

held by small tenants. There are also 4,600 acres of the Girls' High School endowment immediately south of the Wairua. I notice that in other districts the Commission visited, the large amount of stock which passes through Whangarei has been quoted in support of the contention that Whangarei is a centre, and that this gap should be filled up to provide an outlet for the large quantity of stock there. Now, there are four probable sources of the stock which go to Whangarei markets—the Mangonui Valley and Waikiēkie; the district round Tangiteroria; the Mangakahia Valley, with its sources of supply right through to Kaihu; and the far north, with its centre at Ohāeawai. It is a serious loss to the owners of this stock that they have no direct means of export, the cattle having to be driven many miles to a centre at Whangarei before being shipped. Incidentally I might say that if the line is taken to Whangarei in preference to a central route a large proportion of these cattle would have to travel thirty to forty miles from Mangakahia to the railway for shipment. It has been urged before the Commission that fifteen hundred head of cattle were exported from Whangarei last month. Now, of that number, to my personal knowledge, three hundred went from within five miles of Dargaville, one hundred from Tokatoka and Mangapai Road, one hundred from Tangiteroria, over seventy from Mangakahia, and a large number from Bay of Islands. It has been suggested in evidence that railway connection with Whangarei would advance the dairying industry by providing for the landing of dairy-produce in the freezing-chambers in Auckland at a cheaper freight, and in much quicker time. I venture to challenge both statements, and would point out that the dairy supply from Whangarei is now, notwithstanding the bad communication, drawn largely from the interior. Cream is at present being carted by road twenty-one miles from Tangiteroria, twenty-eight miles from Houto, thirty miles from Parakao, and thirty-five miles from Pakotai. So that to secure the advantage of the alleged facilities in Whangarei, unless the Main Trunk line is constructed, the settlers must continue to cart their produce nearly as far before shipment as the branch railway will give them access to. It has also been contended that the requirements of Mangakahia might be adequately served by the construction of an electric line from Whangarei. In this connection I would urge first that the feasibility of such a service by an electric line has not yet been proved. Secondly, that it would only serve the Mangakahia district at one or two points; and that if this electrical or other railway traction with Whangarei were brought about it would only serve to bring the produce to a point almost as far from Auckland by railway as when it started. Thirdly, that if the Main Trunk line were constructed last, when the settlers' produce has passed over the thirty-five miles of distance it will be that much nearer its destination only; while, on the other hand, if that line is constructed first, dairy factories and cattle-markets will be established on the railway-line, and the settlers' produce will be carried almost directly from the farms to the freezing-chamber or the market. In support of the advisability of constructing the main line by the central route, I would point out that coal has been located in two or three places within three or four miles of Mangakahia. Copper of excellent quality has also been found at several points, while manganese and other minerals are in evidence. In connection with a question asked by Mr. Ronayne, I would like to say that, whatever may be the custom in other districts, I believe it will continue to be the practice in the north to connect with the Auckland market by rail, as local conditions to some extent compel us to take that course. The large extent of poor land which exists between Otamatea and Auckland makes the driving of cattle a severe tax upon their condition. The roads are bad, and I feel sure that the railway will always be the main mode of conveying our live-stock. Another point is that there is a considerable amount of stock sent right through to the Waikato and further south. That is a long distance, and the owners and settlers have found that the railway is always the most profitable method of conveyance. In my opinion, Whangarei is not a cattle-producing centre. Right along the line from Otamatea to the north of Hokianga is a very large cattle-producing district, and in the sending of produce from the far north to the market the matter of expense must be a very great question; and, although none of the lines have been completely surveyed, I think accurate estimates will show a saving from Kaihōke to Auckland by the central or western route of thirty miles, the figures being 158 miles by the western route, as against 190 by the Whangarei connection. Another point within the scope of the Commission is the question of connecting the Main Trunk line with other lines in the north. It will be clearly seen from the map that the western route of railway from McCarroll's Gap to Mangakahia, certainly as regards the country, is about midway between the Kaihu line and the Whangarei-Kawakawa line. I would like to emphasize the fact that it is impossible to forecast the future as regards the developments on the Main Trunk line or the establishment of suitable branches. I would therefore urge that it is in the best interests of the country to construct and develop a Main Trunk line which it can be shown would develop the best resources of the Dominion and this part of the country in the best possible way. In the meantime I indorse what Mr. Hammond has urged—that the best connection between the Main Trunk line and the Kaihu line would be from Dargaville and Kirikopuni. Even if the eastern line were adopted, that would still be the best connection. I wish to call attention to the difficulty in regard to statistical evidence. When such evidence is placed before the Commission it must be extremely difficult for the Commission to assure itself of the boundaries within which the witness has compiled his statistics. If the question of population or the occupation of the country were taken into consideration as the foundation for a settlement of the question, the North Island Trunk line must have been carried by way of New Plymouth, and close to the west coast. It is quite true that the line which will give the best results in the establishment of railways may at the time of the inquiry not be in occupation at all, or be very sparsely populated, and yet when the railway was constructed it might prove to be the best route in the interests of the country. That is all I wish to say upon this matter.

4. *Mr. Evans.*] You say you have been sixteen years in this district?—I have been in the district for over thirty years, but in continuous residence for sixteen years.