

Besides these reasons, we have to consider the convenience of the people who would be travelling towards the north from Auckland and the people travelling from the north towards Auckland for many years before they could get as far as Kaikohe, or a junction with it. It is urged as against the western route that they have a very sparse population at the present time, that the Mangakahia Valley, through which it would go, is not thickly populated. It is only a question of time when that valley will be very thickly populated if the land is cut up to induce people to come there. The land is good, and it is easily worked. It will be used for a great number of years for grazing purposes. There are thousands of acres there on which a man who had 100 or 150 acres could milk sixty or ninety cows. The quality of the land is good. Besides this, there will be an immediate trade in the carriage of timber. There is a large block of Government land covered with timber which is not opened. That land, I am told by people interested in timber, contains 100,000,000 ft. of millable timber. Those who know the country well tell me that they would give £5 an acre for the land when cleared of timber. It is mixed timber. I think the Main Trunk line should be pushed on as speedily as possible to, say, Pakatai, the centre of the Mangakahia Valley, which would enable the back-settlers there to get their produce to the market and their goods in. They have now to pay £2 and £3 a ton on all their stuff that goes out, and that is a heavy impost on new settlers.

4. *Mr. Coom.*] Do you know the difference in length between the western and the eastern route?—I do not think there is a difference of many miles.

5. You say that if the connection by rail was made with Whangarei the people south towards McCarroll's Gap would bring their goods to Whangarei for shipment to Auckland: does not that do away with Mr. Carruth's argument that the goods would go to Auckland by way of rail?—I do not remember his saying that. Stock, I believe, would go for a certain distance. They would go to the nearest port.

6. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Have you a good knowledge of the country west of the Tangihua?—I have some knowledge of it.

7. Is it good land?—I have no hesitation in saying so.

8. The population, you think, would grow?—Yes. I have no doubt it will carry a large population if they cut up the sections. If they are kept as at present the land will not be thickly populated.

9. *Mr. Steadman.*] How many times have you been on the western route?—I have been on and off it for the last twenty or thirty years. I have worked timber up to the Mangakahia Bridge and up to Otoa.

10. Have you been over the Tangihua Range?—Yes, two or three years ago.

11. *Mr. Becroft.*] Could you give the approximate distance from the point of junction to Whangarei?—About twenty-one miles, and easy construction, apparently.

JAMES NEIL MCCARROLL examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a farmer and sawmiller, residing at Whangarei, and I hold the rank of captain in the mounted squadron in this district.

2. Would you make a statement to the Commission?—I have been a resident of the north for about twenty-five years. I resided for a good many years at what is known as McCarroll's Gap, and for about five years in Whangarei. I have a good knowledge of the north, my business having taken me frequently in the vicinity of the different routes advocated for the railway. I consider, in the interests of the country as a whole, and in respect to the Auckland Province in particular, that the interests of the north would be best served by having a line north from the Gap to connect at Whangarei with the line to Kawakawa and Kaikohe. This line from Whangarei northwards is almost completed to Kaikohe, and in a few years will be completed right up to Hokianga, and with this short section of twenty-six or twenty-seven miles to McCarroll's Gap put in, the country from Wellington to Hokianga would be linked up by railway. In the meantime the route through to Whangarei would be the main line, but in time, and as the country developed, it might be necessary to continue what is called the main line northwards. In that case the line should keep to the east of the Tangihua Range to Kaikohe.

3. *Mr. Coom.*] Is that the eastern or the western route?—The eastern. The eastern line is close to the mountains. After the railway leaves the Gap to go north, either by the Whangarei route or the eastern route, it is of easy construction, and is the shortest. By coming here it would suit the largest portion of the population there is in the north. The population of the Whangarei County is ten thousand, exclusive of the borough, which is three thousand, and, as the Chairman of the Commission has said, the population of the Bay of Islands is twenty thousand. That is thirty-three thousand people that this line would bring forthwith into communication with Auckland or any other part of the North Island. Trains would be able to run right through from Russell and Hokianga Harbours to Wellington. From a defence point of view, this is very important, as the eastern coast has ports that are easily accessible to an enemy, and the construction of this through railway would facilitate the rapid transportation of troops to any point that was necessary; whereas it will be years, at the present rate of construction, before the railway will be at Kaikohe going by the eastern line. The population on the western side is about five thousand in the Hobson County, and a considerable portion of that is south of this part of the country which is in dispute. I may say that during the last twelve months from Whangarei there has been entrained at the rail-head an average of about seven hundred head of cattle per month for the Waikato.

4. Are they driven to the head of the line?—Yes. Last November fifteen hundred head went away.