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VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF

RAILWAY COMMUNICATION WITH
MOONEE VALE AND WEST BRUNSWICK;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No 1.—[6d]—8076.

REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting Moonee Vale Village Home Settlements and West Brunswick with the existing railway system by means of an electric or steam railway, and the provision of a deficiency rate, has the honour to report as follows:—

1. The object of this proposal was to give railway facilities to the residents of West Brunswick, and also to those living on either side of the valley of Moonee Ponds Creek. During the last ten years there has been a large increase in the number of dwellings erected in that portion of the metropolis, which is within 5 miles of the General Post Office. This has been mainly due to the activity of the building trade in and around Melbourne, and the extension of the metropolitan sewerage works, causing both the brick and pipe works at Brunswick to be busily employed, and also to the Government having established on the east side of the Moonee Ponds Creek four Village Home Settlements, in which there are upwards of 200 dwellings. It was stated by Councillor F. T. Hickford, Mayor of Brunswick, that "the West Brunswick and Moonee Valley district is a rapidly increasing one, not only because of the establishment of the Village Home Settlements there, which have been a great success, but also from the nature of the country. It is high land, well situated for building purposes, with a commanding and picturesque view of a very wide area." Witnesses stated that the only drawback to this residential area was the distance which most of the dwellings were from a railway or tramway, being from a mile to a mile and a half from a railway station, and about three-quarters of a mile from the North Melbourne and Essendon tramway, and from about a mile to a mile and three-quarters from the Brunswick cable tram. The Committee was informed that most of the residents of Moonee Vale were of the artisan class, and had to travel by train or tram every week-day to and from their work in the City or in one of the suburbs. If the proposed railway facilities were provided there would, it was said, be a rapid increase in the number of inhabitants, as the absence of a quick and cheap means of conveyance to the City was the principal drawback to the district. Statistics were submitted to the Committee, showing that in 1908 there were 1,111 dwellings and a population of 5,023 in the area between the Moonee Ponds Creek and a line drawn midway between the proposed West Brunswick railway and the existing Brunswick and Coburg line. It was stated that at least 1,000 permanent second-class passengers would make use daily of the suggested railway as soon as it was constructed. A further reason urged in support of the line was that the Government, in subdividing the Village Home Settlements at West Brunswick, had reserved a strip of land through those settlements for the railway track, and that the purchasers of the allotments had had to pay for that land, and had done so cheerfully, believing that at no distant date it would be used for the purpose for which it had been reserved. The Railways Construction Branch, in estimating the cost of the new line, had put down the sum of £4,416 for land purchase and transfer, but evidence was given by local residents that the property could be obtained for a much lesser sum, probably about £1,500, as the amount of £4,416 included not only £800 for the land reserved through the Village Home Settlements, but sums for the payment of other land along the surveyed route which the owners were willing to hand over to the Government free of cost if the construction of the railway were authorized within a reasonable period. A subsidized line of cabs runs from West Brunswick to the Sydney-road, the fare being One penny; but, while this is a convenience to the

local residents who wish to shop in the main thoroughfare of Brunswick or travel to Melbourne by the Coburg train or the cable tram, it is a very slow and circuitous route for regular passengers proceeding to the City or returning therefrom.

Cost of steam
or electric
railway.

