

concede that it is a little bold of me to make that statement, and I only make it for the purpose of inviting the consideration of the Commissioners, who are much better able to judge than possibly I am. Nevertheless the statement is made for the purpose only of directing your attention to the question.

*The Chairman :* You see the duplication of the line is a different thing from what you propose. The Emperor Nicholas wanted a line made between Moscow and St. Petersburg by drawing a rule and making the shortest line. That line would not be used for local purposes so much so for the practical running of the line.

*Mr. Skerrett :* That is quite true. I propose to deal with that question.

*The Chairman :* That would be of no benefit to the districts. The number of people wanting to travel to Auckland, for example, from this district or Marton is nothing at all.

*Mr. Skerrett :* That is not worth taking into consideration. I quite agree with that.

*The Chairman :* And in these days of motor-cars a man who can afford to be travelling instead of attending to his work will have a motor-car, and go to the town without any trouble. Ten or twenty miles is nothing.

*Mr. Skerrett :* Well, Sir, I would point out that when the time arrives to consider the duplication of the railway-line, that is the time when this problem will require serious consideration, and we cannot—

*The Chairman :* You will have the ordinary consideration that comes to all railways of looking after two separate lines, and looking after a double line means twice the cost.

*Mr. Skerrett :* We shall not overlook that.

*The Chairman :* The cost of management is a great deal more.

*Mr. Skerrett :* That is as definite a statement as I can make, doing my duty to the Commission. Now, there are some facts which may not have been brought quite clearly before the notice of the members of the Commission, though some of them, I know, are present to their minds. I believe it will be common ground that there will be a saving of mileage of about seventeen miles by the deviation, and that there will be a substantial saving of about one hour on the six expresses—four between Auckland and Wellington, and two between Wellington and New Plymouth. Another important fact which must not be overlooked is this: that the proposed route from Marton to Levin is about forty miles long, and it runs practically through level country. There will be no heavy grades. The grades would average, I suppose, 1 in 90, which is almost level. Mr. McKerrow refers to the matter in his report in 1896. After stating the distance he says, "Then, as to the grades and curves on the existing lines from Levin to Longburn, there is no grade steeper than 1 in 100, and only one 15-chain curve approaching the Manawatu River, no other less than 20 chain radius. From Longburn to Greatford, especially that part of the line between Feilding and Greatford, the grades and curves are severe. There are 118 chains of a grade of 1 in 50, and other grades between that and 1 in 100, in all five miles steeper than 1 in 100. From Greatford to Longburn the grades are better, there being only 7 chains of 1 in 50, and less than four miles steeper than 1 in 100. There are five and a half miles of curves ranging from 7 to 20 chains radius." This is how he describes the Levin to Marton line: "In the part of the proposed line Levin to Foxton, there are only 67 chains of grades between 1 in 50 and 1 in 100, and only one curve of 20 chains radius. From Foxton to Greatford the line can be run nearly straight on easy grades. From the foregoing it will be seen that for all places north of Greatford the line via Foxton would bring them fifteen miles nearer Wellington by rail than they are now, and locally it would save the the country between Bull's, Sanson, and Foxton a round by rail of about thirty miles on goods traffic. The settlers complain that for produce consigned to Wellington this extra mileage is aggravated by their having to pay three short-distance rates—namely, on the steam tram, Carnarvon, on the Government line, to Longburn, and from Longburn to Wellington, on the Manawatu Company's line. For passenger traffic the inconvenience is not so great, as the country is well roaded, and generally the access is easy to one or other of the stations on the existing line. As regards the character of the two lines as to grades and curves, that by Foxton would be the better. It would be a very easy line to construct, the country being practically level throughout. The bridges over the Manawatu and Rangitikei Rivers and the permanent-way for about three miles over the Moutoa Swamp near Foxton would be the only expensive items on the line. The Moutoa Swamp can be avoided by a detour through the sandhills, but that would add to the length of the line about one and a half miles, thereby reducing the saving on the through distance to thirteen and a half miles. The tram-line is along a public road almost straight from end to end, and there are no cuttings or embankments of any extent, the country being very favourable. It would be practicable to keep to the tram-line for the railway, although so far as adopting it to save expense on the construction of the railway or an independent line, it is hardly worth consideration excepting the saving in cost of land and severance, as it is laid with old 28 lb. rails very much worn and in bad order. There would therefore be, after deducting the five and a quarter miles of Government line, Foxton to Carnarvon, thirty-four miles of railway to construct. Further, as Greatford Station in its present position is unsuitable for a junction, and, moreover, it is undesirable to have another junction so near Marton Junction, it would be better therefore to continue the new line along the existing line from Greatford to Marton Junction 3 miles 16 chains, or, in all, about 37 or 38½ miles of railway to construct, which, in the absence of detailed survey and estimates, should not be estimated to cost less than £300,000." In Mr. McKerrow's original report the amount is stated to be £200,000, but my learned friend Mr. Myers says that is a misprint for £300,000. Our estimate is in the neighbourhood of £280,000. The report continues: "Although it would be a decided advantage to shorten the distance by 13½ or 15 miles and save from half an hour to an hour on traffic from all places north of Greatford to and from Wellington, the present traffic would not warrant the outlay, for it would practically mean the deviation of the traffic over the two lines, which, with the extra cost of maintenance and of additional train services without corresponding increase of traffic. When the through line to Auckland is completed and opened for traffic it may be worth while to consider the question of constructing the direct line Levin to Greatford, but not till then. The settlers between Bull's and Foxton, although labouring under