

DARGAVILLE, MONDAY, 24TH APRIL, 1911.

JOSEPH WILLIAM SHANNON examined. (No. 30.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your position?—I am a Crown Lands Ranger for the Auckland Land District, and my headquarters are at Auckland.

2. Would you make a statement to the Commission bearing upon the matters we have under consideration?—I have lived all my life in the far north—the district that is to be benefited by the Main Trunk Railway, and I believe the railway should be pushed forward as fast as possible to its ultimate destination before branch lines are commenced; or, at any rate, that it should go so far as to serve the whole of the north. If the line was carried through as far as Mangamuka it would serve a large tract of fertile country to the north of Hokianga and Whangaroa, as main roads could be led to that junction. Of course, I have heard that it might stop for some years at Mangakahia or Kaikohe, but I would like to point out that if carried on from Mangakahia as far as Mangamuka Valley it would open up a large area. From Mangamuka the main road is now under construction to Whangaroa, which is deep water, and a very good harbour. There is also a formed road leading from Mangamuka through Fern Flat Settlement into Peria, where it strikes the middle road through the Oruru Valley and into Mangonui again at deep water. There is also a road under construction now from Mangamuka to Victoria Valley, over which the Commission have travelled by horseback, where there is a good metal road that leads right on to the port of Awanui, through Kaitaia. The present port is on the river, to which steamers of 100 tons get up a distance of seven miles. That road also connects with Mangatete, Waipapakauri, and farther north. Then there is a main road from Kaitaia to Ahipara, and then a road through to Herekino, which is increasing very rapidly as a dairying centre. The timber is now worked out, and the settlers are giving their attention to dairying, and have a factory going. There is also a butter-factory at Kaitaia and Oruru, and a cheese-factory near Awanui. The main metalled road from Victoria Valley to Kaitaia also taps the Takahue Valley and the Fairburn Settlement. Then, again, a road is being made from Broadwood through Te Karae Block to Mangamuka. The distance from Kaikohe to Mangamuka would be about thirty miles at the outside. This land that I have mentioned that is so opened up by roads and roads under construction is a very fertile district, and is now producing a large number of cattle, and in the future will produce a great number of sheep, because a lot of the land is broken, and perhaps more suited for sheep than dairying. At the same time there is a great future for dairying in that district, besides room for a million sheep on the broken land now under forest. I was at a small informal meeting of settlers in that district some months ago, and these railway matters came up and were discussed, and the question of which route would pay the north best was discussed—from McCarroll's Gap to Whangarei, or the continuing of the Main Trunk line through the centre of the Island. It was agreed that probably with the connection to Whangarei the northern end would be pushed on quicker, but at the same time they were unanimous in saying that they approved of the Main Trunk being pushed right through, as it was of more benefit to the greater number of settlers, and the proper thing to do from a Dominion standpoint. That opinion I confirm personally, though I think the line might get through a little quicker the other way. My headquarters were in the north for seven years, and I know that many settlers throughout the Mangakahia and adjoining districts took up their land in the hope that the railway was coming some day, and that hope has kept many of the settlers on the land up to the present. All along the line there will be timber that can be got out by the railway that will never be touched otherwise. The settlers would be able to dispose of any trees they have, but contractors now do not care to go and work a small clump of timber, as it does not pay them to do so. If, however, there was a railway the settlers could get their few logs out to the line, and probably small sawmills would spring up along the route to supply the different localities with timber for the settlers' dwellings. In fact, I feel quite sure there will be many sawmills started along the line.

3. You advocate the pushing-on of the Main Trunk as against the branches?—Yes.

4. *Mr. Ronayne.*] By which route do you advocate the pushing-on of the Main Trunk?—I am not acquainted with the eastern or western route. I have not been along the actual lines.

5. *Mr. Stallworthy.*] I understand you to advocate the construction of the Trunk line from Kaikohe to Mangamuka, and that you are not favourable to the extension from Kaikohe to Horeke. What is the distance from Kaikohe to Horeke?—It may be twenty-five miles.

6. And to Mangamuka, thirty miles?—Yes.

7. And the construction of a line from Kaihohe to Horeke would not be on the line of the central route so much as a line from Kaikohe to Mangamuka?—That is so.

8. *The Chairman.*] Is there any possible way of getting to Mangamuka except by the Te Paka Block?—Yes; across from Kaikohe by Lake Omapere on the west side, and then going down the Waihou.

9. Where do you turn into Mangamuka?—Right across from Rangiahua.

10. Is not Rangiahua on the road to the Hokianga extension from Kaikohe?—Not that I am aware of.

11. Do you not know the surveyed route?—No.

12. Are you aware of this fact: that the surveyors in laying out the Hokianga Railway have as their objective Mangamuka?—Yes.

13. Very well, then: does not the route to Hokianga only mean a branch of two or three miles from the Main Trunk to deep water?—Taken that way, yes.

14. Do you not know this to be a fact: that in laying off the extension from Kaikohe northwards the engineers have as their objective Mangamuka?—I have understood the line is to go there.