

1910.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS**

ON THE PROPOSED

**MALLEE DISTRICTS CONNECTING
RAILWAY;**

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 23rd December, 1910.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER, 1909.

7. MALLEE DISTRICTS CONNECTING RAILWAY.—Mr. A. A. Billson moved, pursuant to notice, That the question of connecting the districts lying between Dimboola, Warracknabeal, Minyip, Watchem, Donald, Cope Cope, and Charlton, with the existing railway system, by a cross-country railway, joining the existing railways to Rainbow, Hopetoun, Mildura, and Sea Lake, and the provision of a deficiency rate, be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report.

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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R E P O R T.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the districts lying between Dimboola, Warracknabeal, Minyip, Watchem, Donald, Cope Cope, and Charlton, with the existing railway system, by a cross-country railway, joining the existing railways to Rainbow, Hopetoun Mildura, and Sea Lake, and the provision of a deficiency rate, has the honour to report as follows:—

1. In addition to the proposed connexions mentioned above, the Honorable the Minister of Railways asked the Committee to inquire into the suggested railways between Birchip and Warracknabeal, and Birchip and Wycheproof, as those connexions would link up the Hopetoun, Mildura, and Sea Lake railways, and in his opinion could be dealt with by the Committee under the terms of the reference to it by the Legislative Assembly. The Committee inspected the various proposed routes, and took evidence at Dimboola, Kewell, Minyip, Laen, Cope Cope, Donald, Korong Vale, Charlton, Wycheproof, Wooroonook, Corack, Watchem, Birchip, Warracknabeal, Hopetoun, Lascelles (Minapre), Bangerang, and Ballarat, concerning the different proposals. Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that a railway from Dimboola, *via* Kewell, Minyip, and Laen, to Cope Cope, would be 57 miles in length, and would cost about £156,000. A cross-country railway from Minyip, by way of Donald, Mount Jeffcott, and Wooroonook, to Charlton, would be 48 miles in length, and would cost, approximately, £130,000. A line from Warracknabeal, *via* Watchem and Corack to Charlton, would be 56 miles in length, and was estimated to cost £151,000. The suggested connexion between Warracknabeal and Litchfield by way of Bangerang would be 26 miles in length, and would cost, roughly, £70,000. Mr. Kernot further stated that a railway from Birchip to Wycheproof would be 19 miles in length, and would cost about £51,000. The suggested connexion between Warracknabeal and Watchem would be 27 miles in length, and was estimated to cost £73,000. If the connexion were made between Hopetoun and Lascelles (Minapre), it would be 16 miles in length, and would cost, approximately, £43,000, while the proposed extension of the Hopetoun railway to Turriff, which is also on the Mildura line, would be 22 miles in length, and would cost £59,000. All these estimates were exclusive of land and rolling-stock. A request was made to the Committee that the short line branching off the Korong Vale railway at Wedderburn Junction, and terminating at Wedderburn, should be extended westwards to the Avoca River, near Coonooer, and thence north-westwards through Wooroonook and Corack to Watchem. It was stated by witnesses who supported this extension that it would be about 46 miles in length, but they had no estimate of its cost. Mr. A. G. Stewart, Engineer of the Wycheproof Shire, said that a connexion 17 miles 52 chains in length could be made between Wycheproof and Birchip by branching off the Wycheproof and Sea Lake railway at a point about $4\frac{1}{4}$ miles north of Wycheproof, and running westward from there to Birchip. Nearly 13 miles of this line could be taken through reserves or on the public roads, so that the acreage of private property to be purchased would be small. Mr. Stewart also submitted an alternative proposal, leaving Wycheproof and running north-west direct to Birchip. This line would be 20 miles 30 chains in length, and all but about 3 miles of it could be on public roads or reserves. He explained that either line could be very cheaply constructed, as there were no large water-courses to cross, and the country was flat, there being a difference of 23 feet only in the level at Wycheproof and that at Birchip. Mr. Kernot stated that there were no engineering difficulties on any of the proposed connexions, as the country was practically flat, and the grades would be easy, while the rivers or creeks to be crossed were small ones and would not involve any costly bridging.

