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VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

WEST COBURG ELECTRIC TRAMWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

RETURN to an Order of the *House*,

Dated 24th July, 1923, for—

A COPY of the Report from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways on the proposed West Coburg Electric Tramway; together with Minutes of Evidence.

(*Mr. Barnes.*)

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 24th July, 1923.

By Authority

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R E P O R T.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Honorable the Minister of Public Works (the Hon. F. G. Clarke, M.L.C.), in accordance with the requirements of section 35 of the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act* 1918, No. 2995, referred the scheme of the West Coburg Electric Tramway for inquiry, has the honour to report as follows :—

WEST COBURG DISTRICT.

1. The West Coburg district lies north of Moreland-road, which is the boundary between the municipalities of Brunswick and Coburg, and extends north for 2 miles towards the Melbourne New General Cemetery at Fawkner. The western boundary is Moonee Ponds Creek, from which the land rapidly ascends, West Coburg district being on a plateau extending from above that creek eastward to Sydney-road. The land being high-lying can be readily drained into Moonee Ponds Creek. Towards the western part of this area extensive views, with Moonee Valley in the foreground, Essendon and Newmarket districts in mid-distance, and Hobson's Bay in the distance, are obtained. West Coburg is well suited for a residential and manufacturing district, being within about 5 miles of the General Post Office and the shopping and business centre of Melbourne. The eastern half of this area, which is within half-a-mile or so of the Coburg railway and the Sydney-road tramways, is thickly built upon. Most of the buildings are dwellings, but there are a few large factories employing several hundred hands. Beyond the half-mile radius going westward from Moreland, Coburg, and Batman railway stations the residences are not so close together, and they are more scattered still as Moonee Ponds Creek is approached, it being apparent that people who have to proceed daily to the City to reach their places of business or where they are employed do not care to reside more than three-quarters of a mile from a regular and cheap means of travel, such as a suburban railway or tramway. A few have erected houses at West Coburg beyond this limit towards Moonee Ponds Creek, but they did so mostly because they had purchased the allotments and built thereon cottages in which they live, hoping that before long nearer facilities for reaching the City at short intervals and low fares will be provided by an electric tramway running through this area in a north-and-south direction about midway between the Coburg railway and Moonee Ponds Creek. There are not more than five or six small estates at West Coburg which have not been subdivided into building allotments and sold, the prices of the land ranging from about 10s. or 12s. to 25s. per foot.

2. Mr. W. Mitchell, Town Clerk of Coburg, said the local Council had had a house-to-house canvass made, and it found that within the section between Moreland-road on the south, Bell-street on the north, and a point half-a-mile west of the Coburg railway and a similar distance east of the Pascoe-vaile line, which borders on Moonee Ponds Creek, there were in February last 855 houses, with 3,975 dwellers. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board had estimated the population in that area at 2,000; but its figures must have been based on data collected some two years ago. Mr. Mitchell further stated that during the past year there had been 169 dwellings erected in that area, housing 855 persons. In the district of about 2 square miles to be served by the proposed electric tramway running northward from Moreland-road to Gaffney-street there were 3,319 building allotments, and 2,105 of these are held by separate owners. The Coburg Council stipulated under its by-laws that residential allotments were not to have less than 40 feet frontage by 100 feet in depth. Many of the allotments which had been sold had depths of 120 feet. He added that the Coburg Council had approved of the proposed north-and-south tramway route through West Coburg, which was practically equi-distant between the Coburg railway and the Broadmeadows line, and considered that route should have preference over the proposed east-and-west routes along Moreland-road and Bell-street, as the latter, though desirable as cross-town lines linking up the northern suburbs from North Essendon to Heidelberg, would not convenience the residents of West Coburg nearly so much as a tramway leading direct into the City through West Brunswick, Royal Park, and North Melbourne. Moreover, the north-south route would open up to settlement a large area of unoccupied land; and consequently would be the better developmental proposition, and more likely to become a paying undertaking at an earlier date. Large water mains from Preston Reservoir had been laid in the principal streets running in an east-and-west direction through West Coburg, so that there would be no difficulty in obtaining an adequate supply for the expected additional population, and the electric light was also in those

main streets. The City of Coburg has a population of 21,000, of which 17,000 are within half-a-mile of a railway or tramway. The remaining 4,000 are mostly in West Coburg, and had been waiting some years for nearer travelling facilities. A motor omnibus service and cabs were kept busy during each day and evening running between West Coburg and the railway stations on the Coburg line; but the district could not be opened up to rapid settlement, as it should be, in the absence of an electric tramway.

