

DONALD WILLIAM JACK examined. (No. 6.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am in business in Whangarei as a draper, and have been for the last thirteen years. I hold no public position at the present time, but I have been a member of the Borough Council. There is not much left for me to say in connection with the matter before the Commission, excepting to indorse the evidence given by former witnesses, especially that by Mr. Killen. I am in favour of the immediate connection from the Whangarei-Kaikohe line with the Main Trunk line at the nearest point to McCarroll's Gap. There is just one argument which I think is being omitted in connection with this proposed linking-up. I do not consider that the main object of a line of railway should be so much the bringing into touch of the few terminal points as the serving of a district, by way of intermediate stations, through which the railway runs. If the line runs through the centre of the islands it will not touch, so far as I know, any of the distributing centres. By a line connecting McCarroll's Gap with Whangarei we have the whole of the north brought into touch with Kawakawa and Whangarei as distributing centres, and places which are easily accessible for the distributing of goods coming in from outside. A good deal has been said with regard to the freights between Auckland and here, but it has to be remembered that a large proportion of the goods that would be landed here by steamer would be distributed per medium of the railway, and therefore be revenue-producing to the railway. On the other hand, if the central route only was to be undertaken, there would be no seaport distributing centre except that of Auckland, which is a long distance away.

2. *Mr. Steadman.*] The goods that at present come from the south by way of Auckland would come to Whangarei wharf, and, if this railway connection to the main line was made, would be distributed from here by rail southwards towards McCarroll's Gap?—Yes; and it is expected that before many years to come Home vessels will be coming here at Whangarei and delivering their imports direct instead of at Auckland, which will cheapen the cost all round.

WHANGAREI, WEDNESDAY, 12TH APRIL, 1911.

GEORGE COPPIN MARSHALL examined. (No. 7.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a storekeeper, residing in Whangarei. I have been in Whangarei for nineteen years, and at the present time am President of the Chamber of Commerce. The statement that I desire to make to the Commission is purely from the commercial aspect of the question before you. I am not in a position to give any evidence regarding the eastern or the western route, but I think, as a commercial undertaking, at the present time a branch line from Whangarei to as near McCarroll's Gap as the main line can be conveniently junctioned with would be in the best interests of the eastern part of the north. When I say the north I mean the Bay of Islands County and the Whangarei County, and the best interests of all that country can be best served for many years to come by this connection. It will not only suit the most populous part of the north, and the part that is likely to be the most populous for many years to come, but the exports from the east coast ports are considerably in advance of anything that can be shown on the western coast. What will occur in the future, of course, I cannot say, but I would ask this question: If you were a syndicate desirous of developing the north, would you run a line straight through this peninsula, or would you use the existing lines by making a junction between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei? I think, taking all circumstances into consideration, as well as the question of defence, you would join up with the Gap at once; and I also think you would probably put a line to the head-waters of the Wairoa later on, or perhaps simultaneously with the present proposed closing of the southern gap. As shown by previous witnesses, we have the largest population in all the northern counties, and I think that would tell with the average business person as a matter of revenue and the general use for the public. The coal to come from the partly developed coal areas in the Whangarei and Bay of Islands Counties would go from Whangarei by rail to beyond the Gap. It might be urged against that that there would be competition with coal from Auckland, but I contend that Whangarei as a distributing centre would be able to supply coal just as cheaply as coal railed from Waikato to within thirty or forty miles of Whangarei. That would be a considerable revenue for the railway. This part of the country is also one of the best adapted for dairying purposes. The industry is only in its infancy, but the butter exported from Whangarei last year was between 440 and 500 tons, and I maintain that that butter would be taken by rail, in preference to steamer, from Whangarei to Auckland. My reason for saying that the butter export will go by rail in preference to steamer is this: I have been told on very good authority that the Railway Department at the present time is carrying butter for the same distance from Thames Valley as from Whangarei, right into the freezing-chambers, for one-half of the present steamer-charge on butter from here to Auckland. The present steamer-charge is 6d. a box, or £1 a ton. In addition to the benefit arising from the cheaper cost of carriage, there is the fact that by rail the butter is taken direct to the freezing-chamber, without any further expense to the producer or handling of the butter. At present the steamer lands the butter on the wharf at Auckland, and there is a wharfage-charge, and there is also cartage from the wharf to the freezer, which has to be added to the transit charge. There is also the fact that during the best butter months the climate here is considerably hotter than elsewhere, and, although I know that some of the steamers are equipped with freezing apparatus, still the train gives the quicker despatch. With the train there is no waiting about for the tide. Another reason why there should be a junction with the Gap as speedily as possible is that there is no harbour fit for any extensive traffic between Auckland and Whangarei. Another reason is that the settlers living at Waikiekie and further north would get