

1905.  
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VICTORIA.

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REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF THE PROPOSED

NETHERBY RAILWAY.

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*Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 28th November, 1905.*

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Seventh Committee.)

The Hon. G. GRAHAM, M.U.A., Chairman.

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(Vice-Chairman),  
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# REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting Netherby by means of a railway with the existing railway system, and of loading the land enhanced in value by the construction of the railway, has the honour to report as follows:—

1. Netherby is a small township about 16 miles, in a direct line, north of Nhill, which is on the Dimboola and Serviceton railway. It is also about 20 miles west of Jeparit, which is on the Dimboola and Rainbow line. Lorquon is another small township situated between 13 and 14 miles west of Jeparit, and about 8 miles south-east of Netherby. Both Netherby and Lorquon are immediately surrounded by what is known locally as the "bull-oak" country, the soil being of a red loamy character, and well suited for growing wheat and oats. The yield of the former was in some instances as high as 18 bushels to the acre last season, while the average for the district was stated to be 12 bushels. Oats yielded on the average 17 bushels to the acre. A few miles to the north of Lorquon and Netherby an extensive area of mallee country is entered upon. It extends from the west of Lakes Hindmarsh and Alacutya to the South Australian border, and stretches northwards for 50 or 60 miles to Cow Plains. The southern fringe of that country is being brought under cultivation, it having been found that mallee land readily responds to the use of fertilizers, provided there is a sufficient rainfall. Records placed before the Committee showed that the average annual rainfall for the Netherby and Lorquon district was slightly over 15 inches for a period of 16 years. The two extremes were 1902, when 8.5 inches were registered, and 1890, when upwards of 22 inches were recorded. A narrow strip of mallee land runs from the west side of Netherby down towards Nhill. It is known as the "Little Desert," and, until recently, was regarded as worthless for wheat-growing. Last season, however, portion of it was brought under cultivation, and fair crops were obtained, with the aid of fertilizers, from that sandy soil. Evidence was given that when mallee land is cropped for three or four successive years, with the assistance of superphosphates, and the land is then allowed to go out of cultivation, a good sole of native grass is obtained, which affords an abundance of feed for sheep during the autumn and winter months.

2. The country in the Netherby and Lorquon district is slightly undulating and lightly timbered. Most of the land has been cleared and brought under cultivation. The holdings range in area from 320 acres to 4,000 acres, the latter, however, including a large proportion of mallee land. Sheep-breeding for the export trade is carried on by many of the farmers in conjunction with growing cereals, it being found necessary and also profitable to keep sheep to clean up the stubble and weeds, and to eat down the early-sown crops where necessary.

3. It was stated in evidence that the chief drawback to cultivation in the district was the distance farmers had to cart their grain to the nearest railway station. Most of the settlers in the area seeking railway communication are from 12 to 15 miles from a railway, and the statement was made that if the price of wheat were to fall much below 2s. 6d. a bushel delivered at the station, it was feared that many of the settlers would have to abandon wheat-growing, because the cost of cartage would press too heavily on them. The Committee believes there is a danger of such a result following a decline in the price of wheat. It therefore urges Parliament in this, and in other similar cases, to authorize the construction of a railway, on the conditions set forth, even though the expected annual receipts may be much less than the estimated working expenses and interest on the cost of construction, so that land may not be thrown out of cultivation, and the production of the country decreased, causing a corresponding loss of freightage to the railways.

Cost of  
railway to  
Netherby.

