

63. May I suggest that at least 80 per cent. of the exports from Rongotea is butter?—You might say so, but I could not corroborate it one way or the other.

64. We will say the bulk of the exports from Rongotea consists of butter?—Yes, I should say butter and wool. It is distinctly dairying produce. The whole of the butter certainly goes down, and that is the largest export from that district.

65. Which way does that go?—It goes by train to Longburn. It is a perishable commodity and will not stand any delay in transit. It is sent in the early morning from the butter-factory covered with wet cloths in summer-time. It is then put into a specially designed van and railed to Wellington.

66. Is it taken in motor-lorries to Longburn?—I am not conversant with that.

67. Now, the construction of this proposed line would not alter that?—No, it would not; nor would it, of course, alter the fact that we supply the bulk of what the factories use in the shape of coal, &c., by tram.

68. I may take it that the proposed deviation would not be of substantial benefit to the residents of Rongotea so far as the export of goods is concerned?—Not for the export of their butter.

69. Do they export anything else but butter and dairy-produce?—I have tried to show that they might perhaps export in future other goods by going in for another class of farming. Some of them have done so already—those who prefer a less irksome kind of farming. I think there will be a tendency for that to extend more than it has done in the past. At the present time they are dependent to a large extent on the butter trade. You are speaking principally of the Rongotea Township?

70. And its immediate district?—There is cheese.

71. But cheese finds its way in the same direction as butter?—No, it is not so perishable, and I understand that 130 tons have gone down our tramway. Butter is a very perishable commodity and must be got to the freezing-chamber as soon as possible. Some cheese does go down our line to Himatangi, and from there to Longburn, I think.

72. On the north-west side of the Rangitikei River, do you suggest any benefit could be derived by the inhabitants there by the deviation?—The settlers in Bull's would derive very considerable benefit. We are now using coal entirely. A very great deal of the household coal is got from the Waikato. It comes to Greatford and is then taken down to Bull's and that neighbourhood by lorry. It costs us 7s. 6d. per ton from Greatford to Bull's—a distance of about four miles. If we could get it down by train I should imagine the cost would be very small indeed.

73. Is it not a fact that you could land coal cheaper in Bull's even with 7s. 6d. per ton than it is sold for in Palmerston?—I could not say.

74. What is the cost per ton in Bull's?—I should have to look up the figures: I could not say offhand. The Waikato coal is only suitable for household purposes, or for mixing with other coal: it is not a good steam coal. We use in our factory considerable quantities of coal, and we like to get the screenings of coal and mix it with Waikato coal, which gives very good results.

75. Is coal burnt generally by the farmers in the Rangitikei district?—It must be, because the cost of firewood is almost prohibitive.

76. Would there be any connection for the farmers on the other side of the Rangitikei River if the proposed line were constructed, and where would the connection be?—There would be a siding at Bull's. They would have to come into Bull's. They would save a distance of four miles from Bull's to Greatford.

77. That is the only saving they would have so far as distance is concerned?—Yes.

78. Do you look upon this permanent deviation as a matter of urgency?—I do not think it is a matter of urgency.

79. Do you think it does not matter whether it is constructed now or in fifty years' time?—I think if it is not constructed for fifty years the colony will lose considerably by it.

80. Will you admit there are other lines more urgently required than this one?—I do not know of any.

81. Take the North of Auckland—do you suggest they have not greater claims?—They are constructing them.

82. You do not admit there are any other lines more urgent?—I do not know of any particular locality in which lines are now being made which would pay better for the money spent on it in a very short time. There are many things against it at the present time. The money-market is against it, also the price of iron and steel; but when things become normal again I should say that in a few years the necessities of the case will absolutely require it.

83. The Manawatu County Council has been the moving spirit in this suggestion, has it not? No, our moving spirit has been directed entirely to Greatford.

84. Who has been the moving spirit in the proposed construction of the line—has there been any?—I cannot tell you.

85. Has there been any demand by any large body of settlers or farmers in either this or other districts agitating for this branch line?—They are constantly talking about it. There have been no meetings. The local bodies have been talking about it, and the Bull's and Foxton people. The Foxton people are the moving spirits in this matter. The Foxton people naturally desire to get in a connection further up. It is very important to them for the harbour, and I think you can safely say that the moving spirit is Foxton, because they wish to bring in goods from Levin and through the harbour.

86. And really they are the only people?—No, I should not say so. At our meeting when we were discussing the question after the setting-up of the Commission, the Levin people came there, and I suppose they will come and give evidence now as well.

87. The Levin people are only interesting themselves with that portion from Foxton to Levin?—Well, you must ask the Levin people that.