

1910.
—
VICTORIA.



REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

ON THE

RUSHWORTH CONNECTING RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 15th December, 1910.

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 5TH OCTOBER, 1909.

5. RUSHWORTH CONNECTING RAILWAY.—Mr. A. A. Billson moved, pursuant to notice, That the question of connecting Rushworth and district to the south-west, including Colbinabbin, with the existing railway between Kilmore and Bendigo by a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway, and the provision of a deficiency rate, be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report.

Debate ensued.

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 Rushworth and district to the south-west, including Colbinabbin, with the existing railway between Kilmore and Bendigo by a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway, and the provision of a deficiency rate, has the honour to report as follows :—

1. The district seeking better railway facilities lies within the diamond-shaped area formed by the Goulburn Valley railway, the Toolamba and Echuca line, the Echuca and Bendigo railway, and the Bendigo-Heathcote-Kilmore line. A railway, 13 miles in length, branches off the Goulburn Valley line at Murchison East and runs west into the diamond-shaped area, terminating at Rushworth. The proposals submitted to the Committee were to extend that branch railway in a south-westerly direction either to Knowsley or to Heathcote, on the Bendigo and Kilmore line. North of Heathcote are Mount Ida, Mount Camel, and Mount Pleasant. A chain of low hills extends from the last-named mountain northward through Colbinabbin to near Lake Cooper. This chain of hills is known as the Mount Pleasant, or Colbinabbin, Range. There are three low saddles in the range, and it was proposed that the railway should be carried through one of these gaps, but the one to be selected varied according to the situation of the land held by the various witnesses who were examined by the Committee. The country westward and south-westward of Rushworth is thinly timbered, but it comprises good agricultural land, including the Colbinabbin Estate, 19,171 acres, which was resumed a few years ago by the Closer Settlement Board and subdivided into 86 farms. There is also some good soil in the parish of Cornella. South of Cornella and east of Mount Pleasant and Mount Camel is the Redcastle district and Moormbool State Forest. This reserve contains about 100,000 acres. The soil around Redcastle is of medium quality only, and much of that in the timber reserve is gravelly and poor. A few years ago about 30,000 acres of this forest, in the neighbourhood of Graytown, were excised and made available for settlement. The forest contains large supplies of ironbark, grey box, stringybark, and red box suitable for sleepers, telegraph poles, fencing, firewood, and mining purposes. Ironbark is the principal timber, but there are fair supplies of grey box in the gullies and low-lying flats with inferior stringybark on the sides of the hills. Timber for firewood is now carted from 7 to 10 miles from this forest into Heathcote South station. The eastern part of the forest is tapped by the McIvor Timber and Firewood Company, which has a steam tramway running from Tooborac, about 20 miles northward, into the forest. Large supplies of firewood are sent by the company to both Melbourne and Bendigo. To the west of the low hills extending from Colbinabbin to Mount Pleasant is an area of very fair agricultural land, most of which was under crop or fallow at the time of the Committee's visit in the early part of 1910. Southwards towards Toolleen, however, the country becomes poorer and is more thickly timbered. It was stated that this timber, which would be useful for firewood and mining purposes, was too far away to be carted to Knowsley and leave a profit, but if the proposed railway were constructed *via* Toolleen it would be cut and sent to the Bendigo market. The supply of timber on the west side of the Mount Pleasant Range is, however, small compared with that which would be obtainable from the Moormbool forest on the east side, and, moreover, the quality is also inferior. Seven traction engines, besides farmers' teams, were hauling firewood into Rushworth from the parishes of Wanalta and Gobarup at the time of the Committee's visit to the district. In those parishes are large quantities of box and ironbark timber which were rung several years ago, and are suitable for firewood for the Melbourne market. It was explained that the timber had to be hauled a distance of from 8 to 12 miles into Rushworth, and that when the belts now being operated on were cut out, it would not pay to go further back into the timbered country for firewood. Between 50 and 60 trucks of firewood were sent away each

Description of district.

week from Rushworth to Melbourne. Witnesses stated that timber of good quality only could be sent to the Melbourne market, but that if a connexion were made by rail through Toolleen to Knowsley, or through Redcastle to Heathcote, second quality firewood could be sent to the mines at Bendigo for steaming purposes. A railway through the district would not only lead to a very large increase in the firewood traffic, but after the timber on private holdings had been removed the land would be brought under cultivation.

Reasons for a connecting line.