4. Being satisfied that the district was one deserving railway communication, the Committee had to consider which of the two rival routes would better meet the requirements. Mr. M. E. Kernot, acting Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways, informed the Committee that a railway could be made from Nhill to Netherby, along the Worack West-road—which is 3 miles to the east of the direct road—so as to serve Lorquon on the way to Netherby. That line would be 20 miles in length, and was estimated to cost £51,000. The other proposal was to build a line westward from Jeparit across the Wimmera River, passing through Lorquon, and terminating at Netherby. That extension would be 21 miles in length, and was estimated to cost £58,000. After inspecting the district, and hearing the evidence, the Committee came to the conclusion that no additional traffic would be secured by constructing the railway all the way to Netherby township, because the farmers at Yanac-a-Yanac, on the west side of the “Little Desert,” would not cart their grain across that sandy belt into Netherby. They stated that if the railway terminated at that township they would still take their wheat to Diapur, on the Serviceton main line, and they therefore urged that the proposed railway should be carried through Netherby on to Yanac-a-Yanac, increasing its length by 10 or 11 miles. While the Committee cannot at present indorse that suggestion, it considers that before long the line recommended by it will have to be extended westward towards Yanac-a-Yanac, and thence northward into the Mallee country to promote settlement.

Cost of a line  
to Lorquon.

5. Mr. Kernot was asked by the Committee to prepare an estimate of the cost of constructing a railway from Nhill along Worack West-road, terminating about a mile and a half north-west of Lorquon, and about 6 miles from Netherby, it being considered that a line to that point would fully meet the requirements of the district. He inspected the route, and reported that that extension would be 16 miles in length, and would cost £41,600, or £2,600 per mile, exclusive of land and rolling-stock. The Committee also requested him at the same time to supply it with an estimate for a railway starting at Jeparit, keeping close to the south end of Lake Hindmarsh, and passing about a mile north of Lorquon, terminating at the same place as the last-mentioned line. He reported that that extension would be 14 miles in length, and would cost £37,800, or £2,700 per mile, including the bridge over the Wimmera River. That estimate also excluded the cost of land and rolling-stock, the former having to be handed over to the Government free of charge, and no additional rolling-stock being required, as the locomotive and train operating the Rainbow railway would also work this proposed line.

Rival routes.

6. The Committee found that the farmers in the district were divided on the question of the starting-point of the proposed railway. Those around Netherby favoured Nhill, contending that it was their market town, and that their financial and commercial interests were centred there. They also stated that there were two large mills at Nhill which bought their grain, giving a slightly higher price than the buyers for Melbourne firms. Another reason urged in support of the extension from Nhill was that the flour mills and the local water trust consumed a large quantity of firewood which would come from the Netherby district, and provide freight for the railway. It was also represented that it was practically the same distance from Dimboola to Netherby by way of Nhill as *via* Jeparit, and that the train which worked the Dimboola-Rainbow line on alternate days could be employed to operate the Nhill to Netherby railway, and also the section of the main line between Dimboola and Nhill, thereby saving an occasional special train between those two stations.

Lake  
Hindmarsh  
country.

7. It was pointed out by the advocates of the Jeparit route that the railway from Nhill would not serve about 20,000 acres on the west side of Lake Hindmarsh, where nearly 7,000 acres were under cultivation. Some of the farmers towards the northern portion of that area, who were 14 miles and more from Jeparit, experienced much difficulty in carting their wheat across the sand hills and over Outlet Creek to Rainbow railway station. They declared that they would send their wheat over the proposed Lorquon and Netherby railway if a station were placed about 7 miles out of Jeparit, notwithstanding that they would have to pay “local” rates from that station to Jeparit. It was also stated by those supporting the Jeparit route that the extension from Nhill would get very little traffic until approaching Lorquon, because farmers living within 10 or 11 miles of the main line to Serviceton would continue to cart their grain to Nhill, Salisbury, or Kiata, rather than pay a “local” rate for the carriage of their wheat or oats over the first portion of the proposed railway.

8. The chief objection, however, raised by the advocates of the Jeparit connexion against the proposal to construct the railway from Nhill to Netherby—apart from the fact that the latter route would not serve the 20,000 acres on the west side of Lake Hindmarsh, referred to in the preceding paragraph—was that Nhill was nearer to Adelaide than Melbourne. It was urged that, not only might the wheat traffic from the Netherby district be attracted to Adelaide by the Nhill extension, but the supplies of merchandise might also be obtained from that city, to the detriment of traffic over the Victorian railways. Nhill is 235 miles from Adelaide, and 248 miles from Melbourne. The distance from the South Australian border to Nhill is but 38½ miles. Adelaide competition.

