

1909.
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VICTORIA.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS.

TOLMIE RAILWAY ACT 1907.

REPORT ON THE PROPOSED RAILWAY
TO TOOMBULLUP AND TOLMIE.

PRESENTED TO BOTH HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Eighth Committee.)

The Hon. G. GRAHAM, M.L.A., Chairman;

J. W. Billson, Esq., M.L.A.,

The Hon. Dr. W. H. Embling, M.L.C.,

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

The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C. (Vice-
Chairman),

E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

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REPORT.

To His Excellency Sir THOMAS DAVID GIBSON-CARMICHAEL, *Baronet, Knight
Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St.
George, Governor of the State of Victoria and its Dependencies in the
Commonwealth of Australia, &c., &c., &c.*

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY :

1. Section 3 of the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907* directs the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways to "investigate and report to the Governor in Council as to the best route to be adopted for a line (or lines) of railway for the purpose of encouraging settlement in the County of Delatite, on lands in or near the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North." Reference.

2. The Committee had, on previous occasions, inquired into the question of railway communication with Tolmie and Toombullup to serve the lands in the parishes named, and had travelled over the greater part of that country, taking evidence at Wangaratta, Whitfield, Tolmie, Mansfield, Tatong, Myrree, and Benalla. In its Reports, placed before Parliament in 1905 and 1906, the Committee stated that the extension of the Whitfield narrow-gauge railway towards Tolmie would result in an annual loss of £2,500, and that the construction of a line from Benalla to Dodd's Crossing on the western slope of the Toombullup tableland would earn from £1,500 to £1,800 a year less than the sum required to meet the interest charges and working expenses. It was also pointed out in the Reports that, owing to the broken nature of the country and the steepness of the bush tracks, it was impossible for one railway to meet the requirements of the majority of the settlers seeking railway facilities; and, furthermore, if a line were made into that country the land-holders could not bear a railway deficiency rate of the amount required to meet the estimated annual loss. The Committee therefore reported that it was obliged to withhold its recommendation for building a line into the Tolmie and Toombullup district until the Government brought forward, and Parliament approved, of a scheme which would, for the first few years at least, relieve the settlers in such outlying, rugged, and heavily-timbered localities as Tolmie and Toombullup of the obligation of making good the whole or the greater part of the annual deficit resulting from the construction and working of the proposed railway. At the same time, the Committee expressed the view that there was no hope of a railway towards Tolmie paying until closer settlement, with its attendant increase in the production of the district, had been secured. The Committee added that it recognised that those settlers who had improved their holdings could not be asked to part with their interest in portion of their land without receiving some compensation from the Government or from the incoming settler. Later on the Honorable the Minister of Railways introduced and passed the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907*, but that measure did not give full effect to the suggestions of the Committee. Previous inquiries and recommendations.

3. Two proposals to give railway facilities to the Tolmie and Toombullup district were placed before the Committee in recent years. One was to extend the Whitfield narrow-gauge line on to the tableland to the south of that township, and thence to either Mather's allotment, near McDonald's Gap, a distance of 15 miles from Whitfield, at a cost of £53,514, or to Mahaikah, 19¼ miles, which would involve an outlay of £71,158, exclusive of the cost of the land required for the track of the railway. No additional sum was set down for rolling-stock, as the existing train could work the extension. The other proposal was to build a broad-gauge line from Benalla, running south along the valley of the Broken River to near Swan Pool, and thence eastwards towards Tatong, terminating either at Dodd's Crossing, close to the foot of the hills leading up to the Toombullup tableland, or at a point further on up Holland's Creek, in the direction of Tolmie. The line from Benalla to Dodd's Crossing would be about 24 miles in length, and would cost £62,688 if new rails were used, and £50,000 if serviceable second-hand rails could be obtained, exclusive of the cost of the land required for railway purposes. The value of the land for the track is included in the estimates given in the Appendix to this Report. To these sums, however, would have to be added £6,650 for rolling-stock. Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, recently Railway proposals.

informed the Committee that if the line were carried beyond Dodd's Crossing for $13\frac{1}{2}$ miles in the direction of Tolmie, the length of that railway from Benalla would be $37\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and its estimated cost £182,000, including the purchase of the land for the railway track and station sites. A narrow-gauge line from Benalla, *viâ* Mansfield-road and Dodd's Crossing to near Tolmie, would be 39 miles in length, and Mr. Kernot estimated its cost at £144,000.

