

the western route than on the eastern route, because the valleys largely run parallel with the general route on the western line; whereas on the eastern side, particularly between Maungakaramea and Mangakahia, the line runs across high and difficult spurs. There is a great height to be climbed up to Maungakaramea, which has to be descended in a short distance to tide-level on the Wairoa. A considerable proportion of the land traversed on the eastern side is poor in comparison with that on the west; and I submit that the country on the eastern route encounters much more difficulty from floods than the country on the west. I speak more particularly in regard to the Waiotama, the Wairua, and the Mangakahia Rivers. Although the water from these three rivers combines where the western route crosses the Wairoa at Kirikopuni, the flood-water gets away better, and there is not the same congestion. In support of that statement I would point out that there is a bridge, which has been constructed by the Roads Department, at Mangakahia, which is of a larger span and is higher out of the water than the bridge at Tangiteroria, which was constructed by the County Council. I will give you the figures taken from the plans when the works were in operation. The span of the bridge at Mangakahia is 210 ft., and of the one at Tangiteroria 153 ft. You can verify the latter by reference to the Public Works Department. The distance between the two bridges is about six miles in a straight line. On the western route, at Kirikopuni, there is one bridge in place of the three. The western line runs as nearly as possible through the centre as it is possible to run it. Taking the southern portion of the divergent routes in the Mangonui Valley, there is a road from Tokatoka wharf to Mangapai, laid out by the Government, which is a main road from east to west. Very nearly the distance is 30½ miles from wharf to wharf, and by road the eastern route is seven miles and a half from Mangapai wharf, and twenty-three miles from Tokatoka. The western route is fourteen miles from Mangapai wharf, and 16½ from Tokatoka. In the eight miles between Tokatoka, Mangapai Road, and the Wairoa there is no access by road. The question of freights has been already amply dealt with, and I wish simply to emphasize the fact that even on the western route the settlers are farther from the western wharves than they are from the eastern. I would also say, in regard to the question of water communication, that it is not possible to compare the water carriage on the Kaipara with that on the east coast on equal terms, because the water carriage on the Kaipara leaves the traffic at Helensville to be transported by rail, with an extra cost of handling to be added. Also, in the matter of time, the journey from Dargaville to Auckland occupies twelve hours, as against seven hours, on the average, from Whangarei. With regard to bridging the navigable river at Kirikopuni, I am of opinion—and it is confirmed after consultation with the most of the landholders or occupiers above the proposed site—that there is likely to be no traffic above the proposed bridge which would be interfered with. The river being navigable, it is probable that the upper reaches of the Wairoa will be used as feeders to the railway, both for the conveyance of heavy goods and for passenger traffic. I wish the Commission to particularly note that a large portion of the north is devoid of metal. There is none throughout a large part of the Mangonui Valley, and by any of the means at present available it is going to be extremely difficult ever to adequately metal or keep in repair metalled roads in that locality. At the Tangihua Range, at Kirikopuni, and at Mangakahia there is an abundance of good metal, which would be available for ballast and for metalling roads; and I submit that this could be delivered at the railway-stations and at various points along the road. By that means the roads would be metalled from the railway-stations as a centre, and would inevitably induce the country traffic to be brought to the railway-stations to be carried by rail. With regard to the proposed linking-up of the Gap with Whangarei, I understand that matter is within the scope of your Commission. I presume that the question really is, which line should be constructed first? Ultimately, no doubt, the country will all be railed. Having pointed out from my own observation the location and area of the wealth-producing portions of the north, I hold that the objective of a railway should be to develop the greatest resources, and to secure the most traffic for the Railway Department generally. I contend that the opening of the railway from Whangarei to the Bay of Islands district brings the resources and produce of that district into touch with cheap freight and rapid communication by sea with the metropolitan market. I also submit that it is extremely doubtful whether a large proportion of the goods from the Town of Whangarei will be carried over a railway, which, taking the present time-table as evidence, will occupy a very much greater time in reaching Auckland, and upon which the freights, to be profitable, must be heavier. The connection from McCarroll's Gap to Whangarei will open up absolutely no new country. It must pass within a very short distance of Mangapai wharf, and therefore come again into competition with cheap and rapid communication by sea.

3. What class of boats go to Mangapai?—The "Coromandel" is, I think, running there regularly, and also scows. The "Coromandel" tenders from Marsden Point. [Statement resumed]: I think it is apparent, therefore, that the railway over these twenty-seven miles will depend for its earnings upon the through freights from Whangarei in the north, and not on the local country, which is already served by cheap freights. I would also like to suggest that the present freights are carried by a company which is, I think, unopposed. If they at any time were driven to cut the rates, I think it is probable that these freights could be materially reduced both in regard to Mangapai and Whangarei. I would point out what appears to me to require to be sacrificed if this connection is made in preference to proceeding with the Main Trunk line. To connect with Whangarei it is estimated that twenty-seven miles of new line is required. To open the country from McCarroll's to Upper Mangakahia will not exceed thirty-eight miles, by a line which will open up new country, and which, as I have endeavoured to make clear, cannot be adequately developed excepting by railway. There is also a block of about 8,000 acres of undeveloped Crown land about twenty-eight miles from McCarroll's. Along the whole western route are groups of Crown tenants. It is the only feasible outlet to a large block of country now