2. The first proposal to meet the requirements of the West Brunswick and Moonee Vale district placed before the Committee by Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, was the building of a steam broad-gauge railway, with a grade of 1 in 50, branching off the Coburg line at the Flemington Bridge station, and proceeding in a northerly direction through Royal Park, and thence along the east side of Moonee Ponds Creek, terminating near the fire brigade station between Moreland-road and Albion-street. This line would have a length of 2 miles 20 chains, and it was estimated to cost £28,906 for a single line of way and sidings, exclusive of rolling-stock. That sum included £4,416 for land purchase and transfer expenses. At the same time Mr. Kernot submitted an estimate for an electric street railway having the same route, grade, and gauge. The cost of this alternative proposal was stated at £35,364 for a single line with turnouts, exclusive of rolling-stock and power house, it being intended to purchase the electric power instead of generating it at a station specially erected for this short line, or, if the suburban railways were in the meantime electrified, to work it as a part of that general scheme. The proposed steam line was intended to carry goods as well as passengers, being equipped with heavy steel rails and the necessary sidings, but as the Committee was of opinion that there was no need at present to provide for the carriage of goods over the line, it asked Mr. Kernot for an estimate of a passenger steam railway from Flemington Bridge to Albion-street, a length of 2 miles 5 chains, equipped with light rails (60 lbs.), and constructed in the most economical manner possible. The cost of this proposal was put down at £19,605. He also furnished a further estimate for an electric street railway of light construction from Flemington Bridge to Albion-street, the cost being stated at £19,280. In connexion, however, with both these latter proposals, it was assumed that the West Brunswick train, whether steam or electric, would be run into the Flemington Bridge station on the rails of the existing Coburg line, and, after setting down its passengers at the "Up" platform, would return to the West Brunswick line on the north side of Manningham-street, where it would remain until the "Down" train to Coburg had passed, when it would be run into the "Down" platform at Flemington Bridge station, and pick up the passengers for West Brunswick who had travelled from the City to Flemington Bridge station by the Coburg train. When this proposal was placed before the Railways Commissioners they objected to it, because they considered it would be dangerous to traffic, and, when the West Brunswick train was late, would detain the Coburg "Up" train on its arrival at Flemington Bridge station, and thus probably seriously interfere with the trains from Essendon, Footscray, and Williamstown when passing through Spencer-street station and over the viaduct to Flinders-street station. The Commissioners therefore insisted on a separate platform being provided at Flemington Bridge station, so that the West Brunswick train could run into that station on its own line of way, and not interfere with the running of the Coburg trains. This was, they said, in keeping with the practice of the Railway Department, which had made expensive alterations at the Hawthorn station to provide a separate line of way and platform for the Kew trains, and also similar additions to the Burnley station for the Glen Iris train. Mr. Kernot estimated that an expenditure of £12,000 additional would be incurred in bringing the West Brunswick train into Flemington Bridge station on a separate line of way, as required by the Railways Commissioners, as there would have to be a bridge erected over Manningham-street, and a bridge over Flemington-road, and the embankment on the north-west side of Flemington Bridge station would have to be widened so as to carry two tracks, one being a loop line for the locomotive to run round the train when changing ends, the Commissioners insisting on the locomotive always being in front of the train. This brought the expense of the proposed steam line up to £31,605. As the Commissioners also required a separate line of way into Flemington Bridge station to be provided for the electric street railway, an additional sum of £10,000 was added to the estimate of that proposal, making its total cost £29,280, there being no necessity to have a loop line for the electric service. Mr. Kernot was asked if the additional expenditure for a junctioning station could be considerably lessened by having the changing station for passengers at Macaulay-road instead of at Flemington Bridge. He, however, stated that the extra expenditure involved

in earthworks, ballast, sleepers, permanent way, widening bridges, culverts, &c., would largely exceed any savings in cost of the siding, signalling arrangements, &c., under the Flemington Bridge junctioning proposal.