Fifteen-mile
Creek route.

4. A new suggestion, however, to serve this country by a 5ft. 3in. railway, commencing at Benalla and going eastward through Molyullah and Kilferra close to Hansen South, and thence southward up the valley of Fifteen-mile Creek to Mahaikah near Tolmie, was recently brought forward. The Committee considered it necessary to inspect this route and take evidence concerning it before submitting this Report. According to an estimate made by Mr. Kernot, the length of a broad-gauge railway from Benalla to Fifteen-mile Creek, terminating on the west side of the Myrree State school, would be 27 miles, and the cost £85,000. If the line were extended to Mahaikah, the length from Benalla would be 43 miles, and the cost approximately £184,000, including the purchase of the land required for railway purposes.

Trend of traffic.

5. Some of the parishes mentioned in paragraph 1 of this Report, as the localities for which railway communication is desired, are nearer to Mansfield, which lies to the south of them, than to either Benalla or Whitfield, but the fall of the greater part of the country to be provided with railway facilities is towards the north, and most of the main roads also lead in that direction. Moreover, the markets for the timber growing on the land and for the potatoes and oats produced in the district are in the North-Eastern District of Victoria and Eastern Riverina, New South Wales. Consequently, the Committee, in considering the various railway proposals, had not only to keep in view the best route for a railway to encourage settlement on the lands in the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North, but also the importance of railway connexion either with Whitfield or Benalla rather than with Mansfield, so that the timber and produce of the district might reach the markets referred to by the shortest route.

The lengths, grades, curves, and estimated cost of the various routes are given in the Appendix to this Report.

DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY.

6. The district with which railway communication is desired is hilly, broken country, heavily timbered, situated to the south of Benalla and Wangaratta. Rich volcanic soil covers the caps of most of the hills. This good land is in patches of a few thousand acres each. The narrow flats of the creeks, which intersect the country, also contain fertile soil. The land on the hill sides, however, is mostly of an inferior quality, and, in many places, is too steep for cultivation, but, nevertheless, would be useful for grazing when cleared of scrub and fallen timber. Evidence was given that the average annual rainfall was 41 inches, extending over a period of ten years. Roughly speaking, the Broken River forms the southern and western boundaries, and the Upper King River the eastern side, of the district seeking railway facilities. Between these streams flowing northward are Holland's, Ryan's, Middle, Fifteen-mile, and Boggy Creeks, which have their source in the Toombullup and Tolmie district. These streams are separated by chains of hills running northward, which practically divide the country into several distinct areas, it being impossible to cart produce from some of the valleys over the hill into an adjoining one. It was stated that timber or produce could not be profitably got out of the district without railway facilities, as the cost of cartage over the rough bush roads and down the steep hill sides to either Whitfield or Benalla, especially in the winter and spring, when the roads were bad, was too heavy, and acted as an effectual bar to the settlement and development of the country. Many settlers had become disheartened at having had to wait so long without railway communication and had abandoned their selections, the land reverting to the Crown. The result is that the present population is sparse and the production small.

Mr. Lavery's
report.