2. The country through which these proposed railways would pass was taken up years ago, and is well settled. The soil is of good quality, and the land is used for agriculture, chiefly wheat-growing, and for sheep-farming and raising fat lambs for export. Most of this country is served by the railways running north to Rainbow,

Hopetoun, Mildura, and Sea Lake, but as these parallel lines are about 25 or 30 miles apart some of the farmers have to cart their wheat from 15 to 20 miles to a railway station, according to the position of their farms and the direction of the roads. The number so situated is not large, but even those who have to cart 12 or 13 miles to a railway station complained that they are beyond the reasonable limit of a day's carting, owing to the dusty state of the roads in summer, combined with the excessive heat in those months, and to the bad condition of the roads in winter because of the absence of any suitable metal or gravel in the district with which to make roads at a cost that could be borne by the ratepayers. It was also stated by the farmers that they frequently had to wait three or four hours at the railway station before they could unload there. But the Committee found that this delay was due in most cases to the wheat-buyers at the stations not having a sufficient number of labourers to expeditiously unload the farmers' waggons, and either stack the wheat at the railway sidings or place it in the railway trucks. It was admitted by the farmers that even if cross-country railways were made, bringing a station nearer to them, they would still run the risk of such delays, but as the number of farmers delivering grain at the new stations would be smaller than at the existing ones the time they would be kept waiting would not be so long. Another reason given in support of the construction of the proposed railways was that the time saved in carting could be used in putting additional areas under wheat or oats, or, if the farmers did not increase their acreage under crop, they would be able to better work the fallowed land, and so secure a good, moist seed bed, and the probability of a better yield. Increased production, either through bringing additional areas under cultivation or obtaining heavier crops, would be a benefit, not only to the producers, but to the railway system, and also to the State generally. It was urged that some farmers in this district were compelled to drive their fat lambs from 15 to 20 miles along wet and muddy roads to a railway station. This depreciated the value of the lambs, and sometimes prevented the sale of early lambs to advantage in the Ballarat and Melbourne markets. If cross-country lines were constructed, a number of farmers would be nearer to the new stations on those lines, and would be able to get their fat lambs to market without so much difficulty as now existed. A further reason given for a railway connexion between the Mildura and Hopetoun railways was that freezing works were about to be established at Murtoa, and it was necessary to have this cross-country line so that fat lambs may be sent from stations along the Mildura line direct to Murtoa. It was also represented to the Committee that connecting lines in this part of the State were required to enable live stock, principally sheep, from the western portion of Riverina and of New South Wales, and also from the northern areas in Victoria, to be taken at a cheap rate, and with the necessary expedition, to the Wimmera and Western districts, and also to allow live stock to be sent from the latter districts to the Eastern and Western Mallee when grass was more plentiful in the northern than the southern portion of Victoria. Again, it was stated that this cross-country line would be a convenience to residents and others desiring to travel westwards to Adelaide or southwards to the sea-side at Portland or Warrnambool, and also for the interchange of railway rolling-stock in the busy wheat season, and for defence purposes. Evidence was given that agricultural implements, farmers' waggons, and other vehicles, and also flour manufactured in the Wimmera district, as well as fruit grown there, would be despatched to the Northern Mallee areas if there were a connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines and that both fresh and dried fruits grown at the irrigation settlements on the Murray River would be sent by rail from Mildura and White Cliffs to the Wimmera and Western districts. At present, these articles would have to be forwarded *via* Ararat, Maryborough, and St. Arnaud, and that was too long a detour to permit manufacturers in the Wimmera and Warracknabeal districts to compete in the Eastern and Northern Mallee with others who were more conveniently situated by rail. An additional reason placed before the Committee for this cross-country railway was that it would allow potatoes and other produce grown in the Western district to be sent at a cheaper rate into the Western Mallee than by the existing route through Ararat, Maryborough, or St. Arnaud.