3. At the instance of the Committee, Mr. George S. Morison, of Messrs. Siemens Bros. Limited, electrical engineers, Melbourne, furnished an estimate for an electric railway from Flemington Bridge to Moreland-road, West Brunswick. He proposed to start his line on the ground level on the north side of Flemington-road, close to the foot of the railway bridge spanning that thoroughfare, and to meet Mr. Kernot's survey in Royal Park, and follow that route to West Brunswick. His track, which would have a gauge of 5 ft. 3 in., would be $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length, and would have a grade of 1 in 30 in the southern end of Royal Park, so as to avoid the expensive cuttings and embankments which a grade of 1 in 50 would require. Mr. Morison estimated the cost of his proposal for a single track with turnouts at £18,964, including £2,800 for light rolling-stock and £4,290 for the power-house and plant. The objection, however, to this scheme was that passengers from West Brunswick would have to cross Flemington-road and ascend a long flight of steps to reach Flemington Bridge station. Mr. Kernot informed the Committee that the rails Mr. Morison proposed to use—50lb. steel rails—were far too light for an ordinary suburban electric tramway, those used in the St. Kilda to Brighton electric tramway being 92lbs. He added that “Mr. Morison's estimate was for a very light tramway, so light that it would not be likely to run for many years before it would have to be renewed. . . . Mr. Morison made no allowance for the ordinary preliminary expenses and the survey of the line, nor for obtaining the land or clearing the track.”

Another estimate for an electric line.

4. When the Committee was taking evidence, it was suggested that the proposed railway should be carried on from Albion-street, West Brunswick, to Pascoe Vale, so as to form a junction with the North-Eastern railway at that station, and thus give a second route for the Sydney express trains, and also the heavy goods trains, into Melbourne, instead of their having to pass through Essendon and Newmarket, where the traffic was frequently very congested, because of the increasing suburban train service to Essendon, and the growing goods and live-stock traffic on that line, and also the increasing traffic on race days to Flemington race-course. This proposition was brought under the notice of the Railways Commissioners, who replied:—“In regard to the contention that the construction of a railway from Flemington Bridge through West Brunswick to Pascoe Vale would be advantageous for the purpose of diverting the North-Eastern traffic from the Essendon line, there is already a railway between Flemington Bridge and Somerton, but this line has not been utilized for the North-Eastern traffic, because no difficulty is experienced in dealing with such traffic over the Essendon route, and, similarly, the proposed new route would not be used for this purpose, inasmuch as the diversion of the traffic would occasion considerable increase in the working expenses.”

Junction with North-Eastern railway.

5. An estimate of the probable traffic over the new line was furnished by the Railways Commissioners, who pointed out that the area which would be served by it was less than was stated by the Brunswick councillors, inasmuch as the fares on the new railway (West Brunswick) would be higher than those charged on the Brunswick and Coburg line, which had specially low fares owing to the keen competition of the neighbouring cable tramway. The Commissioners expressed the opinion that the area from which traffic would be drawn to the new line was bounded on the north by Moreland-road, on the east by Pearson and Grantham streets, and on the west by the Moonee Ponds Creek, with a small area on the west side of that stream between Hoddle-street and the Moonee Valley racecourse. The number of dwellings within this restricted area was put down at 558, and the population at 2,800. As passengers would be inconvenienced by having to change trains at Flemington Bridge station, and as higher fares would have to be charged than on the existing Brunswick line, it was considered that these drawbacks would not induce settlement on the area to be served by the proposed line. It was also stated by the Railways Commissioners that it was proposed to credit the new line with 2d. for each return trip over it, or 1d. for every single journey. They added that the return fare from Albion-street to Flinders-street would be 4d. second class and 6d. first class, as compared with 3d. and 4½d. respectively on the existing Brunswick railway. The monthly tickets

Revenue and working expenses of steam railway.

would be 8s. 6d. and 12s., as against 5s. and 7s. 6d. In consequence of the competition by the adjacent means of transport with their exceptionally low fares, the estimated annual revenue of the West Brunswick railway was comparatively small. There would be a service of fifteen trains each way daily on the new line, which would keep a locomotive and train crew fully employed. Thirty-five passenger trains are run daily to Coburg, and a similar number from there to Flinders-street station. If the majority of these trains had to be met by a train on the West Brunswick line, it would be necessary to employ two trains on the new line, with a corresponding increase in the working expenses. The revenue of a steam service was estimated by the Railways Commissioners at £788 7s. 9d. per annum, of which £771 7s. 9d. would be derived from the carriage of passengers, and the remainder from the conveyance of parcels, &c. The working expenses were set down at £1,991 11s. 1d., and interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £36,605—being £31,605, the cost of constructing the line, including the additional platform and siding at Flemington Bridge, and £5,000 for rolling-stock—would come to £1,464 4s., making the total annual charges £3,455 15s. 1d., and leaving an estimated annual loss of £2,667 7s. 4d.