2. A further reason given in support of a through line between Rushworth and Knowsley was that it would enable fat live stock to be dispatched from the Goulburn Valley to the Bendigo market, and this traffic would increase if a connexion were subsequently made between Murchison East and Violet Town so as to give a more direct route from the North-Eastern district to the Midland market towns. Several witnesses at Bendigo informed the Committee that efforts were being made to establish factories in that city, and that if a shorter route to the Goulburn Valley and North-Eastern district could be obtained from Knowsley through Toolleen to Rushworth, commodities manufactured at Bendigo could be sold in the Goulburn Valley and North-Eastern districts in competition with articles made in Melbourne or imported and sent from the metropolis into the districts mentioned. The rainfall in the Cornella and Toolleen district was stated to average close on 20 inches per annum, and the yields of wheat, which was the principal crop grown, ranged from 12 to 15 bushels, according to the quality of the soil. The production of wheat at Colbinabbin Estate and Wanalta averaged from 20 to 25 bushels. Yields of oats ranged from 25 to 35 bushels. It was explained by the settlers at Colbinabbin that while they were, in a direct line, within about 12 or 13 miles of Elmore, they had to travel either north or south to get through the gaps in the hills, and this extended the distance to 15 or 16 miles. Most of the settlers were about the same distance from Rushworth. The cost of carting from Colbinabbin to an existing railway station was from 12s. to 15s. a ton in the dry months of the year, but in the winter, owing to the heavy nature of the soil, the roads became almost impassable, and it was impossible to get carting done at anything like a reasonable rate. About two-thirds of the land between Rushworth, Toolleen, and Knowsley was said to be suitable for cultivation. Less than one-third of the land had been cleared and cropped. If railway facilities were provided, it was urged, it would give farmers an opportunity of clearing more of their land and putting it under crop, as, being relieved from so much carting, they could use their teams to a larger extent on their holdings, and increase the acreage under cereals. It was admitted by those who advocated a connexion with Heathcote instead of with Knowsley that the land in the vicinity of Redcastle was inferior to that about Toolleen. They, however, stated that if the railway were constructed from Rushworth, across Cornella Creek, into the southern portion of the parish of Cornella, and thence south-eastward to Redcastle and on to Heathcote, it would get both the grain traffic from the Colbinabbin and Cornella districts and also the timber traffic from Moormbool forest, as well as supplies of concentrates from the Costerfield Gold and Antimony Company, and would, because of this larger traffic, soon become a paying line. They added that Toolleen was within easy distance of either Knowsley or Axedale railway stations, being 12 miles from the former and about 13 from the latter. Another reason given in support of the Heathcote connexion was that it was the principal town in the district, the banks and market being located there.

Cost of various routes.

3. Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that a railway starting at Rushworth and proceeding westward through Moora and Wanalta, to near the Waranga-Mallee water channel at the southern end of the Colbinabbin Estate, and thence south-west through Toohey's Gap in the Mount Pleasant Range to Toolleen, junctioning with the Heathcote and Bendigo line at Knowsley, would be 35 miles in length and, with a 1 in 50 ruling gradient, was estimated to cost £129,405, based on a wage of 7s. 6d. a day for labourers. If serviceable second-hand rails became available, the cost would be reduced by about £250 a mile. No survey, however, had been made of the whole of this route, and these figures, which were based partly on an old trial survey and partly on an inspection of the country, had to be taken as a rough approximation. This was the route favoured by the farmers at Colbinabbin and Toolleen, and also by the mine owners and traders at Bendigo. Mr. Kernot said that a railway had been surveyed from Rushworth through Moora, thence south-west to Redcastle, and on southwards

through Happy Valley to Heathcote, passing about 3 miles west of Costerfield. This route would be 33 miles in length and would cost £135,000, if new 60-lb. steel rails were used and the ruling grade did not exceed 1 in 50. He further stated that an alternative route had been surveyed, keeping the line on the west instead of the east side of Cornella Creek. It would better serve the southern end of Colbinabbin Estate, and would pass through Mount Camel pre-emptive purchase, and thence along the valley of Lady's Creek and the west side of the Toolleen and Heathcote road to Heathcote. This line would be 35 miles in length and would cost close on £145,000. It was suggested by Mr. Kernot that, if thought advisable, the railway could, after proceeding along the west bank of Cornella Creek so as to serve Colbinabbin Estate, be deviated south-eastward near Mount Camel pre-emptive purchase to Redcastle, where it would join the survey running from Redcastle through Happy Valley to Heathcote. If the line were deviated as suggested, it would increase the length of the railway to 36½ miles and would bring the estimated cost up to about £150,000. All the estimates were made on the assumption that the railway, on leaving Rushworth station, would pass under High-street, which is the main business thoroughfare of that town. The Committee, however, considered that, with but one or two trains daily each way, there would not be much interruption to the pedestrian and vehicular traffic in High-street if a level crossing were made there instead of taking the line under the roadway and necessitating an outlay of about £1,500 in making the excavation and erecting a bridge over the railway. On being informed of the view held by the Committee, Mr. Kernot substituted a level crossing at High-street, Rushworth, for the cutting under the road, and reduced his estimates of cost of the various proposed routes accordingly. The settlers at Moornbool urged that the railway, if constructed, should be taken a few miles eastwards of Redcastle, and thence through Costerfield to Heathcote, so as to better meet their requirements and pass more through the centre of the Moornbool State Forest. They stated that this route would traverse a belt of good red soil. The objection, however, raised to this proposal was that it would take the railway more through the timbered country, and leave unserved, or at any rate very badly served, the grain growing areas at Colbinabbin, Cornella, and Toolleen unless the line was made "S" shape, which would add to its length and cost, and largely detract from its value as a through connexion between the Bendigo-Heathcote railway and the Goulburn Valley line. Mr. S. H. McGowan, speaking for the Bendigo Mine Owners' Association, urged the selection of Knowsley as the junctioning station on the Bendigo-Heathcote railway in preference to a connexion at Heathcote, as the latter station would be 9½ miles further from Bendigo than Knowsley, and would permanently increase the railway rates on all mining timber and firewood brought from the Toolleen district to that city, and also the charges on all articles manufactured at Bendigo and sent to the Goulburn Valley.