3. According to the figures submitted by the Railway officials the areas more than 10 miles from an existing railway which would be served by the proposed connecting lines were as follow:—Dimboola to Minyip, 34,690 acres; Minyip to Cope Cope or Minyip to Donald, 6,989 acres; Warracknabeal to Litchfield, 27,160 acres; Warracknabeal to Watchem, 45,620 acres; Warracknabeal to Birchip, 57,290 acres;

Hopetoun to Lascelles (Minapre), 5,427 acres ; Hopetoun to Turriff, 44,416 acres ; Birchip to Wycheproof, 4,300 acres ; Watchem to Charlton or Donald to Charlton, 28,930 acres.

4. When giving evidence at Wycheproof, Mr. A. G. Stewart, shire engineer, referred to the easier grades on the Sea Lake-Bendigo railway as compared with those on the Mildura-Birchip-Castlemaine line. He said that if a connecting line were made from Birchip to Wycheproof the heavy grain traffic from the Western Mallee could by that connexion be diverted from the Mildura-Castlemaine railway to the Wycheproof-Bendigo line and this would result in a great saving in haulage which should reduce the working expenses of the Railway Department. The maximum load a "V" locomotive can haul on the "up" and "down" journeys over the steepest grades on the Birchip-Castlemaine line is 346 tons, while the same locomotive is able to draw 496 tons on the "up" trip on the Wycheproof-Bendigo railway and 416 on the "down" journey. Taking the outward "up" traffic which would be mostly grain and live stock, this shows an advantage to the Wycheproof-Bendigo route compared with the Birchip-Castlemaine line of 150 tons per train drawn by a "V" locomotive. Assuming that the traffic on the Sea Lake-Wycheproof railway in 1908-9 was a fair sample of the traffic that may be expected in the course of four or five years from the Mildura-Birchip line, including the extension from Ouyen to Murrayville the total outwards goods traffic from stations on the latter lines would on this basis come to 149,518 tons. To transport this loading from Birchip to Melbourne by means of fully loaded trains drawn by "V" locomotives 433 trains would be required *viâ* Maryborough, and Castlemaine and 302 *viâ* Wycheproof and Bendigo. The distance from Birchip to Castlemaine by way of Maryborough was $136\frac{3}{4}$ miles, and *viâ* Wycheproof and Bendigo it would be 132 miles. Although there would be no great saving in distance the heavy grain traffic from the Western Mallee could reach the main line at Bendigo in 110 miles from Birchip. As this traffic, Mr. Stewart added, could be dealt with more expeditiously at Bendigo with the double line from there to Castlemaine, than on the single line from Maryborough to Castlemaine, a further advantage for the Birchip-Wycheproof connexion became apparent, and he thought that if this connecting line were made the Railway Department would send all the heavy traffic coming from north of Birchip through Wycheproof and Bendigo, leaving the lighter trains to go over the present route *viâ* Maryborough and Castlemaine. Somewhat similar evidence was given at Birchip by Councillor J. Lockwood and by Mr. J. M. Kensley, secretary of the Birchip Shire Council.

Transfer of
traffic from
Mildura line.

5. The Railways Commissioners reported that none of the suggested connecting lines were required for departmental purposes, such as the interchange of rolling-stock, or for the economical handling of the goods traffic. The only proposed connexion which would be of any value to their Department was the one from Birchip to Wycheproof, but the saving would not be so large as was thought by Mr. Stewart, as the mixed train service would still have to be maintained on the Birchip-Maryborough-Castlemaine line, and in the off season it would often be more economical to carry the traffic over that route than to divert it to the Wycheproof-Bendigo railway. If, as Mr. Stewart had assumed, cultivation considerably increased along the Birchip-Mildura line, and the expected production in the Ouyen-Kow Plains district was realized, and was despatched to Melbourne instead of to Adelaide, the suggestion to connect the Mildura and Sea Lake line would have to be considered by the Commissioners in the light of that experience. Mr. Stewart, the Commissioners added, had based his figures on the haulage power of "V" locomotives, which were not in regular use on the Mallee lines. They had made their calculations on the employment of "Dd" locomotives which were run over the northern railways, and on the actual tonnage carried last year from Birchip and all stations north of that town, and not on the prospective traffic four or five years hence. On this basis and having regard to the maintenance of the mixed train service on the Birchip-Maryborough-Castlemaine line, the annual saving by diverting the goods traffic from the Mildura railway at Birchip and bringing it over the easier grades *viâ* Wycheproof and Bendigo to Castlemaine would be approximately £500.