Revenue and
working
expenses of
electric railway.

6. The electric train, not having to do any shunting, either at Flemington Bridge station or at the proposed terminus at Albion-street, would give a more frequent service than the steam train, and, consequently, its revenue was put down at £1,077 15s. 7d. per annum. On the other hand, its working expenses, according to the Railways Commissioners, would come to £2,711, to which had to be added £938 for depreciation of the plant, track equipment, and rolling-stock, making a total of £3,649. In addition to that expenditure there would be a further annual outlay of £1,323 4s., being 4 per cent. interest on £29,280, the cost of the line, and on £3,800 for two electric cars. Therefore, the electric railway would show an annual loss of £3,894 8s. 5d. In calculating the working expenses of the electric service, the Railways Commissioners contemplated purchasing power from the North Melbourne and Essendon Electric Tramway and Lighting Company, which offered to supply the quantity required at 1½d. per unit, to which had to be added £112 for maintenance, interest, depreciation, and sinking fund of the connecting cable (which would cost £700), and £30 for sundries, making a total of £555, or 2.018d. per unit. The price quoted by the Melbourne City Council was equal to 2.890d. per unit, including maintenance, interest, depreciation, and sinking fund in connexion with the sub-station and labour and attendance therein. The cost of generating power at the Elsternwick power-house for the St. Kilda to Brighton Electric Street Railway was 1.159d. per unit, including labour, material, and supervision, but not including interest or depreciation. The number of units generated annually, however, at the Elsternwick power-house was much larger than would be required for the working of the West Brunswick line, and, consequently, while there would be little, if any, reduction in the cost of generating current at a separate power-house at West Brunswick, the expenses, when divided amongst a lesser number of units generated annually, would probably come to nearly as much as the price quoted by the North Melbourne and Essendon Electric Tramway and Lighting Company.

Municipal
guarantee.

7. During its inquiry into this question the Committee received a letter from the Town Clerk of Brunswick stating that the Council had, by a resolution, affirmed the principle of giving a guarantee on the cost of the proposed railway through West Brunswick.

Decision of
Committee.

8. The Committee is of opinion that it is inexpedient to construct either a steam or electric railway to connect Moonee Vale and West Brunswick with the existing railway system, because of the large annual loss which would be involved, and the difficulty of lessening that loss by charging higher fares owing to the competition of neighbouring means of conveyance, which carry passengers into and out of the City at exceptionally low rates. At the same time, the Committee recognises that residents in this suburban area will continue to ask for an improved means of transit; but if payable results are to be obtained, their application, pending the metropolitan tramway system passing into the hands of the municipalities or of the Government, can only be met by adopting some method of conveyance which will not involve a large capital expenditure; such, for instance, as the running of tram cars with accumulators, as is being done in New York, instead

of having overhead wires to convey the electric current, or the adoption of railless electric trolley cars which have for some time been in operation in several towns in Europe, and are about to be introduced into Great Britain. The Agent-General should be asked to report on the trials of the latter cars—probably at Leeds or Bradford—to ascertain if they are a success when worked under English conditions, and the necessity of the municipality maintaining, in good order, the roads used by the cars.

9. Section 5 of Act No. 1350 prohibits a member of the Committee taking part in its proceedings when any proposed line running into or through his electoral district is being considered or reported on by the Committee. Consequently the Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C., did not take part in the deliberations of the Committee when the question of railway communication with Moonee Vale and West Brunswick was being considered.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 1st June, 1910.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]