ROUTE AND FINANCIAL RESULT OF PROPOSED TRAMWAY.

3. Towards the close of 1922 Parliament passed an Act authorizing the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board to construct a double-track tramway from the City along William-street, Peel-street, and Flemington-road, and thence through Royal Park and West Brunswick by way of Melville-street to Moreland-road. From that terminal point, which is a mile from the Sydney-road cable tramway and slightly less from the Coburg railway, the Board sought to have the route for an extension of this tramway through West Coburg defined now, so that a roadway of sufficient width for the tramway and vehicular traffic might be obtained at an early date before many houses or fences are erected on the vacant allotments in that part of Coburg, as after their erection it will be more difficult and costly to secure a through road of adequate width. The Board stated in its Special Construction Scheme submitted to this Committee that, with the exception of East Northcote, the West Coburg district is the largest unserved area within 4 or 5 miles of the heart of the City of Melbourne. The proposed tramway would serve about 1,000 acres. The route suggested starts in Moreland-road at the terminus of the West Brunswick electric tramway—which will be under construction shortly—and proceeds north for about a quarter of a mile, thence north-westerly to the intersection of Reynard-street and Imperial-avenue, and thence north along Imperial-avenue to near Princess-terrace, where there would be a slight westerly deviation, turning into Victoria-parade and going north to Bell-street. Crossing Bell-street the tramway route would be through some resumed land to O'Hea-street, and thence along Derby-street to Gaffney-street, which would be the ultimate terminus. The length of this route would be $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, but the Board intended at first to construct only the first section from Moreland-road to Bell-street, a distance of a mile. As already stated, most of the streets along which the proposed tramway would be built are but 50 feet in width, and portion of the route would be through private property. The Board's idea was that it should act in conjunction with the local authorities to secure sufficient land to have an avenue 132 feet or 2 chains in width along the full length of the route from Moreland-road to Gaffney-street, so that the tramway could ultimately be laid in "parked formation" in a narrow reserve in the centre of the avenue to be used exclusively by the tram cars, and where the tram track could be ballasted with loose bluestone metal instead of having a tarred surface. The estimated cost of constructing the first mile section, which at the outset would be a single line of tramway terminating at Bell-street, would be £11,500 for track and overhead construction, but exclusive of any sum for land purchase or compensation. The estimated cost of the rolling-stock and buildings required was set down at about £7,000. Between Moreland-road and Bell-street would be one section, over which the fare would be $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. per journey. There would be five sections from Bell-street into the City, and the through fare would be $5\frac{1}{2}$ d. unless a concession is granted to through passengers, as is done on other electric tramway lines in Melbourne and suburbs. It was estimated by the Board that this tramway extension in West Coburg would carry 375,000 passengers in the first year it is opened for traffic, yielding a revenue of £7,035 from the above number of passengers, of which £1,617 would be the proportion due to the West Coburg section, the balance of £5,418 being allotted to the West Brunswick-Melbourne section of the line. The estimated annual expenditure would be as follows:—12 per cent. interest on capital cost of permanent way and overhead construction, £1,416; 12 per cent. interest on capital cost of rolling-stock, buildings, &c., £843; operating expenses, 40,500 car miles at 15d. per car mile, £2,530; total annual charges, £4,789, leaving an estimated annual loss on this section of £3,172. It was explained by the Board, however, that against this loss the receipts of the West Brunswick-Melbourne section would benefit as stated.

4. Mr. W. O. Strangward, Manager and Secretary of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, who gave evidence on its behalf in this matter, stated that even if the proposed West Coburg tramway were constructed and also cross-town lines along Moreland-road and Bell-street, as suggested in the Board's General Scheme of Tramways for the Development of the Metropolis, Coburg would not have an excess of tramways when that General Scheme was completed. There would then be but 1.255 route miles of tramway per square mile in Coburg, and that district would then be seventeenth on the list of suburbs. Fitzroy would head the list with 5.165 present and future route miles per square mile, St. Kilda coming next with 4.264, while Port Melbourne would be the lowest on the list, with only .308 route miles per square mile. The average for the metropolis on the completion of the General Scheme would be 1.410 route miles per square mile. He also pointed out that, while these cross-town lines in West Coburg will

ultimately become necessary, they were not required now, and there would either have to be level crossings in both Moreland-road and Bell-street over the Coburg railway—which would probably be objected to by the Railways Commissioners with the increasing electric train service on that line—or the tramways would have to be carried under or over the railway, which would be a costly work. Moreover, the Board would not favour a tramway from West Coburg linking up with Sydney-road either at Bell-street or Moreland-road and the cars brought into the City by way of Sydney-road, as that tramway was already up to its full capacity. It was to avoid any further congestion of tramway traffic in Sydney-road that caused the Board to propose the extension of the Royal Park–West Brunswick electric tramway into West Coburg. Councillors representing Coburg said the residents of West Coburg also favoured the extension of the West Brunswick line, as any linking-up at Sydney-road might necessitate passengers from and to West Coburg having to change cars at that junction.

