

*The Chairman:* In connection with this letter the Mines Department have supplied the Commission with the following report:—

“Inspector of Mines’ Office, Thames, 23rd March, 1911.—The Under-Secretary, Mines Department, Wellington.—Coal-deposits, Wairua Valley: In accordance with instructions contained in your memo. (No. 520) of the 22nd ultimo (Mines, 1911/261), I am furnishing herewith a report on the indications of coal between Hikurangi and Tanekaha. Mr. Long’s farm and adjoining property are situated some three miles S.W. of the Hikurangi Township. About half-way between these lands and the township the Hikurangi Coal Company put down several boreholes, and it was said that a seam of good quality was located. However, strange to say, the company abandoned the property, which was subsequently taken up by the Northern Coal Company, who have bored to the N.W., and got coal. Mr. Long put down two boreholes in his land some years ago. One bore cut into a shale-seam at a depth of 40 ft., and was discontinued; the other was sunk to a depth of 100 ft. close by, but no slate or coal seam was discovered. The surrounding country is level and marshy, but there are no coal-outcrops to be seen. In view of the proximity of the land to the Hikurangi and Northern Collieries, and seeing that the strata dip west, coal should be found in the locality referred to by Mr. Long, and in the Wairua Valley as far as Hukerenui and Towai, where a coal-seam has been located. The land is easily approached by road, and four miles of railway would establish a connection with the Kawakawa-Grahamtown line.—B. BENNIE, Inspector of Mines.”

*Witness:* The coalfields extend to the railway, and in all probability through 30,000 or 40,000 acres of flat. I should like to say, in regard to the report from the Inspector of Mines, that the bore cut into the shale-seam was cut to a depth of 100 ft. before being discontinued, and not 40 ft., as stated in the report. I found coal at 40 ft. two years ago, but before that I had picked up a piece of coal on the surface.

2. *The Chairman.*] Are you an advocate of the extension of the line from Whangarei to McCarrroll’s Gap in order to enable you to send your coal to the south of Whangarei?—No. My idea is that the coal country tending in the direction of Mangakahia should be a claim for consideration for making a junction with Hikurangi and bringing the line through there.

3. To connect with the proposed central line?—Yes, on the western route.

4. You propose having a branch railway a distance of some eighteen miles to enable you to connect with the main line?—I am proposing to have a railway across to Mangakahia, and it would be worth while to make this branch line.

5. Would the coal go by way of Whangarei?—If the railway was made it would go over all the lines north.

6. You would still make Russell and Whangarei your shipping ports?—Yes.

7. What is the fuel that is used now?—The population consists mostly of farmers, but, of course, we are looking forward to something other than firewood for fuel.

8. *Mr. Coom.*] Why should you extend the line eighteen miles when a distance of four miles would tap your coalfield?—Because they wanted a junction between the two; that is what I gathered from the Whangarei paper.

9. You think there would be an advantage in connecting Hikurangi with the Main Trunk?—Yes, it would open up a splendid lot of country. I recommend the connection for the sake of working the coalfields, the opening-up of good agricultural country, and joining the two railways together.

10. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] How far is Hikurangi from Whangarei?—About eleven or twelve miles.

11. *Mr. Becroft.*] Is it your opinion that the connection you suggest would produce more traffic with Whangarei?—It would connect the railways, and there would be more traffic right through.

12. Is it your opinion that it would be an advantage to Whangarei to have the connection you have suggested?—I do. It would tend to connect the country districts with Whangarei more than is the case at the present time. At present we have a distance of from five to twenty miles to ride to catch the train.

13. *The Chairman.*] How many years have you been residing near Hikurangi?—Fifteen years.

14. What is the name of the place you are advocating that the branch line from the Main Trunk should come from?—I do not know really where the line is to come. I understand, however, that the railway is to come through Mangakahia, and if so I propose that the railway should junction from Mangakahia to Hikurangi.

15. How far are you from the Titoki Bridge?—By road, about twenty-two miles. The route I am advocating up the river-flats would be seventeen or eighteen miles between Hikurangi and Titoki.

16. Which road do the settlers take in going to Whangarei from Aponga and Otakairangi?—Through Ruatangata and Kamo.

17. Is there anything you wish to add?—I believe that the route proposed by me—viz., from McCarrroll’s Gap to Mangakahi and from thence to Hikurangi—will be the best, and the best-paying route, for the following reasons: First, it will do all that is claimed for the eastern and the western routes, in that (a) it will form a short and convenient connection with the present railway, and so give ready access by rail between Auckland and the northern districts; (b) it will follow the direct route to the north to Mangakahia, and open up good country in the inland district. Second, the eighteen miles of railway from Mangakahia to Hikurangi, will follow the river-flats to the junction of the Hikurangi River, thence to the junction of the Mangawahine River, thence to the Aponga Settlement, and through the Otakairangi and the Wairoa River flats to Hikurangi. *En route* it will tap the following settlements, the most distant being within two miles of the railway—Purua, Aponga, Ruatangata, Otakairangi, Riponui, and Tanekaha. Third, it will pass through immense coal areas in the Wairua and Otakairangi flats—approximately, 20,000 acres—and it will open up for selection hundreds of acres of good land.