

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WELLINGTON, THURSDAY, 3RD MARCH, 1921.

THE Commission met in the Parliamentary Buildings, Wellington, on Thursday, 3rd March, 1921. M. Myers, Esq., appeared on behalf of the Department, and R. W. McVilly, Esq., General Manager of Railways, was present at the opening.

The Secretary of the Commission (Mr. H. H. Sterling) read the order of reference appointing the Commission.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION.

The Chairman : Well, Mr. Myers, I do not know how you propose to bring evidence before the Commission, but I thought, and the other Commissioners think, that, as it will practically be a review of the recommendation of the Department, we might take first the oral or written evidence from the Department, and then proceed to Palmerston. Then, on the return of the Commission to Wellington, the Department could give further evidence or make further statements.

Mr. Myers : Of course, I do not know at the present moment what evidence is likely to be called in Palmerston with regard to the subject-matter of the first and original Commission.

The Chairman : We have one communication from the Palmerston North Railway Vigilance Association, and also a communication from His Worship the Mayor.

Mr. Myers : I apprehend, sir, that some sort of notice will be given in the papers at Palmerston North where it is proposed that the Commission should sit there.

The Chairman : Yes.

Mr. Myers : We are entirely in the hands of the Commission, and, as the members of the Commission will understand, we are desirous simply of giving the fullest information you desire at such time as you desire it and in such manner you may desire. My own suggestion is that perhaps the best course would be for the General Manager, or some other officer deputed by him for the purpose, to appear before the Commission and submit to the Commission the plans of the proposed alterations at Palmerston North, without going into detail as to the why and wherefore; that the Commission should then go to Palmerston North, inspect for itself the existing accommodation and the proposed new accommodation, and then hear what reasons the people in Palmerston, or any other people who may desire to give evidence, have for objecting to the proposals of the Department. Then the Department could give their oral evidence at Palmerston North or in Wellington, as may be most convenient. If the Palmerston North people desire to be represented, of course they could be so represented. I do not know whether those suggestions commend themselves to the Commission.

The Chairman : I think some such arrangement would be quite reasonable. The only thing is that, in addition to the mere copies of reports and plans, I think it would be well if the Department tendered some evidence before we went to Palmerston, or amplified their previous evidence if they have anything more to say. The Commissioners would like to have the departmental statement as fully as is possible before we hear the other people at all. For instance, we would like to know, among other things, which no doubt the Department can supply, the probable cost of the present proposals of the Department, and the reasons why the Department prefers the other site.

Mr. Myers : A good deal of the information that the Commission desires will, of course, be found in the reports. Certain plans have been prepared, which will be submitted to the Commission, but whether at the moment we can give you all the information that you desire in regard to the cost I am not aware. I think probably we will be able to give you all the information necessary, but the details that will be required will be worked out later.

Mr. Miles : I agree with the Chairman that it is absolutely necessary that we should have the fullest possible information from the Department. The information that the Department could give us would be of the utmost value to us.

Mr. Myers : We are entirely in the hands of the Commission, and will give the Commission all the assistance we can, and will adopt any course that the Commission desires. So much for the moment with regard to the first Commission. After all, I do not suppose that a great deal of evidence will be given in Palmerston.

The Chairman : I do not think so.

Mr. Myers : And, after all, the evidence that can be given in Palmerston is not expert testimony.

The Chairman : No, but I fancy from what I have heard that there will be many persons desirous of giving evidence. Of course, I may be wrong in that.

Mr. Myers : With regard to the second Commission, or extension of the Commission, I apprehend that while the Commission is in Palmerston it would be best to take any evidence that is available there. Of course, it will be understood that the Railway Department is not suggesting any deviation. On the contrary, the Railway Department takes precisely the same view as it took in 1916—namely, that any such deviation is impracticable, and would be nothing short of absurd, and more so even now than in 1916 owing to the altered conditions.