7. In 1905 Mr. H. Lavery, district surveyor, made a special inspection of the land in the Tolmie district, and in his report to the Surveyor-General he stated that the nature of the soil varied with the height of the surface, the more elevated portions of the ridges being basaltic caps overlying the sandstone formation which cropped out on the descending slopes, and which in turn gave way in some portions of the area to a coarse granite. The basaltic soil was, he said, extremely rich, and this good

land covered, in the aggregate, an area of about 16,000 acres. The soil of the sandstone formation, while not so excellent in quality, was, nevertheless, far from being inferior land in the ordinary sense of the term. It varied in character from a light loam to dark and somewhat friable clay, and would, in his opinion, be capable of giving a very profitable return to the cultivator if he had the advantage of reasonably cheap transit to a market. Mr. Lavery also stated that a considerable area in the locality would not at any time be devoted to agriculture, because of the very abrupt and steep slopes of the surface. This was specially the case with regard to the faces of ridges near the King River and Holland's Creek, as well as some portion of the Fifteen-mile Creek. Much of the land, where least precipitous, would be useful for grazing. In his opinion, no new selection or re-selection of the abandoned areas was likely to take place under existing conditions, but it was possible that a continuation of the Whitfield railway to Tolmie would have a beneficial result. He added that to deal effectively with the abandoned selections it should be made a condition that those taking up the land should have a fair amount of capital to cope with the expense of clearing off scrub and fallen timber and providing the necessary stock and plant to work the land. Closer settlement would, he further stated, have but little effect in the direction of giving much revenue to the railway for a year or two, as some time would be spent in getting the land into full cultivation. Mr. Lavery also thought that a considerable trade in timber would result from the extension of the railway.

8. A classification of the land made in 1905 by the Surveyor-General showed that out of about 70,000 acres which would be benefited by a railway from Whitfield to Tolmie, there were 16,000 acres of exceptionally good soil, and 31,000 acres of very fair land, suitable for cultivation, the remainder being mostly inferior, and of little use except for grazing. About 32,000 acres were in the hands of persons who had either acquired the freehold of the land or had the right under their lease or licence to obtain the fee-simple. The remaining lands were in the possession of the Crown, there being then about 32,000 acres available for settlement, the balance being small timber reserves. Of the 32,000 acres of Crown lands available in 1905 for settlement, 3,000 acres were reported to contain good soil, while 13,000 acres were considered fair land, suitable for cultivation, and the remainder inferior.

Area of Crown lands in 1905.

9. As a number of the local witnesses examined by the Committee differed somewhat from Mr. Lavery in his description of the country, and also questioned the accuracy of the statement made by Mr. M. Murphy, land examiner, Construction Branch of the Victorian Railways, that the bulk of the Crown lands in the Toombullup and Tolmie district were unsuited for cultivation, either because of the poor quality of the soil or the configuration of the country, the Committee had a close inspection made in September, 1908, by Mr. F. Mott, district surveyor at Benalla, of the Crown lands—excluding the timber reserves—in the various parishes named in the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907*. He informed the Committee, as the result of his inspection, that the areas of Crown lands which would be available for settlement in the several parishes and their classification were as under:—

Mr. Mott's report.

Parish.	Total Area.	1st Class.	2nd Class.	3rd Class.	Remarks.
Toombullup North	15,000	..	7,500	7,500	Mostly forfeited lands
Toombullup	16,269	..	5,738	8,308	.. ..
.. ..	..	..	..	2,223	Unclassified State forest
Dueran	11,000	..	4,000	7,000	Forfeited lands
Dueran East	3,924	..	1,703	2,221	.. ..
Whitfield	6,680	250	169	6,261	.. ..
Whitfield South	10,740	320	4,434	3,323	.. ..
.. ..	..	..	..	2,663	Unclassified State forest
Total	63,613	570	23,544	39,499	

10. Mr. Mott stated that, in the above classification, the formal classification under the Land Act had been generally observed, but, as many of the second class blocks included a proportion of good land, the following was an approximate grading of the areas in question:—

Good land	4,500 acres.
Fair land	25,000 ..
Inferior land	34,000 ..

Area of Crown
lands in 1908.

