

WILLIAM CHARLES KENSINGTON sworn and examined. (No. 33.)

1. *Mr. Skerrett.*] By profession I think you are a surveyor?—Yes, an authorized surveyor.

2. You have retired from the Government service, the last position you held being that of Under-Secretary for Lands and Immigration?—Yes. I appear to-day in the position of vice-president of Marton Chamber of Commerce. They have asked me to come with other delegates to put before the Commission the views of that Chamber; and in order to save time I will, with your Honour's permission, read the different headings which I have tabulated. They are as follows: "(1.) Shortening time between Wellington and Marton Junction by one hour, also enabling train to leave Wellington at 2 p.m. and yet reach Auckland same time as at present: same argument from Auckland to Wellington. (2.) Shortening time to Wanganui and New Plymouth by one hour, and *vice versa*. (3.) Advantage of shortening time between Wellington and Auckland of great moment to passengers arriving by ferry steamers from South Island and bound north. (4.) Proposed route from Levin to Marton almost level throughout—probably an average grade of 1 in 90; very easy engineering country, no appreciable curves nor steep grades to be contended with; distance only forty miles, against fifty-seven round through Palmerston North. (5.) Cost of construction would be from £8,000 to £9,000 a mile, including cost of two new bridges over the Manawatu and Rangitikei Rivers: total cost, say, £280,000, and probably much less. (6.) Construction of line direct from Levin to near Marton would save cost of duplicating present line from Levin via Palmerston North, which must be done in the near future owing to rapidly increasing goods and passenger traffic. (7.) Traffic so heavy at present that Railway Department find it difficult to accommodate the public when special stock-trains are asked for, as the main line 'must be kept clear' for six express trains daily. (8.) Proposed national deviation of Main Trunk line will pass through new country nearly all fit for close settlement. (9.) That acquisition of Foxton-Sanson Tramway from the Manawatu County would enable it to be utilized as portion of Main Trunk line and naturally lessen the cost of construction of the deviation. (10.) That Marton seeks no personal benefit in upholding the proposed deviation, as the new line would become part of the present Main Trunk line at least a mile and a half on the Greatford side of Marton Junction. (11.) That the grade from Marton Junction to where the proposed line will join the present Main Trunk is about 1 in 80 or 90, but from thence onward to Greatford by present line is a very steep grade, about 1 in 40 or 50. (12.) That owing to the numerous curves and steep grades on the Palmerston North-Greatford line the wear-and-tear of the rolling-stock and the extra coal used to maintain a good head of steam would be greatly obviated by the construction of the new proposed line. (13.) That in all older lands it has been found that the running of fast trains—express passenger and express goods—involved extensive deviations from the old-established routes in order to quicken communication, and the extraordinary growth of the populations of cities such as Auckland and Wellington will force the Government before long to carry out the same policy in this country: this also applies equally to Wanganui and New Plymouth as to Auckland and Wellington. (14.) With reference to Palmerston North being deprived of certain railway facilities by the proposed deviation: when national questions and conveniences are involved all towns so situated in older lands have had to submit for a time, but have never suffered any real set-back, the extension of population, the extension of the railway to Gisborne and adjoining districts will soon demand many more through trains to Napier and Gisborne, all of which must pass through Palmerston North. (15.) The important town of Wanganui and through passengers for the Main Trunk line from New Plymouth and towns on route are now served by extra trains from Wanganui to Marton Junction, connecting there with the Main Trunk trains: suitable trains would in the same manner run from Palmerston North to Marton Junction and connect with through expresses. (16.) Particular emphasis is laid upon the fact that no local body is asking for the construction at present of the Main Trunk national deviation, but they are urgently pressing for the acquisition by the Government of the proposed through line, feeling certain in a very few years the public will demand that the new line be made." Those are the views of the Marton Chamber of Commerce upon the Main Trunk line question. Now, if I may be allowed to state, they have also asked me to put their views before the Commission upon the question of the Sandon Tram. The Chamber is strongly of opinion that the Government should acquire as part of the railway system the Sandon Tramway and utilize it by extending it to Marton, and thus form part of the railway system. That is, of course, quite apart from the question of the Main Trunk deviation. They are of opinion that the line would probably be worked in the same manner as an ordinary light line—the same kind of line as Mr. Furkert was sent Home to England to report upon—viz., light lines for the purpose of feeding the main railway system. Failing that course being recommended, the Chamber thinks that the local bodies should be allowed by Order in Council to extend the Foxton-Sandon line to somewhere near Marton Junction, that it may be treated as a private line. The Government might put a clause in to the effect that if they wish to purchase or take over the line at any time they should have the right to take it over without paying anything for goodwill. Those are the views of the Chamber of Commerce which I represent.

3. Is there any further observation you would like to make?—I do not know whether I am in order in referring to some evidence given just now in connection with the ordinary traffic on the Sandon Railway, but if so I should like to point out that the Railway Department would not lose by having a line running from Foxton to Marton as a centre. This is only my own opinion. It is not only the traffic for timber and posts, but I might emphasize the fact that the Railway Department would benefit by merchandise being shipped to Foxton and thence going by a railway-line instead of being shipped to Wanganui. It does not go by the Main Trunk line from Wellington, but, as it is at present, so much merchandise is shipped to Wanganui;