

1909.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF

RAILWAY CONNEXION BETWEEN THE
DOOKIE AND YARRAWONGA LINES;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 3rd August, 1909.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

WEDNESDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 1909.

18. LINES OF RAILWAY REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEE.—Mr. A. A. Billson moved, pursuant to *amended* notice, That the following questions be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report :—

* * * * *

(2) The question of connecting the Dookie and Katamatite and the Benalla and Yarrawonga lines by means of a railway, and the provision of a deficiency rate.

* * * * *

Question—put and resolved in the affirmative.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Ninth Committee.*)

The Hon. E. H. CAMERON, M.L.A., Chairman ;

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

J. Cullen, Esq., M.L.A.,

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

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

(Vice-Chairman),

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

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the Dookie and Katamatite and the Benalla and Yarrawonga lines by means of a railway, and the provision of a deficiency rate, has the honour to report as follows :—

1. Four proposals for connecting the Dookie and Katamatite railway with the Benalla and Yarrawonga line by means of a broad-gauge railway were placed before the Committee by the local residents, namely, from Cosgrove, a station on the Shepparton and Dookie line, to Goorambat; from Dookie to Devenish; from Dookie to St. James; and from Katamatite to Telford or Yarrawonga. All these proposed lines would pass over fairly level country, so that the earthworks would not be costly. It would be necessary, however, on the Goorambat, Devenish, and St. James routes to provide bridges over the Broken Creek and Major Creek of a sufficient height and length to prevent any likelihood of the railway being inundated and traffic interrupted when the Broken River became flooded and caused a large volume of water to enter Broken Creek, which is an affluent of Broken River. A bridge over the Boosey or Back Creek would be required in connexion with the extension of the Katamatite line to either Telford or Yarrawonga. Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, reported that the line from Cosgrove to Goorambat passing along the north side of the Broken River would be $20\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length, with a ruling gradient of 1 foot in 80 feet, and its estimated cost £61,000 for a fenced line laid with new 60lb. steel rails. If, however, serviceable second-hand rails became available, the cost would be reduced by about £250 a mile, or £5,000 for the whole length of the line. He stated that a line had also been surveyed from Dookie to Goorambat, passing on the north side of Mount Major and north of the grounds of the Dookie Agricultural College. The length of this connexion, which would have a ruling grade of 1 foot in 50 feet, would be 15 miles 30 chains, and the estimated cost £50,000, including new rails and fencing. Mr. Kernot further reported that the line from Dookie to Devenish would be close on 13 miles in length. Its grade would be 1 foot in 66 feet, and the estimated cost £42,000 if new rails were used and fencing erected. The suggested connexion from Dookie to St. James would be $12\frac{3}{4}$ miles in length, with a ruling grade of 1 foot in 83 feet, and the estimated cost £41,500 if the line were fenced and new 60lb. steel rails laid on the track. No survey had been made of the proposed extension from Katamatite to Yarrawonga, but Mr. Kernot stated that the length would be about $18\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and the cost approximately £55,000 if new rails were used and fencing erected.

2. The construction of a railway between the Dookie and Yarrawonga lines was urged both from a local and "national" standpoint. It was stated that if a railway were made from Cosgrove to Goorambat it would tap a large area of alluvial land in the valley of the Broken River, which would be closely settled, as it could be irrigated from that stream or from the Broken Creek. Apart, however, from irrigation, it was said by one witness that about 60,000 acres to the south of Mount Major and bordering on the Broken River, which would be served by the Cosgrove-Goorambat connexion, would, when cleared of the timber, grow good crops of grain and fruit, especially raisin and currant grapes. In the meantime the box and redgum timber, which was very plentiful, and had been mostly ringbarked, could be cut for firewood, and despatched over the new line to Melbourne. Some thousands of sleepers for railway purposes were, it was said, obtainable in the valley of the Broken River. At present the greater part of the land bordering on that stream was used for grazing. Portion of the area, however, was under cultivation, and yields of wheat averaging 24 bushels to the acre had been harvested. Dairying and pig raising are also carried on to a limited extent. Evidence was given that if a railway were constructed from Cosgrove to Goorambat it would save the farmers on the south side of Mount Major carting over the hills to Dookie station, and would induce them to put a much larger area under crop. It was also stated that if either this connexion or the one from Dookie to Devenish were made, stone for road making would be sent over the new line from the quarries near Cosgrove to the Tungamah and Yarrawonga districts, there

Routes
advocated and
cost.

Description of
country and
claim for a
railway.

being no supplies of suitable metal or gravel obtainable in those shires. Furthermore, those who urged the building of a railway from Dookie to Devenish said that it would cause a large deposit of limestone about midway between those towns to be worked, as there was a good demand in the Goulburn Valley for lime for building and agricultural purposes.

