely increased if railway communication were provided.

14. That from Beaumont to Lawrence, a distance of twelve miles, there is a large area of land under cultivation, as well as pastoral country, the value of which would be materially increased by railway communication.

15. That there is a flourishing, extensive, and thickly settled farming district at Tuapeka West, about eleven miles from Lawrence, which, besides securing the advantages of cheap lime, would be brought considerably nearer the railway than at present, and be thereby saved the delay, expense, and labour of carting their produce over a long stretch of one of the worst portions of the county main road, as well as being brought within easy reach of all those advantages which the facilities afforded by convenient railway communication confer on country settlers.

16. That the traders, business people, and others in Lawrence suffer serious loss and disadvantage by reason of the absence of railway communication with the producing districts throughout the County of Tuapeka, of which Lawrence is the chief town and business centre and at present the railway terminus.

17. That the various industries in the County of Tuapeka, from Lawrence to Roxburgh, a distance of forty miles, would be developed on a larger and more profitable scale by the extension of the line, leading to a large increase in the industrial population and in the productive output of the land, while enterprise would be stimulated, trade and business extended and improved, the general prosperity of the district secured on a larger and more stable basis, and the revenue and wealth of the colony materially benefited and increased.

Your petitioners therefore pray that your honourable House will take the matters mentioned into your favourable consideration, and will request the Government to accede to the request of your petitioners by authorising the extension of the railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh, and request the Government to have the work undertaken with such expedition as may be possible.

And your petitioners will ever pray.

W. J. SCRIMGEOUR, and 1138 others.

REPORT.

Petition No. 454.—W. J. SCRIMGEOUR and Others, of Lawrence, &c., Otago, praying for the Construction of a Railway from Lawrence to Roxburgh.

THE Committee recommend that this petition be referred to the Government for consideration, and, together with the report and evidence, be printed; but, as the subject-matter of the petition is a question of public policy, the Committee has no further recommendation to make.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

FRIDAY, 19th SEPTEMBER, 1902.

The Chairman: Who is the first witness?

Mr. J. Bennet: The petition is to the effect that it is now twenty-five years since the line from Lawrence to Roxburgh was surveyed. The country intervening between Lawrence and Roxburgh has been settled on during the last forty years, and during that time, owing to the inaccessibility to markets, the agricultural and mineral development of the district aforementioned has been seriously retarded. Roading through those districts has been and is still a heavy burden on the settlers and producers, and the material available for maintenance is of such an inferior character that the recurring yearly expense cannot be met without heavy annual grants from the Government. The annual expenditure now devoted to the maintenance of the main county road, which during a great part of the year is impassable, would be the means of putting the country roads—now very much neglected—in order, besides relieving both the Government and the settlers of large yearly contributions. The country to be traversed by such a line of railway consists of agricultural, pastoral, fruit-growing, and mineral lands, the value and productive powers of which would be largely increased if cheap and rapid transit to market were provided. Roxburgh and Coal Creek are the largest fruit-growing districts in Otago, and at present under very great difficulties send large quantities of fruit to the southern and northern markets, between 70 tons and 80 tons per week being carted over forty miles of bad road to the railway during the season. With railway communication such as your petitioners request the industry would be enormously developed, as there are immense areas of land suitable for fruit-cultivation which could be profitably utilised for that purpose under cheaper and more rapid conditions of transit to market. There are also in the districts of Roxburgh and Coal Creek large deposits of coal almost entirely untouched, but which, if tapped by a railway, would suffice to supply at a cheap rate the whole of the districts between there and Lawrence, a distance of forty miles. The mineral resources alone would become a source of enormous wealth and create a large carrying trade, profitable to the railway and of great benefit to the settlers throughout a large extent of country. There are about thirty dredges on the Molyneux River and the adjacent flats between Coal Creek and Lawrence. The coal required by those dredges for steaming purposes is at the rate of 800 tons per week, which would be all conveyed by rail. In addition, large quantities of building and repairing material are constantly required by those dredges, which are now conveyed by road at a heavy expense and delay. There are also in