

being a revenue-earning connection. As to the question which is the most suitable Main Trunk route for future branch connection, there can be no doubt that the western route is the most needed, and will give the best results, because the settlers on the eastern route are fairly well served with roads and water, giving them an access to open markets. They would not be likely to pay £1 5s. per ton for railway freight when they have water carriage for 7s. 6d. on the western route. The land at present improved and occupied is capable of producing more valuable produce than it is at present yielding, but for want of roads or railway connection the settlers have to produce what they can get to the market, and cannot consider the purposes for which their land is most suited. Branch lines will be required in the future both east and west of the Main Trunk. The Main Trunk at Mangakahia will undoubtedly require an eastern branch connection with the Kawakawa line, so as to give access to Opuā, which is undoubtedly the best deep-water port north of Auckland. Speaking of the immediate earning-power of the railway on either route, I am convinced that a very large amount of revenue will accrue from timber freights on the western route—a very great deal more than is likely to accrue on the eastern route. On the western route there is a large kauri forest belonging to the Crown, which should be reserved until the railway is constructed. It contains from 10,000,000 ft. to 12,000,000 ft. of kauri, which with present facilities would not bring more than 2s. per 100 superficial feet. As to royalty, I have every reason to believe that if a railway were put through the western route it would bring 5s. per 100 ft. in royalty, while the freights on this timber would reach a very considerable amount. As to the course of construction, I wish to state that the western route, crossing the Wairoa River, is the best point for a high-level bridge. The Mangakahia, Wairua, and Waiotama Rivers would have to be bridged if the eastern route were adopted. As to the other consideration, the number of settlers and the benefit conferred on them by the proposed route, water connection being much cheaper, the Main Trunk would not be made use of by the Maungatapere settlers to any great extent; therefore more settlers would derive a great amount of benefit from the western route. At present freights from Auckland to settlers on the western route range from £1 10s. to £2 5s. per ton. As to my proposition about the land on the proposed route belonging to the State or being held for speculative purposes, if the latter is the case, then a fixed value should be placed on it, and it should be acquired by the State before the line is put through. I wish to put in a lithograph map of the sections offered at the last ballot for lands in the Mangakahia, taken on the 27th March last, and showing the sections on the eastern route the railway would traverse. Sections 5A and 6, referred to in this plan, are on the Mangakahia Road.

3. Does your information agree with the description on the lithograph?—Yes. It is heavy clay soil of inferior quality, fern land covered with manuka and rushes. From McCarroll's Gap right through on the western route the land is good throughout.

4. *Mr. Coom.*] Which do you refer to as the western route?—From Kirikopuni to the Mangakahia Valley, close to Tangihua Range.

5. Could the State forest reserve be tapped by the eastern route?—It is more feasible by the western route.

6. How far away would it be from the eastern route?—About four miles. Tutamoe State Forest was reserved some years ago, and the timber has been sold for 3s. 9d. per hundred, while before being reserved it could not be sold for 6d. per hundred. In regard to the bridging of the Wairoa River, on the western route only one bridge would be required, on account of the natural formation of the country being high, in place of three bridges if the other route were taken.

7. *Mr. Evans.*] Do you think the Government should acquire any blocks of land on the line of route?—Not all blocks of land, but any land held for speculative purposes, in order to give the settlers a chance of obtaining the increased value.

8. Is there any Native land in your district?—Yes, but not on the western route. It is all Government and private land there.

9. How many settlers are located on the western route?—I could not say.

10. Has much land been taken up in this district?—It is being gradually brought under grass, but for want of roads nothing else can be done with it at present.

11. How long does it take to clear land and get it into cultivation?—A number of years in some places, but a shorter time in others. It depends on the nature of the bush.

12. We were told that a man took fifteen years to get his land into grass: do you agree with that?—If a man has energy and money, and roads to his farm, he can do it in a couple of years, but not without.

13. There are settlers who have held land for fifteen years, and have not got it cleared for cultivation yet: why is that?—Because they found it more profitable to graze.

14. Do not many settlers who have no cattle make their living by getting out gum?—Not many go gum-digging now.

15. Why is that?—The place was settled at first with the assistance of the gum-digging, and the pioneer settlers had to depend on it, but of recent years they have got beyond that stage, and depend on the cattle.

16. What is the size of your section?—I have not one. I am living in Dargaville; I have sold out the place I had—480 acres.

17. *Mr. Ronayne.*] You spoke of the necessity for the construction of a branch line later on to connect with the Grahamtown-Kawakawa-Opuā Railway?—Not with the Grahamtown line.

18. You meant a branch line from Mangakahia to Opuā, *via* Kawakawa?—Yes.

19. Are you not aware that the Main Trunk line junctions at Kaikohe?—Yes.

20. And would give by that means a connection with Opuā?—Yes.

21. Then, your proposal is to have an additional branch line?—Yes. I am convinced that in the future there will be a connection with Mangakahia and practically with Opuā, as it is the best seaport north of Auckland.