National aspect
of proposed
connexion.

3. Referring to the "national" aspect of the proposed railway connexion between the Dookie and Yarrawonga lines, either by way of Cosgrove and Goorambat or Dookie and Devenish, it was stated by several witnesses who gave evidence at Shepparton and Benalla that there would be a large passenger traffic over this cross-country line, as it would be a cheaper and much more direct means of communication between the Goulburn Valley and the North-Eastern district. The existing route between Shepparton and Benalla *via* Mangalore is 98 miles, but by way of Dookie and Devenish or Goorambat it would be but half that distance. Moreover, it was represented that this suggested direct route would lead to an interchange of products between the fertile hill country around Toombullup and Tolmie, in the North-Eastern district, and the plains in the Goulburn Valley, where potatoes, onions, mangolds, and other root crops could not be profitably grown. Timber for building purposes and coach-making would also be sent from the Benalla district to Shepparton and neighbouring towns. Soft fruits would be consigned from the irrigation colonies in the Goulburn Valley to the towns in the North-Eastern district, and also large quantities of peaches and apricots would be sent from Mooroopna and Arduona over the proposed connexion to Sydney for canning, as the New South Wales fruits could not be used for that purpose, being affected by the fruit fly. The Dookie-Devenish railway if made would, it was added, not only shorten the distance to Sydney and save time, which was an important matter in the transport of perishable fruit, but the orchardists would secure a reduction of about 6s. a ton as compared with the rate charged for the carriage of peaches, &c., by way of Mangalore. It was also stated it was expected that a considerable quantity of lucerne hay would be grown within the next two or three years in the irrigation areas in the Goulburn Valley, and that there would be a good demand for it in the markets of the North-Eastern district, and also in the Albury, Wagga, and Riverina districts, especially in drought years. During such dry periods thousands of tons of hay and chaff, it was said, had been sent from the Goulburn Valley to the North-Eastern and Riverina districts. A further statement made to the Committee in support of this cross-country line was that it would cause live stock, which were now driven from the Wangaratta and Benalla districts to the Goulburn Valley, to be carried by rail. Several of the witnesses, however, admitted that the live stock, being mostly store sheep or cattle, would not be trucked if the minimum "local rate" of £1 a truck were charged for its carriage over the new line. But, at the same time, they thought that occasional consignments of pigs would be sent over the line notwithstanding the local rate.

Other suggested
connexions.

4. The suggested connexion between Dookie and St. James was urged chiefly on the ground that the line could later on be carried eastwards from the latter town through Peechelba to Springhurst, thus giving a direct route between Wodonga and the Goulburn Valley. Only one or two witnesses supported the extension of the Dookie and Katamatite railway to either Yarrawonga or Telford. Such a line would, however, be valueless as a direct or connecting route between the Goulburn Valley and the North-Eastern district.

Report of
Railway officers.

5. According to the report of the officers of the Railway Department who visited the district to estimate the traffic over the proposed connexions, an area of about 10,000 acres between Dookie and Devenish would be served by a line connecting those towns, and an area of, approximately, 30,000 acres between Cosgrove and Goorambat by a railway between those places passing on the south side of Mount Major. Grain-growing and grazing were the principal industries, and near the Broken River fruit and vine culture and dairying were also carried on to a limited extent. The population of the district, they added, was very small, and the whole of the residents were within 10 miles of an existing railway. The construction of either of these suggested lines would give a direct connexion by rail between the Goulburn Valley and North-Eastern district; but the officers considered that the traffic likely to be forthcoming would be inconsiderable, except in drought years, when the interchange of live stock and fodder would lead to an increased business; and even then the revenue would be insufficient to make the connexion a paying one.

6. The Railways Commissioners estimated the annual revenue, working expenses, maintenance, and interest charges in connexion with the proposed railways for a tri-weekly service as follows :—

DOOKIE TO DEVENISH.

Annual Charges.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £42,000, being the cost of constructing 13 miles of railway from Dookie to Devenish	£1,680 0 0
Traffic expenses	23 12 0
Maintenance charges	819 0 0
Rolling-stock expenses and repairs	157 1 10
General expenses	24 19 10
Total annual charges	£2,704 13 8

Revenue.

Annual revenue based on local rates between Dookie and Devenish :—Passengers, £135 6s. 8d. ; parcels, £17 ; mails, £97 10s. ; class goods, £34 3s. 4d. ; live stock through traffic, £100 ; through goods, £300 ; agricultural produce, £112 10s. ; all other traffic, £10	806 10 0
Estimated annual loss	£1,898 3 8

COSGROVE TO GOORAMBAT.

Annual Charges.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £61,000, being the cost of constructing 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles of railway from Cosgrove to Goorambat	£2,440 0 0
Traffic expenses (including station-master at Cosgrove)	202 0 2
Maintenance charges	1,275 15 0
Rolling-stock expenses and repairs	203 14 8
General expenses	42 0 9
Total annual charges	£4,163 10 7

Revenue.