11. As Mr. Mott stated in the foregoing table that there were 63,000 acres of Crown lands in the parishes mentioned therein, and as the Surveyor-General, in 1905, reported, from information contained in Mr. Lavery's report, that the area of Crown lands at that time was but a little over half the acreage stated by Mr. Mott, it should be explained that the Surveyor-General did not include in his list the forfeited lands in the parish of Whitfield, as they were within 6 or 7 miles of the present railway terminus, and were therefore regarded as being already served by a railway. Nor did he include some of the Crown lands in Toombullup North, as he considered them outside of the influence of a railway from Whitfield to Tolmie. Moreover, since 1905 several additional holdings in the Tolmie district have been abandoned, and the land reverting to the Crown increased the area in possession of the Government.

Parish of
Cambatong.

12. Regarding the land in the parish of Cambatong, which was also included in the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907* as one of the localities in or near which settlement was to be encouraged, Mr. Mott reported that this parish was practically all State forest. The country was rough and broken and of sandstone formation. Portions of it were snow-bound during winter. This parish, he remarked, was very little known, and was always spoken of as containing very fertile land, but an inspection quickly dispelled that idea. He did not see any land in Cambatong suitable for closer settlement, though there were odd little corners where selections might be taken up and perhaps profitably worked if in proper hands. The parish, he considered, afforded very little hope of providing any railway revenue except from its timber. This description generally agreed with that of Mr. M. Murphy, land examiner of the Construction Branch of the Victorian Railways, who reported that the land in the parish of Cambatong was "rough and broken; heavily timbered, and not suitable for settlement."

Other parishes.

13. Speaking of the Crown lands in the parish of Toombullup, of which 5,738 acres were classified as second and 8,308 as third class, Mr. Mott said that mostly all of the valuable volcanic land in this parish was held by selectors, but little of it was worked up to its fullest capacity. Much more of this land would, he considered, be made ready for cultivation if transport facilities were provided. The excellent quality of the volcanic land was undeniable. This rich land was usually only found on the crests of the ranges, and the area of it now held by the Crown was very limited. The patches of rich land in possession of the Government were so detached that any closer settlement scheme on such Crown lands could not, he added, in any sense be safely attempted. The 8,308 acres of third class land was mostly of a rough description, and where abutting on creeks was very steep and of granitic formation. As to the Crown lands in Whitfield South, he reported that they contained small areas of volcanic land in detached portions. These Crown lands were some years ago all selected, but were subsequently abandoned and withdrawn from selection pending a decision as to the construction of a railway. He thought, but for that withdrawal, they would have been applied for. The greater area of available land was, however, steep and rough, but with improvement could be made fair grazing land. Dealing with the Crown lands in Toombullup North, which had been occupied and abandoned, he stated that the blocks were, in many cases, rough and hilly, and, on account of their physical conformation, a large area could not be regarded as cultivable land. Mr. Mott further reported that in Dueran East there was some good basaltic land, but it was all held by selectors. The available Crown lands consisted of 1,703 acres of second class and 2,221 acres of third class land. Some of the latter, however, could be fairly raised to second; but the greater portion was suitable for grazing only. Referring to the 11,000 acres of Crown lands in Dueran, he said that the greater part was grazing land only, though, if cheap transit were provided, some revenue could be derived from the timber still remaining. There were portions which, when cleared, would be fit for cultivation, but he could find no large area of good Crown land in one piece that would lend itself to successful closer settlement. As it was represented to the Committee, when taking evidence at Benalla, that there were some Crown lands in the adjoining parishes of Moorngag and Too Rour suitable for settlement, Mr. Mott was also asked to inspect these lands. He reported that, in Moorngag, the available Crown lands amounted to 3,870 acres, in three detached areas. This land was principally rough, steep, granite country, and could only be considered as grazing land of third class quality, and it would not in any sense be suitable for closer settlement. The available Crown lands in Too Rour totalled 17,400 acres. In his opinion, these lands were, on account of their steepness and quality, quite unfit for closer settlement. Their principal value was in being used for rough grazing, and in the possible return from any good milling timber on them.

CLOSER SETTLEMENT AND LAND PURCHASE.