RUSHWORTH-KNOWSLEY CONNECTING LINE.

4. The Traffic officers of the Railway Department (Mr. C. H. Barber and Mr. J. S. Mitchell), who visited the district to make an estimate of the probable traffic over the proposed railway, reported that the area which would be tributary to the line from Rushworth through the southern portion of Colbinabbin Estate, and thence through Toohey's Gap and Toolleen to Knowsley, was approximately 200,000 acres, of which 150,000 acres was good arable land, the balance being inferior for agricultural purposes, but suitable for grazing. Within that area there were under crop during the present season 24,355 acres of wheat, 5,071 acres of oats, and 4,328 acres to be cut for hay. The average annual yields per acre in the county of Rodney for the past five years for these crops were—wheat, 12·83 bushels; oats, 20·68 bushels; and hay, 1·14 tons. These figures had been used as the basis in estimating the traffic over the proposed railway, after making an allowance for seed and fodder for home and local consumption. They thought that the construction of a railway through the district would increase the area under wheat to 30,000 acres annually. The average annual rainfall in the district for the past five years was 17·76 inches. It was estimated that there were 430,000 tons of firewood suitable for the Melbourne and Bendigo markets in the district, and the proposed through line from Rushworth to Knowsley had been credited with an average annual freight of 24,000 tons for a period of twenty years to the two cities mentioned above. The population of the district

Area served;
production;
population.

was estimated at 1,600 persons. According to the figures obtained from the Government Statist, the number of live stock in the district which would be benefited by the through railway was as follows:—Horses, 2,032; dairy cattle, 1,459; other cattle, 1,098; sheep, 80,599; and pigs, 298. The Traffic officers considered it unlikely that the interchange of traffic between the Bendigo-Midland district and the Goulburn Valley would be more than nominal, and they had credited the new line with £300 for this traffic. The outwards traffic was put down at 36,065 tons per annum, two-thirds of which, as previously stated, would be firewood for the Melbourne and Bendigo markets, and the balance principally wheat, wool, oats, hay, and mining timber. The inwards traffic was estimated at 1,825 tons, which included general merchandise, groceries, and fertilizers. It was proposed to operate this connecting line by the present Rushworth train and crew, but an additional engine-driver would be required, and 31 trucks would be needed for the firewood, mining timber, and grain traffic.

5. The Railways Commissioners estimated that the annual revenue and working expenses of a line from Rushworth to Knowsley, for a daily train service each way, would be as follow:—

ANNUAL CHARGES.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £133,095, being £127,970 the cost of constructing a 5ft. 3in. railway from Rushworth to Knowsley, 35 miles, and £5,125 additional for rolling-stock	...	...	£5,323	16	0
Traffic expenses	...	...	701	3	3
Maintenance charges	...	...	2,100	0	0
Locomotive expenses and repairs and replacement of rolling-stock	...	...	1,891	1	0
General expenses	...	...	117	6	1
			£10,133	6	4

REVENUE.

	On New Line.	On other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.			
Passengers	£833 6 8	£100 0 0	...	...	...
Parcels	130 0 0				
Mails	262 10 0				
Class goods	595 6 3				
Wool	80 12 6				
Live stock	250 0 0				
Mining timber and firewood	1,875 0 0	738 6 8	...	...	...
Grain	1,358 15 0	320 0 0	...	...	...
All other traffic	50 0 0				
	£5,435 10 5	£1,158 6 8			£6,593 17 1
Estimated annual loss	...	...	...	...	£3,539 9 3

6. In view of this annual loss the Committee considers it inexpedient to construct a connecting railway between the Rushworth line and the Kilmore and Bendigo railway, because the deficiency rate which would have to be levied to make good that loss would be too heavy a burden to place on those interested in the proposed through line, and there is no prospect of the connexion becoming a paying one for many years.