WIDTH OF TRAMWAY AVENUE.

5. The representatives of the Coburg Council did not approve of the proposal of the Board to have an avenue 132 feet or 2 chains in width in the centre of which the tramway should be constructed. They pointed out that the existing roadways had a width of 50 feet and the allotments fronting those streets a depth of about 120 feet, so that if the roadway had to be widened to 132 feet about 80 feet would have to be taken off the allotments on one side of the street, leaving them with a depth of only 40 feet; or if land was taken from allotments on both sides of the road the depth of each allotment would be reduced by 40 feet, leaving a depth of but 80 feet, which was too shallow, the Council's by-laws requiring a minimum depth of 100 feet. Therefore the whole allotment would have to be purchased in each case, involving a large sum for compensation. They added that the Coburg Council was prepared to give the Board every assistance in having the streets widened to 70 feet, but not to 132 feet. When Mr. Strangward heard this statement he tendered further evidence, saying that the Board's proposal for an avenue 2 chains wide was simply a suggestion from a town-planning scheme, it being thought it would be a good proposal to have a wide avenue in West Coburg leading towards Melbourne. But from the Board's standpoint a 70-ft. road would be ample for tramway purposes if the Coburg Council would provide it.

EFFECT OF THE TRAMWAY ON RAILWAY REVENUE.

6. Mr. J. H. Olsson, Chief Special Traffic Officer of the Railway Department, in a report on the proposed West Coburg electric tramway, pointed out that the electric trains took 22 minutes to run between Coburg station and Flinders-street station, while the time from Batman station, half-a-mile north of Coburg station, was 25 minutes. The proposed electric tramway would run from Bell-street, Coburg, into its City terminus close to the intersection of Collins and William streets in about 36 minutes. The railway fares are as follow:—Coburg to Flinders-street, 1st class, single, 4½d.; return, 7d.; second class, single, 3½d.; return, 6½d.; monthly, first class, 12s.; second class, 10s. Batman to Flinders-street, 1st class, single, 6½d.; return, 10d.; second class, single, 4½d.; return, 7½d.; monthly, 1st class, 19s. 6d.; second class, 13s. 6d. The through concession fare by electric tramway from Bell-street to the City would probably be 5d. He estimated the loss to the railway by the proposed tramway extension to Bell-street at about £1,400. The Railways Commissioners, after remarking that, generally speaking, outside the short-haul metropolitan zone new tramways should be constructed so as to act as feeders to the high-speed electric railways, went on to say that although in this instance a loss would be occasioned to the railways at the outset "the Commissioners consider that this extension will ultimately prove beneficial to the railways, inasmuch as it will encourage settlement in an area which is at present remote from railways and tramways, and the increased population may be expected to bring business to the electrified railways. The district is an attractive one, and should in the course of time become an important residential neighbourhood. Having regard to these considerations the Commissioners offer no objection to the construction of this tramway extension."

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

7. The Committee, after making a close inspection of West Coburg and hearing the evidence, is satisfied it is a district which should, because of the opportunities it affords for comparatively cheap and well-drained sites for residential and industrial purposes, have tramway facilities. The route of the proposed tramway in a north-and-south direction along the streets suggested by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board will best serve the district and avoid further congestion of traffic in Sydney-road—which a line along either Bell-street or Moreland-road would cause if constructed by itself. At the same time, the Committee considers that in this instance the Board should be given power to deviate the route by, say, 100 yards, so that should any difficulties arise in having the streets mentioned in the Board's Special Construction Scheme widened to a chain or 70 feet, as suggested by the Coburg councillors, they could be overcome

by exercising this power. The Committee, in addition to agreeing to the location of the proposed West Coburg electric tramway, recommends its construction, believing that it will largely augment the revenue of the West Brunswick electric tramway in the course of a few years, and if credited with the surplus income from that source, after deducting working expenses, should show but a small annual loss. It is the function of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board to decide when it should proceed with the construction of this tramway extension to West Coburg after obtaining from Parliament authority for that undertaking.

R. F. TOUTCHER,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 13th March, 1923.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]