14. Mr. Mott's evidence, summed up, was that among all the Crown lands in the Tolmie and Toombullup district there was no compact area containing sufficient good land for closer settlement. What fertile Crown lands were available were in small scattered patches, which made them unsuitable for such a scheme. In this respect, his opinion was indorsed by Mr. M. Murphy, land examiner of the Construction Branch of the Victorian Railways. Mr. Mott, in reply to a question put to him by the Committee, suggested that, if closer settlement was to be successfully undertaken in the Tolmie district, and the railway made to pay, it would be necessary for the Government, before building a line towards that place, to purchase a sufficient area of the basaltic and other good lands in the hands of private owners, and then, by combining them with the Crown lands, recast the existing subdivision of the area so as to make it fit in with the route of the railway, and with various roads which would have to be made in connexion with the new boundaries. This was the view held by the Committee in 1905, and a subsequent inspection of the country has not led it to alter the opinion it then expressed "that there is no hope of a railway towards Tolmie paying until closer settlement, with its attendant increase in the production of the district, has been secured." Mr. Mott thought 100 acres of the basaltic land would be ample for a man and his family to make a living off. But the Committee considers that 50 or 60 acres of that rich soil, combined with a similar area of second class land, or with 100 acres of third class, should be sufficient for a settler. In any case, however, those placed on the land around Tolmie either should have enough capital to enable them to clear and cultivate a reasonable portion of their holding within the first year or so of occupancy, or should be assisted by a loan from the Lands Purchase and Management Board to make such improvements during that period, so that freight may be forthcoming for the railway as soon as it is opened for traffic.

SELECTION OF A ROUTE.

15. As has been already stated, no one line will fully meet the requirements of the Tolmie and Toombullup district, but as the country can not possibly support two railways, or justify an expenditure of about £150,000 required to give it adequate transport facilities, the Committee had, in compliance with the obligation placed on it by section 3 of the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907*, to select the best route for a railway to encourage settlement in the district. The proposed broad-gauge line from Benalla, *viâ* Mansfield-road to Dodd's Crossing, owing to the larger timber traffic, showed a smaller annual loss than the suggested extension of the Whitfield narrow-gauge railway to Mahaikah. But the former railway was set aside by the Committee because it would serve the western fringe only of the country mentioned in the *Tolmie Railway Act 1907*, as the area desired to be settled. This line could be continued from Dodd's Crossing on towards Tolmie, and thereby better meet the needs of the district; but the increased capital expenditure—£112,000—required for that extension, or a total outlay of £182,000, from Benalla to Tolmie was, in the opinion of the Committee, unwarranted. It was claimed for the proposed broad-gauge railway from Benalla, *viâ* Molyullah and Fifteen-mile Creek to Mahaikah, that it would cross all the roads leading from the Toombullup and Tolmie tableland down the various valleys, and would thus better serve the requirements of the district than any other line. Here again, however, the large expenditure required, namely, £184,000 for a 5ft. 3in. railway, and £147,000 for a 2ft. 6in. line, was, the Committee considered, not justified by the prospective traffic. A section of this line, from Benalla to Myrree State school, in the valley of Fifteen-mile Creek, would be 27 miles in length, and would cost £85,000 for a broad-gauge railway. But that section would terminate about 16 miles from Mahaikah, which may be regarded as the centre of the district for which railway facilities are desired in order to encourage settlement. Therefore, the Committee had no option but to select the extension of the narrow-gauge railway from Whitfield by way of Glenmore to Mahaikah, a distance of 20 miles, for a line having a grade of 1 foot in 30, at an estimated cost of £85,000. It would be possible to reach Mahaikah from Whitfield, *viâ* Hannon's Gap, thus getting on to a narrow ledge of the tableland, about 3 miles nearer Whitfield, with a 2ft. 6in. line, also having a grade of 1 foot in 30. The objection to this proposal, however, is that it would be $4\frac{1}{4}$ miles longer than the route by way of Glenmore, and would cost at least £15,000 more.

RECOMMENDATION.

