

5. *Mr. Coom.*] Will there be any timber or gum from the far north?—I do not like to say anything about the timber. There will be a lot of timber, but whether it will pay to send it by rail for such a long distance I am not prepared to say. It depends on the freight. Timber can generally be carried by water at a lower freight than by rail, whereas with perishable goods it is safest to send them by the quickest route.

6. Do you know the population that would avail themselves of the railway from Kaikohe southwards—the population north of Hokianga River?—There are about twenty thousand in the electorate, including Natives, and that is all I can say.

7. How would this district of Kawakawa be affected by the east central route being constructed as compared with a connection between Whangarei and McCarroll's Gap?—I am looking forward to the junction between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei being made before anything else. When that is done we will have direct communication with Auckland.

8. Which would suit Kawakawa better—that or the direct line to the north?—It appears to us that we would have earlier connection with Auckland if lined up at Whangarei with the main line. By the other way, with the present rate of progress, it looks as if we would have to wait for the next twenty years before we have a railway through to Auckland.

9. Which would you advocate as a preference—a junction between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei, or the main line brought through to Kaikohe, with a junction at this end?—The junction from Whangarei to McCarroll's Gap.

10. Why?—Because it would give the earliest connection.

11. At which end would you suggest the connection should be made with the Dargaville-Kaihu Railway and the Main Trunk line?—I am not in a position to say, not having been over the route further than Matakoho.

12. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] Your object is that the line should go farther north ultimately?—Yes.

13. Considering that point, where do you suggest would be the best place for a junction with Hokianga and Kaikohe?—Three miles from Kaikohe is the only place the lines could cross.

14. Why?—We are led to believe by the engineers that that is the most convenient spot, owing to the configuration of the country.

15. Do you think that the Whangarei-Kaikohe junction would be the best for opening up the country for settlement?—Yes. It would be necessary to construct a few roads as feeders. The Mangakahia is a good water-way.

16. Have you ever seen it?—No.

17. *Mr. Steadman.*] Taking the country right to the north from McCarroll's Gap on both sides, where does the largest population lie—to the east or west of the Tangihua Range?—To the east, I should say.

18. If Whangarei was connected with McCarroll's Gap would it open up the northern lands?—Yes. I think more passengers would use the railway. It is often quoted that passengers prefer the railway to water travelling.

19. *Mr. Becroft.*] Are you familiar with the two routes, to the east and west of the Tangihuas?—No.

20. You made the statement that the far north does not care whether the Main Trunk line goes to the east or the west?—Yes.

21. It would suit Kawakawa better to have the line go by way of Whangarei to McCarroll's Gap?—Yes.

22. Are you aware of the difference in distance between linking up with the eastern or the western route?—No.

HARRY CLOUGH BLUNDELL examined. (No. 14.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am Clerk and Engineer to the Bay of Islands County.

2. Will you make a statement regarding the subject-matter of the inquiry of the Commission?—I have heard the evidence given by Mr. Stewart, and, as far as the central route is concerned, I have very little to add. I agree with him that it is immaterial to the north which route is taken. We want the most direct route to Auckland. It is of great importance to us that a connection should be made between Whangarei and McCarroll's Gap at the earliest possible moment. One of the chief reasons is that, as the Commission is aware, we have the finest harbour in the north, where ocean-going vessels can enter at any time. We have a coalfield already between here and Whangarei. They are prospecting for further seams, and there is little question that the same field extends right through to Hikurangi. Coal has been found in several places already in fair quantities. I may say that the prospecting that has been done has been on a small scale. We have applied several times for the use of the Government's diamond drill, but it has not been sent up. The prospecting has been done by private persons, and it has led us to believe that coal exists. I mention this to show that in the event of war men-of-war could come into the Bay of Islands and get coal, and also get coal or stores from Auckland when the line is put through. Not many years ago the Union Company's boats used to come into Russell and Opua for supplies of oysters for Sydney, and they took in coal at the same time. If the railway connection were made with Auckland, I think it is quite conceivable that large vessels, such as the Frisco boats, would call at Bay of Islands, and land passengers and mails, take in coal, and go on to Sydney, and thus save twenty-four hours' steaming. That, I understand, with a mail-boat, is a great consideration. The Bay of Islands is a lovely harbour, an ideal yachting-place, and is daily becoming a resort for tourists; and if there was railway connection with Auckland no doubt it would help Russell and the bay generally, and also be a great convenience to Whangarei residents. That, however, is of minor importance to the other matters.