

25. That is not much for a mill. It is not a large mill, then?—Yes, it is fairly large. It is an average-sized mill for the Rangitikei district.

26. *Mr. Skerrett.*] What prospect has the North Island sawmiller of capturing or competing with a portion of the Wellington trade, if there be a permanent deviation from Marton to Levin, shortening the distance by seventeen miles?—I think that the reduction of 2 per cent. in the price would enable the sawmillers of that line to place their timber more advantageously on the Wellington market, and if that were done it would result in considerable revenue to the Railway Department, which would be fresh business.

27. What does the Railway Department lose for every million feet of timber which is not sent to Wellington per rail?—On the present rate it loses nearly £2,000—to be exact, £1,916 13s.—on every million feet of timber that is sea-borne to Wellington.

28. That is to say, if timber from the North Island mills were substituted for South Island timber, there would be that additional earning-power per million feet?—Yes; but if it came round by the deviation it would not be so much as that: it would be that much less 2d. per 100 ft.

29. *Mr. Hannay.*] If the timber comes from the South Island there is railage?—The railage on the South Island line is only short, and means only a small revenue to the Railway Department.

30. *The Chairman.*] It depends on where the timber comes from?—I assume that the timber comes from the West Coast, and on that railage I understand special concessions are given by the Department.

31. *Mr. Skerrett.*] If the northern sawmillers could capture the whole of the sea-borne trade, it would pay interest on the estimated cost of construction, say, £280,000?—That trade would be 6,000,000 ft., and on the lower rate of railage of 3s. 8d. per 100 ft. it would result in revenue to the Department of £11,000; but by taking only half the sea-borne trade—viz., 3,000,000 ft.—a good portion of the interest on the new line—viz., £5,500—would be provided.

32. *Mr. Hannay.*] And would it also pay the working-expenses?—I could not say; I am not conversant with the working-expenses.

33. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Are there any further observations that you think you could usefully make to the Commission?—I do not think there is very much in regard to sawn timber, but there are other classes of timber which are consumed in that district, and which it is in great need of. I believe settlers in that district have great difficulty in getting it—that is, fencing-posts and firewood.

34. Will you deal with each of these topics?—First of all, regarding the extension of the tram to Greatford or Marton only; and in treating this matter I have not taken into consideration the new 10 per cent. revenue which the Railway Department are now making—I have taken the tariff rates only. Under Class F, at which firewood is carried, it is loaded at Rata, Mangaonoho, Utiku, and even lately at Rangataua, but the principal loading-station may be taken to be Utiku. Rata and Mangaonoho are by far the leading stations, but in a lesser degree at the present time. If the tram is extended to Greatford the saving per truck to the settlers on firewood railed to Utiku would be 10s. 9d. per truck: that is to say, assuming that each truck holds about 3 cords, the saving would be 3s. 7d. per cord, or about 10 per cent. On fencing-posts the central position from which they are obtained is different again: they range from stations from, say, Utiku as far north as Taumarunui; but I would take Ohakune or Horopito, which is the centre for silver-pine posts, as a fair average. Assuming that the tram is extended to Greatford, the saving on a truck of posts consigned to Greatford instead of Himatangi would be 10s. 9d., or 5s. 4½d. per one hundred posts. There are, roughly, two hundred posts loaded into a truck.

35. *Mr. Hannay.*] What is the value of those posts?—You would buy the posts at about £5 per hundred on the truck at the loading-station. Assuming that the deviation is made the rates would be better still, because the through rate would be from the loading-station to another point in the Sandon district, and the saving on firewood railed from Utiku to, say, Sandon would be 17s. 9d. per truck—that is, if the new railway were put through. On fencing-posts, assuming that the line is put through, the saving would be 18s. per truck, or 9s. per hundred posts—that is, almost equal to 10 per cent.

36. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Is there any other observation which you think you could usefully make to the Commission?—That is all I desire to say in regard to the timber business from the mills. The only other matter I would like to mention, speaking as a timber-merchant and manufacturer in Marton, is that we have not been able to do much business in that district owing to the cost of getting our productions into the Sandon district. We make joinery in Marton. We have to send it round by rail to Himatangi, then by the tram again to Sandon, to supply a place only ten or twelve miles away from our factory. To get goods manufactured in our factory to a point, say, ten or twelve miles from that factory it is necessary either to go to the expense of cartage or to take it sixty or seventy miles by rail and thirty miles by tramway. That applies to manufactured goods in the way of joinery. As a matter of fact, as a business man in Marton, I can truthfully say that on the other side of the river, in the Sandon district, it is like a foreign country, and there is no community of interest between the two places.

37. *Mr. Hannay.*] Where would they get their joinery from?—Probably from Palmerston or Feilding; but I should judge it to be more likely from Palmerston, on account of the tram via Himatangi. The fact remains that in that district our factory is the closest to a good portion of it, and the communication is about eighty miles, whereas by a direct line it would be just about twelve miles.

38. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Are you acquainted with the circumstances connected with Mr. Broadbent's box-factory at Rongotea?—No, except in a casual sense. I believe that owing to the cost of getting material to his factory he had to abandon it, and transfer his factory to Feilding, where he still carries on business.