

KAIKOHE, WEDNESDAY, 11TH APRIL, 1911.

GEORGE FREDERICK DICKESON examined (No. 20.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a gum-buyer and storekeeper, residing at Kaikohe, where I have been a resident for thirty years.

2. During that period has your business taken you much about the vicinity of Kaikohe?—Yes.

3. And you are conversant with the land that lies about Mangakahia and the Hokianga County?—Yes, and the Bay of Islands County also.

4. Will you give the Commission your opinion regarding the routes or route to be taken in the further prosecution of railways in the north?—I think the main line should come through the Mangakahia Valley to Kaikohe. The land through the Mangakahia Valley is of first-class quality, and it is being settled by good settlers at the present time, and that railway will give them an opportunity of sending their produce and stock to Auckland; also produce from Kaikohe and farther north, including Hokianga and Mangonui. It would be very much quicker to send stock to Auckland by railway than to send it to Whangarei and be shipped there to Auckland.

5. Is there much stock going out of this district?—A very great number indeed. This last year the number ran into thousands of head.

6. When those cattle are collected in the north, where do they ultimately go to?—To Whangarei, and there shipped to Auckland, or driven to the nearest point on the railway. They cannot be consumed in Whangarei, and must go to Auckland or Waikato.

7. I suppose you do not know whether they go to the rail-head at Te Hana?—No.

8. Have you any comments to make regarding the proposals to link up the main line with the Whangarei-Kawakawa and the Dargaville-Kaihu Sections?—It would be all right to have the branch lines, but we must have the Main Trunk. Cattle require very quick transit, and it makes a great difference to have to go round by Whangarei. It makes a difference of days and a reduction in value, especially in the case of fat stock. The same thing applies to other produce, such as butter, &c. Quick transit is the main thing. The only other comment I have to make is the benefit that would be derived by the completion of the main line by the northern people. There is beautiful land in Hokianga, Kaipara, and in the north, and the people there should be considered.

9. When the Main Trunk is put through, say, to Hokianga, what parts do you think would the majority of the products come from between Hokianga and Auckland?—Waima, Waihou, Mangamuka, Broadwood, and Herekino. The land round about these places is very good.

10. *Mr. Evans.*] You are not in favour of a connection between Whangarei and McCarroll's Gap?—It would be a so-much longer distance we would have to go. It would not be opening up the Mangakahia Valley.

11. Do you not think it would be better to have those two lines linked up—that by so doing you would get communication with Auckland by railway quicker than by waiting for the completion of the Main Trunk?—I hardly think it would be much quicker, as there is a possibility of not less than £100,000 being voted per year for the construction of the main line, whereas if only a branch line was to be gone on with the vote would be a small one.

12. *Mr. Ronayne.*] The distance round by Kawakawa and Grahamtown and McCarroll's Gap would be only twenty-seven miles longer than the short route by the central line, so it would only take about two hours longer to convey cattle to Auckland by train: would that be a material difference?—What with shunting and coaling, &c., it would be a good deal longer than two hours.

13. Assuming that the Whangarei to McCarroll's Gap section could be constructed in two years, I suppose you would not be agreeable to wait for five years for the construction of the line from McCarroll's Gap to Kaikohe by the central route. In other words, if the line was constructed between McCarroll's Gap and Whangarei, you would be able to send your cattle from Kaikohe to Auckland by rail in two years instead of having to wait five years?—[No answer.]

14. I presume when the line is through the cattle will all be shipped by rail, and not through the Hokianga Harbour?—I should think they would all go by rail. The harbour is dangerous, and outgoing boats often get stuck up for a week.

15. Would you get your stores through the Hokianga Harbour?—I do not think so. There is no doubt that Opua is the best port. It is a splendid harbour.

16. Can you tell us how many thousands of cattle were sent from the north to Auckland in, say, twelve months?—I know the amount is over two thousand head from the north. Quite a thousand went from this district, and about a thousand from Hokianga.

17. That would make about four thousand in the twelve months?—Yes.

18. Do you consider that trade would be materially increased when through railway communication is established?—Undoubtedly. Settlement would advance very rapidly.

19. *Mr. Steadman.*] Do you know how many thousands of people there are up Pihama?—No.

20. What road would you use yourself going to Auckland as a passenger if the railways were closed up?—The Main Trunk, decidedly.

21. Do you know the difference in time going by way of Whangarei and steamer or by way of the Main Trunk?—I should say that one would get to Auckland in six hours from Kaikohe by the Main Trunk.

22. How many miles is it to Auckland?—160, I think.

23. Do you know what the difference in passage-money would be?—The train-fare, I suppose, would be 1d. per mile second class; that would be 13s. 4d. to Auckland by the direct route. From here to Whangarei is fifty-six miles, and the return from Whangarei to Auckland is 15s., first class, by steamer. It is not a mere matter of fares, it is a matter of time. It takes six hours to Whangarei and eight hours from Whangarei to Auckland.