9. The traffic officers of the Railway Department who visited the Netherby district reported that the proposed railway from Nhill towards Netherby—terminating about a mile and a half north-west of Lorquon—would serve about 130,000 acres, of which 31,000 acres were under cultivation, excluding fallowed land. The population within that area was estimated at 1,000 persons. The number of sheep was set down at 20,000, cattle at 1,500, horses 700, and pigs 1,600. According to the figures supplied to the traffic officers by the Government Statist, the average yield of wheat in the Netherby district for the past five years was 7.71 bushels per acre, and for the last ten years 6.50 bushels. They took the former figure as the basis for estimating the wheat traffic. It should, however, be pointed out that the periods mentioned included the drought years, when the wheat yield was exceptionally poor, and that the farmers in giving evidence before the Committee declared that the average yield of wheat in the district last season was 12 bushels per acre. The traffic officers also reported that the Jeparit route to the same terminal point as the Nhill extension would serve approximately 130,000 acres, of which 36,000 acres were under crop. They stated that the grain traffic on the Jeparit line would be larger than on the Nhill connexion, as the former railway would serve a number of settlers on the west side of Lake Hindmarsh, who would not use the latter line. The passenger traffic, however, would be less, as there would be but two trains per week from Jeparit to Lorquon, as against three from Nhill to Lorquon. Report of traffic officers.

10. According to the statistics collected by the Nhill, Lorquon, and Netherby Railway League, the area under wheat was set down at 29,982 acres, and that under oats at 7,081 acres, while the fallowed land covered an area of 20,819 acres. Local statistics.

11. The Railways Commissioners estimated the annual revenue, working expenses, maintenance, and interest charges in connexion with the proposed railway from Nhill to near Lorquon as follows:— Annual expenses and revenue, Nhill to Lorquon line.

#### NHILL TO LORQUON.

	£	s.	d.
Interest at 4 per cent. on £41,600, being cost of constructing 16 miles of railway from Nhill to near Lorquon ..	1,664	0	0
Traffic expenses .. .. .	46	17	0
Maintenance charges .. .. .	870	0	0
Locomotive expenses .. .. .	423	16	11
General expenses .. .. .	33	13	6
Total annual charges .. .. .	3,038	7	5
 Annual revenue, based on local rates between Lorquon and Nhill (passengers, £335; parcels, £45; mails, £144; class goods, £170 0s. 10d.; wool, £15; live stock, £100; grain, £862 10s.; all other traffic, £22) .. .. .	 	 	 
Estimated annual loss .. .. .	1,344	16	7

Annual  
expenses and  
revenue,  
Jeparit to  
Lorquon line.

12. It was estimated by the Railways Commissioners that the annual revenue, working expenses, maintenance, and interest charges in connexion with the proposed railway from Jeparit to near Lorquon would be as follows:—

JEPARIT TO LORQUON.

	£	s.	d.
Interest at 4 per cent. on £37,800, being cost of constructing 14 miles of railway from Jeparit to near Lorquon ..	1,512	0	0
Traffic expenses .. .. .	46	17	0
Maintenance charges .. .. .	770	0	0
Locomotive expenses .. .. .	188	9	5
General expenses .. .. .	25	2	8
<b>Total annual charges .. .. .</b>	<b>2,542</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
Annual revenue, based on local rates between Lorquon and Jeparit (passengers, £200; parcels, £45; mails, £84; class goods, £168 7s. 8d.; wool, £15; live stock, £100; grain, £975; all other traffic, £22) .. .. .	1,609	7	8
<b>Estimated annual loss .. .. .</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>

Views of  
Railways  
Commissioners.

