

21. Do you advocate that the Hokianga people should be compelled for all time to send their goods some thirty miles along the railway unnecessarily?—Not for all time, and perhaps not for a great many years. As soon as the population warranted it I would advocate the construction of this railway into Mangakahia as far as it was wanted.

22. You consider that the population will some day justify the construction of that railway into the Mangakahia?—I do not know that I can conjure up a population in the district that would justify it from a paying point of view; but if a few minerals were discovered no doubt it would pay right away. You can disregard the timber traffic, as it would be far cheaper to send it down by water.

23. Then, if this railway connection were made between Whangarei and the Gap the country would not be justified in putting the central route through unless minerals were found?—Not at present.

24. Does the quality of the land around Mangakahia lead you to expect that it will eventually carry a sufficient population to justify the railway?—Not for many years to come.

25. There is a large area of land along the central route?—Yes, but a great portion of it is very hilly.

26. Are you referring to Tutamoe?—Yes.

27. Which end do you refer to?—The valley is the only good part of it. There are some bits there that are good, but not all; the hills are not suitable for agriculture. I should say that a considerable portion would be suitable for dairying.

28. Have you been to Waimatanui?—No; my impression is gained from surveyors and settlers who have taken up farms there.

29. Have you been through the Mangakahia?—A portion of it, to the bridge. I have not been to Pakotai.

30. Then, you are basing your opinion on what you hear?—Not altogether, but on what I know of the farms there.

31. How are the settlers getting on there as farmers?—Some of them are getting on very well, and others are struggling.

32. You made the remark that a Main Trunk line should not go on as quickly as possible to its terminus?—I should not say that. If there is a populous terminus it might be desirable to make the Main Trunk line as soon as possible. To make it terminate at a place like Pakotai is absurd.

33. The objective is the same?—I do not admit that, because the objective of this railway is a point on the Hokianga River, which the population have access to by boat.

34. The objective is the same, Hokianga being the northern terminus and Auckland the southern. Do you say that the Main Trunk line from Hokianga to Auckland should not go by the quickest route?—Not necessarily, but it ought to diverge for a reasonable distance in order to tap the centres of population.

35. Do you realize that every diversion from the direct route means an additional freight-charge for people living at either extremity, and will necessarily cost them more to put their produce on the market?—It may be so, but they are in the minority. Are you going to take the railway straight in order to accommodate fifty people at Horeke, while there are three thousand people at Whangarei?

36. The objective is the same, and I think your argument does not apply. You still maintain that the Main Trunk line should not be built as direct as possible?—Not necessarily.

JAMES HARRISON examined. (No. 5.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a storekeeper at Whangarei, and have been here since 1875.

2. Would you like to make a statement to the Commission?—I have travelled over the route from McCarroll's Gap to Whangarei several times, and I know the country pretty well. I have also some knowledge of the central route, but I do not know much about the western route. I am impressed with the advantage of linking up the present railway with Whangarei and the north rather than of expressing myself against the other routes. If the link were completed as quickly as possible it would be the means of increasing very largely the revenue from the line already constructed, and I am sure it would prove a commercial success. It taps the largest centre of population in the north. The country between McCarroll's Gap and the constructed portion at Whangarei is favourable for constructional work, and can be dealt with at comparatively small expense. I have nothing to say against the other lines being constructed later on, but I presume what is being sought now is what is the most profitable line to construct at once, and which line would confer the greatest benefit on the greatest number. The connection between Whangarei and McCarroll's Gap would greatly enhance the earning-power of the line from Whangarei, both north and south, increasing the value of the land, and enabling it to be fully utilized. As to the Mangakahia line, it is looked upon here as one which would have the greatest claim to be constructed at a later period, but that part of the country could be cheaply served by electric trams. No doubt in the next few years there will be a great development in this direction.

3. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] What are the freights from Auckland to Whangarei?—7s. 6d. a ton, with 1s. a ton wharfage.

4. What is the cost of the transport of goods from Whangarei to Maungakaramea?—In the summer about 1s. per hundredweight, and in the winter about 1s. 6d.

5. Could goods be carried by rail from Auckland to Maungakaramea as cheaply as by steamer to Whangarei, and carted out?—Yes, certain classes of goods, such as potatoes, chaff, grain, and manures.