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REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF THE PROPOSED

BRUTHEN RAILWAY.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 8th December, 1905.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Seventh Committee.*)

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P. McBride, Esq., M.L.A.,

The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.
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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting Bruthen 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. Two proposals to connect Bruthen by means of a broad-gauge line with the existing railway system were placed before the Committee by Mr. M. E. Kernot, Acting Engineer-in-Chief of the Victorian Railways. The first was from Bairnsdale along the higher and inferior land by way of Sarsfield, and the other by the lower route and through better land *via* Johnsonville. The Sarsfield line would have a length of 19 miles 16 chains, and was estimated to cost £94,652, or £4,930 a mile, including bridges over the Mitchell and Nicholson rivers. This estimate was based on a trial survey made some years ago, and the figures were computed on a 7s. wage rate. It was explained by Mr. Kernot that the ruling gradient on the Sarsfield route would be 1 in 30, and as the sharpest curves would have a radius of but 5 chains, it would be necessary to use special locomotives, and only portion of the existing railway trucks and carriages could be taken over the line. He added that a permanent survey, keeping away from the Tambo River at Mossface, would probably reduce the length of the railway to about 17½ miles, and the total cost to not more than £88,000.

2. No survey had been made of the other route from Bairnsdale to Bruthen, *via* Johnsonville, but an inspection of the country by the engineers indicated that a broad-gauge line, with a ruling grade of 1 in 37½ and curves of 10 chains radius—the same as are being worked satisfactorily on the Warburton railway—could be constructed for £92,500, or £4,300 a mile, including bridges over the Mitchell and Nicholson rivers. The length of this line would be 21½ miles. Mr. Kernot stated that he favoured the Johnsonville route if a broad and not a narrow gauge railway were to be built. He explained that the cost of a narrow-gauge railway would be about three-fourths the amounts stated above.

3. It was stated in evidence that if the railway were constructed by way of Johnsonville, it would not only serve a greater number of people, but would also obtain a large timber traffic from the Colquhoun State Forest. The objection urged against the Johnsonville route was that it would be 2 or 3 miles longer than the Sarsfield survey, and, consequently, the residents of Bruthen and the districts beyond would, owing to the increased mileage, have to pay for all time more for the carriage of their produce, live stock, &c.

4. As already stated, the country along the Sarsfield survey is hilly, and the soil is inferior to that met with on the Johnsonville route, which traverses tolerably level country. About midway between Bairnsdale and Bruthen the Nicholson River is crossed. That stream is navigable as far as Sarsfield. There are some rich alluvial flats adjacent to the Nicholson River, but they are limited in area. Good crops of maize are regularly obtained from these fertile patches, and oats and potatoes are also grown. The uplands are chiefly devoted to grazing, dairying being carried on by a number of the farmers. Bruthen is situated on the Tambo River, and is surrounded by rich alluvial land, which was stated to be worth from £40 of £60 an acre. Yields of maize from 80 to 120 bushels per acre are obtained, and also large crops of French beans and potatoes. The flats, however, do not cover a large area. About 30,000 bags of maize are sent away from the district annually, and from 20 to 30 tons of beans each week from January to April.

5. The Committee was informed that the railway to Bruthen would be the first section of the proposed railways to Omeo and to Orbost. The former town is about 60 miles north of Bruthen, and the latter 40 miles east of that township. Evidence was given that the output of gold was rapidly increasing in the Omeo district, the yield for 1904 having been over 30,000 ounces. It was stated that if means of communication were easier, and the cost of carriage cheaper, a number of mines which were now idle could be profitably worked. Moreover, the railway if extended towards Omeo would result in a large area of Crown lands being settled, and the production of the district considerably increased, as the farmers would cultivate more extensively if they had facilities for getting their produce to market cheaply. Witnesses stated that there were about 35,000 acres of exceptionally rich flats around Orbost, bordering on the Snowy and Brodribb rivers. Those fertile areas were principally used for growing maize, and grazing cattle, sheep, and pigs. Dairying was also carried on by a number of the farmers, the district being particularly well suited for milk production, as frequent rains and heavy dews were experienced throughout the summer months, keeping the grass green for a much longer period than in other parts of Victoria. It was represented to the Committee that if the railway were extended from Bairnsdale to Bruthen, fat cattle, sheep, and pigs would be sent by rail to the Melbourne market. Last year about 7,000 pigs were travelled by road from Orbost to Bairnsdale. Wool and wattle-bark from the Omeo and Orbost districts would also be despatched by rail, besides large quantities of timber, such as piles, beams, sleepers, and sawn hardwood. Such perishable articles as butter, cheese, fruit, and vegetables (potatoes and beans) would be sent by railway from Bruthen to the Melbourne market. A small portion of the maize grown in the district would probably be sent by rail to take advantage of any sudden rise in the market prices, but the bulk would be despatched by boat to Melbourne.

6. There is no doubt that the Bairnsdale railway would have been extended some years ago to Bruthen were it not that the latter town is fairly well served by water carriage. Steamers and schooners drawing 5 or 6 feet of water can ascend the Tambo River to Mossiface, which is within $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of Bruthen, the two places being connected by a good road. In 1892, the first Railways Standing Committee reported that the railway to Bruthen could not successfully compete with the water carriage. It also stated in its Report that passengers would travel by the line if it were made, and timber (such as sleepers and beams for railway purposes), live stock, and light freight (such as parcels of drapery and furniture), which would occupy a large space on vessels, would be sent by rail. The heavy traffic, however, in produce and stores would be conveyed by water. Mr. R. W. Stirling, secretary of the Tambo Shire, when giving evidence before the present Committee a few months ago, said that "Apart from the perishable goods, if the boat charges were still cheaper than by rail, people would send by the cheaper route. . . . The reason the goods go by steamer to Melbourne, instead of being sent by train from Bairnsdale, is because the water carriage is cheaper." Mr. Charles Seehussen stated that he would not say "that the people would throw aside the boats entirely," and Mr. H. W. Seehussen told the Committee that "it would pay to send maize by rail at the beginning of the season, but not afterwards, because the prices were better at the beginning than later on." Mr. D. T. King, an agent, residing at Bruthen, said—"I am of opinion that the bulk of the maize will continue to go by the boats as long as they can carry it at anything like the price they do now."

7. The Commissioners of Railways were opposed to the extension of the Bairnsdale railway to Bruthen, because the line would be costly to construct, and in view of its proximity to the coast it was unlikely that the line would be payable, as it was very improbable that much of the business would be captured from the steamers, which carried practically all the traffic from the district beyond Bairnsdale. It was also stated by the Commissioners that, notwithstanding the special reduced rates which the Railway Department charged in order to attract traffic, the railway secured about one-third only of the total tonnage carried from the Bairnsdale district, and about one-half of the inwards traffic.

8. It was estimated by the Railway Department that the annual working expenses and interest charges on the capital expended in building the railway to Bruthen, and equipping it with rolling-stock, would be approximately £7,000, while the revenue would not exceed £2,000, leaving a loss of about £5,000 a year.

9. Although several witnesses who appeared before the Committee expressed themselves as being favorable to having their lands loaded, to meet the loss resulting from the construction and working of the proposed railway, it was evident from their statements that the residents generally were disinclined to have their lands taxed to make good the deficit, even though it may have been considerably less than £5,000.

10. In the opinion of the Committee, it is not expedient to construct a railway from Bairnsdale to Bruthen, because it would always be exposed to keen water carriage competition, and would, for many years, result in a large annual loss.

GEO. GRAHAM,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 6th December, 1905.