16. The Committee considers that the best route for a railway to encourage settlement in or near the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North is from Whitfield to Mahaikah, a narrow-gauge line, 20 miles in length, with a grade of 1 foot in 30, and estimated to cost £85,000, including the cost of the land required for the track of the line. But, at the same time, the Committee draws attention to its remarks in paragraph 14 of this Report, concerning the need of an effective closer settlement scheme preceding the building of the railway if the estimated loss of £2,500 a year in connexion with the proposed extension is to be substantially reduced.

Divisions.

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

FRIDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER, 1908.

The Committee further considered the evidence received regarding the question of railway communication with the Toombullup and Tolmie district.

The Chairman moved, That, in the opinion of the Committee, the best route for a railway to encourage settlement in or near the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North is from Whitfield to Mahaikah, a narrow-gauge line, 20 miles in length, with a grade of 1 foot in 30, and estimated to cost £85,000, including the cost of land required for the track of the line.

Mr. McBride moved, as an amendment, That all the words after the word "is" be omitted, with a view to insert in place thereof the following words:—"from Benalla, *via* Molyullah and Fifteen-mile Creek, to near the State school, Myrree, a broad-gauge railway, 27 miles in length, at an estimated cost of £85,000, including the cost of land required for railway purposes."

And, after debate—

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the motion—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 4.

The Chairman,
Mr. J. W. Billson,
Dr. Embling,
Mr. Warde.

Noes, 2.

Mr. Melville,
Mr. McBride.

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

Ayes, 4.

The Chairman,
Mr. J. W. Billson,
Dr. Embling,
Mr. Warde.

Noes, 2.

Mr. Melville,
Mr. McBride.

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

GEO. GRAHAM,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 17th November, 1908.

APPENDIX.

RAILWAYS TO TOLMIE DISTRICT.

Board of Land and Works,

Railway Construction Branch,

Melbourne, 11th November, 1908.

The following estimates can only be taken as rough approximations to actual cost, as the class of country to be dealt with requires permanent surveys before preparation of detailed estimates suitable for fixing limit of cost.

These estimates have been prepared from available information, which consists of reports of inspections by surveyors and flying surveys in parts, and are intended to give a rough comparison of the length and cost of different routes, which will probably be close enough for the purpose of determining the best route for encouraging settlement in the Tolmie district.

Route.	Gauge.	Length.	Probable grades.	Sharpest curves.	Cost, including Land and New Rails, but not including Rolling-stock.
	Ft. in.	Miles.	1 in—	Chs. rad.	
FROM MANSFIELD.					
Mansfield to Bridge Creek	5 3	8½	33	10	34,000
Mansfield, <i>via</i> Bridge Creek, to Tolmie	2 6	14¼	25	2	60,000
FROM BENALLA.					
Benalla, <i>via</i> Mansfield-road and Tatong, to Moorngag (Dodd's Crossing)	5 3	24	40	10	69,000
Benalla, <i>via</i> Mansfield-road, Tatong, and Moorngag, to Tolmie	5 3	37½	40	5	182,000
Benalla, <i>via</i> Mansfield-road, Tatong, and Moorngag, to Tolmie	2 6	39	30	2	144,000
Benalla, <i>via</i> Molyullah and Fifteen-mile Creek, to Myrree	5 3	27	40	10	85,000
Benalla, <i>via</i> Molyullah and Fifteen-mile Creek, to Mahaikah	5 3	43	30	10	184,000
Benalla, <i>via</i> Molyullah and Fifteen-mile Creek, to Mahaikah	2 6	44	27	2	147,000
FROM WHITFIELD.					
Whitfield, <i>via</i> Glenmore, to Mahaikah	2 6	19¼	25	2	78,000
Whitfield, <i>via</i> Glenmore, to Mahaikah	2 6	20	30	2	near 85,000
Whitfield, <i>via</i> Hannon's Gap, to Mahaikah	2 6	24¼	30	2	over 100,000
CONNEXION.					
Mahaikah—Tolmie	2 6	3	30	2	12,000

(Signed) MAURICE E. KERNOT,
Chief Engineer for Railway Construction.