6. After inspecting the country and hearing the evidence, the Committee came to the conclusion that none of the proposed lines would pay if they were mostly dependent on the local traffic for their revenue, as the gathering ground comprising those farms which were more than 12 or 13 miles from an existing railway would be

too small and would not produce sufficient freight to warrant the construction and operation of the railway, notwithstanding that there might be an additional acreage cropped, or the land be better cultivated, giving larger yields of wheat.

7. The Committee had therefore to look at these proposals more from the aspect of connecting railways linking up the main lines in the western part of the State and the effect they would have on the development of trade, the interchange of products grown in the northern and southern parts of Victoria, and the assistance they would be to the export trade in grain and fat lambs, besides their convenience to the public in travelling from the Mallee and Midland districts to the Wimmera and Western towns. Viewing the suggested connexion between Dimboola and Minyip in this light, the Committee considered it was inexpedient to construct that railway, as it would run practically parallel with, and but a few miles from, the Dimboola-Murtoa main line and would be of little or no value for the interchange of trade because of the requirement of the law that "local" rates must be charged on all goods carried over the line. Moreover, it would be of little service to cross-country passengers, as the trains on the Murtoa-Hopetoun and Dimboola-Rainbow railways would in all probability be still run to make their connexions with the main line from Murtoa to Dimboola, rather than with any new line between Minyip and Dimboola. The Committee was also of opinion that there would be comparatively little traffic sent from stations on the Korong Vale-Sea Lake railway across to towns on the Mildura line or to the Western Mallee and Wimmera districts in the event of a connexion being also made between the Mildura and Hopetoun railways. This opinion is supported by the small quantity of goods and number of live stock now carried over the connecting line from Inglewood to Dunolly for stations on the Mildura railway. It is considered by the Committee that sheep off the shears from the northern areas, on being sold at such markets as Wycheproof and Charlton, would not be trucked in large numbers over any of these connecting lines, as at that time of the year there is usually good feed on the roads and convenient supplies of water, and these "stores" would consequently be driven to their destination. At the same time, however, the Committee was impressed with the evidence of Mr. A. G. Stewart concerning the advantage which a connecting line between the Mildura and Wycheproof railways may be in future years in securing the cheaper haulage of grain to Melbourne. But it must not be overlooked that Ouyen and Mildura will be nearer by rail to Adelaide than to Melbourne if the suggested connexion—17 miles—is made between Murrayville and Pinnaroo and that most of the grain and other traffic may thus be diverted to Adelaide, thereby removing the basis on which Mr. Stewart made the claim for the Birchip-Wycheproof connexion. This matter is being inquired into by the Inter-State Commission on Border Railways, and the Committee is of opinion that it is inexpedient to build a connecting railway between the Mildura and Sea Lake lines pending the decision of the Commission and also ascertaining the direction of the grain traffic from the Ouyen-Murrayville district in the event of the connexion being made with Pinnaroo, because other factors than shorter mileage rates, such as a slightly better price being obtained in the Melbourne than in the Adelaide market, or better facilities for shipping, may affect the destination of the wheat grown in that district.

8. The Committee considers that the connexion which is most likely to assist trade and be of service to both the producers and the public is one between the Murtoa-Hopetoun line and the Mildura railway. But until there is more settlement along the Mildura railway this connexion would not become a paying one, unless the establishment of the proposed freezing works at Murtoa causes a large demand for lambs for export in the districts adjacent to the Donald-Mildura railway, and shows that there would be a good traffic in live stock over the connecting line. In the meantime, however, the Committee is of opinion that it is not expedient to construct any of the proposed connecting railways.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 22nd December, 1910.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]