RUSHWORTH TO COLBINABBIN RAILWAY.

7. The Committee thereupon asked the Railways Commissioners to furnish it with an estimate of the revenue and working expenses for a section of the through line, namely, from Rushworth to Colbinabbin, a distance of 12 miles. Mr. Barber and Mr. Mitchell reported that the area considered tributary to this proposed railway was, roughly, 120,000 acres, almost the whole of which could be classed as good agricultural land. Within that area during the present season there were 16,169 acres of wheat, 3,216 acres of oats, and 3,184 acres to be cut for hay. In estimating

the revenue for this suggested extension the average yields of cereals and hay in the county of Rodney for the past five years had been taken as the basis of the estimate, after allowing a deduction for seed and fodder for home and local consumption. If the Rushworth line were extended to Colbinabbin the area under wheat would, in the opinion of these officers, be increased to 20,000 acres yearly. It was estimated that there were in the district 260,000 tons of firewood, principally box and ironbark, suitable for the Melbourne market, and that, on the average, 13,000 tons annually would be transported by rail from the two stations on the new line to the metropolis. The population in the area which would be benefited by the proposed railway from Rushworth to Colbinabbin was estimated at 1,100 persons. The number of live stock in the district was as follows :—Horses, 1,489 ; dairy cows, 854 ; other cattle, 719 ; sheep, 42,888 ; and pigs, 190. It was proposed to operate the extension with the existing Rushworth train and crew, giving a daily service each way ; but fourteen additional trucks would be required for the firewood and grain traffic. The outwards traffic was set down at 19,915 tons a year, two-thirds of which would be firewood for Melbourne. The greater part of the remainder would be wheat, wool, oats, and hay. The inwards traffic was given at 1,325 tons yearly, representing general merchandise, groceries, and fertilizers. No credit had been given for any revenue from live stock, as it was thought the operation of the "local" rate of £1 a truck over this extension would preclude any stock being sent by rail.

8. The Railways Commissioners estimated that the annual revenue and working expenses of a line from Rushworth to Colbinabbin, for a daily train service each way, would be as follow :—

Revenue and working expenses of Colbinabbin line.

ANNUAL CHARGES.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £44,280, being £41,970 the cost of constructing a 5ft. 3in. railway from Rushworth to Colbinabbin, 12 miles, and £2,310 additional for rolling-stock	£1,771	4	0
Traffic expenses	252	13	5
Maintenance charges	720	0	0
Locomotive expenses and repairs and replacement of rolling-stock	631	0	9
General expenses	40	1	10
	£3,415	0	0

REVENUE.

	On New Line.	On other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.	
Passengers	£386 13 4	£50 0 0	
Parcels	72 0 0		
Mails	90 0 0		
Class goods	238 15 0		
Wool	23 0 0		
Firewood	415 12 6	465 0 0	
Grain	787 10 0	216 0 0	
All other traffic	30 0 0		
	£2,043 10 10	£731 0 0	£2,774 10 10
Estimated annual loss			£640 9 2

9. In estimating the cost of the proposed railway from Rushworth to Colbinabbin provision was made for the use of new 60-lb. steel rails. Mr. Kernot informed the Committee that if serviceable secondhand rails became available, the cost would be reduced by £250 a mile, or £3,000 in all. The interest charge would therefore be lessened by £120, bringing the estimated annual loss down to £520. As the Committee believes there will be a supply of serviceable secondhand rails available for this extension, it recommends the construction of a 5ft. 3in. railway from Rushworth to Colbinabbin, a length of 12 miles, at an estimated cost of £38,970, with £2,310 added for rolling-stock, conditionally on the land within the area to be benefited by that extension being made liable for a period of twenty years for an annual deficiency rate which will produce £520, so as to make good the estimated annual loss, or such lesser sum as may be required each year to make the railway a paying one. In addition, the land-holders within that area must hand over to the Govern-

Recommendation of Committee.

ment free of charge the land required for the railway track and station grounds, and also pay the cost of management of the local Railway Construction Trust. Witnesses at Colbinabbin, speaking on behalf of the local residents, offered to pay a deficiency rate averaging 2d. per acre per annum over the whole area benefited. A rate of 1d. per acre per annum on the 120,000 acres which will be enhanced in value by the proposed extension would produce £500 per annum. In answer to a question, Mr. Barber expressed the opinion that in ten years' time, at the longest, this railway extension should become a paying one.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 15th December, 1910.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]