13. On being asked to express their views, the Railways Commissioners stated that they were not able to recommend the construction of either the line from Nhill to Lorquon or the one from Jeparit to the same terminal point. They added, however, that if the Committee and Parliament decided that a railway towards Netherby should be built, the Commissioners considered that the line from Jeparit should be selected, because the loss would be less, after the payment of working expenses and interest charges, than in the case of the proposed railway from Nhill. They also stated that if the line from Jeparit were built, it would enable the Railway Department to provide a more satisfactory train service between Jeparit and Dimboola than would otherwise be justified. In their opinion, an improved train service between those two points was desirable, and it could be provided by running trains alternately two or three days a week to Rainbow, and two or three days a week towards Netherby, as the traffic might warrant, thus giving a service between Jeparit and Dimboola on four, five, or six days a week, as the case might be.

Increase in  
value of land.

14. Evidence was given that land in the Lorquon district would be increased in value from 10s. to 20s. an acre by the building of the railway, and that areas of Mallee country now regarded as worthless would be occupied.

Decision of  
Committee.

15. The Committee is of opinion that the railway should be constructed from Jeparit, and that it should be carried as near to the southern end of Lake Hindmarsh as practicable, so as to serve the country on the west side of the lake. It therefore recommends that a railway 14 miles in length be built from Jeparit westwards to about a mile north of Lorquon, at a cost of £37,800, subject to the following conditions:—

1. That the Board of Land and Works fix the boundaries of the railway district, or the area which will be enhanced in value by the construction of the railway.
2. That the Bill authorizing the construction of the railway impose on the district the obligation of handing over to the Board of Land and Works, free of charge, the land required for railway purposes, and of contributing £800 per annum for 20 years towards meeting any loss resulting from the working and maintenance of the line after providing for payment of interest on the cost of the railway and rolling-stock. The first year's payment of £800 to be lodged with the Commissioners of Railways before the building of the line is entered upon. Should the railway, with the assistance of the annual contribution of £800, earn sufficient to pay the annual working expenses, and also the maintenance and interest charges, the contribution to be diminished from time to time to such amount as the Commissioners of Railways may deem necessary to make the railway a paying one. The railway rate to be

levied on the land within the district on an acreage basis, and to vary in amount according to its proximity and means of access to the nearest railway station or siding, and also according to the quality of the land. In the case of any property being less than 10 acres in area, the rate to be based on the municipal valuation of such property. Lands and buildings exempt from municipal rating to be exempt from the railway rate.

16. If the railway recommended be constructed, it will, in all probability, result in a large area of mallee land near the vermin-proof fence, separating the counties of Lowan and Weeah, being brought under cultivation, as several thousand acres of that land will be within 10 or 12 miles, in a direct line, of the proposed terminus. The railway will also lessen the distance that the farmers have to cart their grain, and will enable them to use their teams in following larger areas, instead of spending so much time in carting, thereby increasing the production of the district, and diminishing the estimated annual loss. As the railway will be the means of inducing settlers to take up and cultivate a large area of Crown lands now regarded as valueless, and as it will also bring additional freight to the existing lines, the Committee is of opinion that the State should, in the interest of land settlement, bear a portion of the loss resulting from the construction and working of the proposed railway during the first few years. It has, therefore, fixed the maximum local contribution towards the line at £800 per annum, instead of £933, the full amount of the estimated annual deficiency.

17. The following extract from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Committee shows the division which took place during the consideration of the question referred to it:—

TUESDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 1905.

The Committee proceeded to consider the draft Report of the Chairman on the question of connecting Netherby by means of a railway with the existing railway system, and of loading the land enhanced in value by the construction of the railway.

Paragraphs 1 to 14 inclusive were read and agreed to.

On paragraph 15, which stated that the district interested in the proposed railway should provide £800 a year towards the estimated annual loss of £933 resulting from building and working the line from Jeparit to near Lorquon—

Mr. Warde moved, That "£800" be omitted with a view to insert in place thereof "£933."

And, after debate—

Question—That "£800" proposed to be omitted stand part of the paragraph—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 4.

The Chairman,  
Mr. Bailes,  
Dr. Embling,  
Mr. McBride.

Noes, 2.

Mr. Melville,  
Mr. Warde.

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

The paragraph was agreed to.

GEO. GRAHAM,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
24th November, 1905.