

61. How much does it cost to get goods from Poroti, fourteen miles from Whangarei?—£1 per ton, while the water carriage is 7s. 6d. to Whangarei from Auckland.

62. Do you not think, if the freight was £1 5s. per ton by the Main Trunk, they would use the railway?—No; that is not my figure. I was talking about the freights, and not the cost between the railway and the settlement.

63. Do you know what the freight to Whatitiri is?—No.

64. Do you think that if they had to pay 7s. 6d. water carriage and £1 for cartage, they would use the road when they could get it by the Main Trunk for £1 5s.?—No; but I say that the Maungatapere settlers would not avail themselves of the Main Trunk. I do not refer to Poroti.

65. You said that most of the settlers would be served by this line: where are the most numerous settlements?—Within a very close distance of the proposed junction at McCarroll's Gap.

66. Are there not a good many settlers at Maungatapere?—There are a good few there.

67. What about Ruatangata?—There are also a good many there.

68. What about the country lying to the east of the line, and north of the Wairoa River?—Yes, that is settled also.

69. What about the other settlements at Hikurangi and Aponga?—Yes, the eastern line would benefit them, as they have no direct communication with the southern part.

70. Is most of the population of the North Auckland peninsula on the eastern side—from McCarroll's Gap northwards?—Yes, but they are served by a railway already.

71. Taking a point between the two railway routes, where do the most settlements lie?—I believe we have equally as many on this side of such a line as there are on the eastern side.

72. *Mr. Becroft.*] Would the Ruatangata settlers be better served by the present Whangarei-Kawakawa line than by the eastern route?—They would be better served by the eastern route.

73. You said that McCarroll's Gap—Whangarei connection would never pay: supposing the western route were adopted, would you still speak like that of a connection with Whangarei by the western route at its nearest point?—I think, in the interests of the country, the western route would be the better.

74. If the western route were adopted, would the same objection lie in respect to a connection with Whangarei?—From a paying point of view, yes.

BENJAMIN EMRYS WILLIAMS examined. (No. 29.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a storekeeper, residing at Dargaville.

2. Would you make a statement to the Commission?—I will confine myself principally to making a statement regarding the localities I am absolutely acquainted with, and that will practically cover the whole of the country north of Dargaville from the Wairoa River extending right up to Kaikohe. I have been resident here for about twelve years. Before that time I was three years in Kaikohe. I am well acquainted with the whole of the country extending from Dargaville, and below it, too, for that matter, right up to the North Cape—that is, the whole of it on the western side. My experience in this district as a storekeeper and farmer, and other vocations, has led me to believe that we are suffering great hardships in this country for want of direct railway communication with the port of Auckland. Our freight from Auckland, from wharf to wharf or railway-station at Auckland to our wharf here, is something like £2 per ton on the highest rate, and about £1 7s. per ton on general merchandise, which is the lowest. We also have a freight of 11s. per ton over a portion of railway sixteen miles in extent. This practically is the only possible means we have to get trade direct from Auckland. Occasionally vessels coming from Auckland to take timber away make a point of trying to get freight, and to my knowledge they have never brought freight from Auckland under 10s. per ton: it is generally 12s., and sometimes 15s. We have also occasionally a cheap freight from the south, but that principally applies to produce, consisting of flour, grain, and chaff. It does not in any case apply to the ordinary necessities of life from the settlers' point of view. I refer to food and clothing. The freight from the south has never been less than 10s. per ton to this port, but that figure of 10s. per ton may be qualified in this respect: that everything is a ton so long as it is ten sacks. As a matter of fact, we are not getting a ton of anything for 10s. Speaking generally, I consider this district from end to end is paying 50 per cent. more freight than any part on the east coast for general merchandise. Even to Awanui freight is cheaper than to Dargaville. Speaking of the quality of the land from Dargaville upwards, my experience in Australia and in this country leads me to believe that the country in the Kaihu Valley is not only equal but superior to the bulk of the country in New Zealand, notwithstanding some tracts of rich volcanic soil. We have large tracts of country through the Kaihu Valley that is only fed at present by the Kaihu Railway, and I maintain that the connection of the Kaihu Railway with the direct Auckland railway service would prove of value to the land, and, moreover, would encourage settlement to a far greater extent than we can expect at the present time. I may say that we have a large tract of country which came into our possession three years ago by purchase from the Mitchelson brothers. We have something like 32,000 acres at present, and I may say that the whole block is subdivided into small sections. Southern people visiting our district inquiring for land have, without exception, condemned our facilities for transport, and have condemned the land for that very reason. They inquire first, "Where is your market?" and secondly, "How do you get there?" and that is as far as they go. A considerable amount of this land is west coast gum land that would not be suitable for grazing for some years to come, but for fruit-growing it is admirably adapted. The land adjoining our portion consists principally of Crown lands, and extends from the immediate neighbourhood of Dargaville right up to Tutamoe, and is a forest reserve: it practically extends right from the Bay of Islands to Punakitere. It is fringed by settlers on the lower end, and there are four settlements on the Kaihu-Taheke Road. These settlers are situated so far