Annual revenue based on local rates between Cosgrove and Goorambat :—Passengers, £275 ; parcels, £51 ; mails, £157 10s. ; class goods, £146 13s. 4d. ; live stock through traffic, £100 ; through goods traffic, £390 ; agricultural produce, £243 15s. ; all other traffic, £25. Carriage of new traffic over existing lines—Agricultural produce, £200	1,588 18 4
Estimated annual loss	£2,574 12 3

7. It was stated by the Traffic officers of the Railway Department that they had not allowed anything for the carriage of firewood over the Cosgrove to Goorambat line, because the local rate of 2s. or 2s. 3d. a ton for the haulage of firewood from a station near the Broken River to Cosgrove would check any such traffic. Neither did they allow any revenue for consignments of sawn timber from Benalla to the Goulburn Valley, because the heavy charge for carting timber from the mills at Toombullup to Benalla, added to the rate which would have to be paid for carrying the timber from that town over the new line to the Goulburn Valley, would exceed the cost of sending supplies of hardwood from the mills near Cheviot, on the Yea line, and other places to Shepparton, &c., from whence the sawn timber required in the Goulburn Valley was at present drawn. This view is supported by Mr. L. D. Gibson, chairman of the Benalla and Tolmie Railway League, who stated that the two proposed lines, namely, Dookie to the Yarrawonga railway and Benalla to Dodd's Crossing and Tolmie, "were twin projects, each one the complement of the other." The Traffic officers also stated that unless the latter line were made, and the

present handicap arising from the high charge for cartage on timber brought into Benalla thus removed, little or no timber from the Toombullup district would be sent over the Dookie and Devenish or Cosgrove and Goorambat connexion. But even if that were done, the quantity of sawn timber which would be despatched from Benalla to the Goulburn Valley would not, the Committee considers, be sufficiently large to make a marked decrease in the estimated annual loss of either connexion, unless in the meantime extensive settlement takes place in the Shepparton and Rodney districts as the result of the new irrigation policy of the Government. As to the statement that if a connexion by rail were made between the Dookie and Yarrawonga lines a large quantity of stone for road-making would be sent from the quarries at Cosgrove to Yarrawonga, the Traffic officers said that this traffic would be small. If a local rate were charged for the conveyance of the stone over the new line from Dookie to Devenish, it would cost 3s. 9d. a ton to take the metal from Cosgrove to Yarrawonga. But if the local rate were abolished, and the ordinary through rate charged, it would be 2s. 2d. a ton, as against 2s. 5d. from Glenrowan, from which place supplies were now obtained. The secretary of the Tungamah Council, when asked what quantity of metal the shire used last year, replied, "Very little." Dealing with the statement that many tons of hay and chaff would be despatched over the proposed line in times of drought, and also numerous live stock, the Traffic officers remarked it was improbable, except in drought seasons, that there would be much fodder carried over the new line, and as to the live stock despatched by rail in such dry periods, the Railways Commissioners usually conveyed the sheep and cattle at reduced rates, which yielded little more than the actual cost of haulage. As to the deposit of limestone, it was within 6 miles of Dookie railway station, and, considering the expense of sending lime from Lilydale or Lara to the Goulburn Valley compared with the railway rate from Dookie to Shepparton, &c., the Traffic officers were of opinion that there must be some other reason than the cost of cartage from the kiln to Dookie which prevented the deposit being worked.

Interchange of rolling-stock.

8. When questioned on the matter, the Traffic officers informed the Committee that the proposed connexion was not required by the Railway Department for the interchange of rolling-stock.

Deficiency rate.

9. Most of the witnesses examined by the Committee at Shepparton, Dookie, Yarrawonga, Tungamah, and Benalla expressed their unwillingness to pay a deficiency rate towards making good the estimated annual loss resulting from the construction and operation of a railway connexion between the Dookie and Katamatite and the Benalla and Yarrawonga lines, contending that the line should be regarded as a national one, and that the State should therefore bear the loss.

Firewood traffic.

10. The Committee believes that the construction of a railway from Cosgrove to Goorambat would, if local rates were not charged, result in firewood being sent from the valley of the Broken River to Melbourne, because of the superior quality of that fuel; but, nevertheless, the proportion of the revenue from that source which would be credited on the mileage basis to the new line would be comparatively small, and would not make any very appreciable reduction in the estimated annual loss.

Recommendation.

11. In view of the largeness of the loss on either route, and the disinclination of most of those who asked for the connexion to pay a deficiency rate, the Committee considers it inexpedient to construct a railway to connect the Dookie and Yarrawonga lines.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 28th July, 1909.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]