

1911.  
—  
VICTORIA.

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REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

BENALLA TO TATONG RAILWAY ;

TOGETHER WITH

BOOK OF REFERENCE AND PLAN.

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*Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 20th September, 1911.*

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 9.—[6d.]—14028.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE  
ASSEMBLY.

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WEDNESDAY, 6TH SEPTEMBER, 1911.

10. BENALLA TO TATONG RAILWAY.—Mr. A. A. Billson, in accordance with the requirements of the Railways Standing Committee Acts, moved, pursuant to notice, That the construction of a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway from Benalla to Tatong be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report.

Question—put and resolved in the affirmative.

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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.,	The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.
J. Cullen, Esq., M.L.A.,	(Vice-Chairman),
The Hon. Dr. W. H. Embling, M.L.C.,	E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

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# R E P O R T.

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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of constructing a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway from Benalla to Tatong, has the honour to report as follows :—

1. The subject of railway communication with Moorngag (Dodd's Crossing), Former Report. which is in the Tatong district, was referred by the Legislative Assembly to the Committee as a general question in 1909, and a Report dealing with the matter was presented to the House on the 26th July, 1910. In that Report the Committee suggested the construction of a railway from Benalla to Tatong, a length of about 18 miles, provided that the line could be built for £50,000 or thereabouts. In consequence of the Railways Commissioners strongly objecting to the new line junctioning with the North-Eastern main line on the west side of the railway bridge over the Broken River at Benalla, because such a connexion would be dangerous to the traffic on that busy main line, and as an expenditure of £35,000 would be necessary to widen that steel bridge so as to bring the Tatong line into Benalla station on a separate pair of rails, the Committee was compelled to set aside the Mansfield-road route to Tatong and adopt a route on the east side of Broken River. In its Report, however, the Committee urged that in making the permanent survey of the new line the Railway Construction Branch should take it as near Swanpool-bridge as possible (before turning eastwards to Tatong) so as to better convenience the farmers at Lima South, on the west side of the Broken River, about 15 miles south of Benalla, and also the saw-millers at Too Rour State forest, which is on the west side of the Benalla-Mansfield road. The permanent survey which was recently completed was carried out in accordance with this suggestion. Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, has reported, as the result of that survey, that a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway, leaving Benalla station on the east side and running southwards on the east side of Broken River to within about 2 miles by road of the Swanpool-bridge, and thence eastwards to Tatong, terminating on the west side of Holland's Creek opposite that township, would be 18 miles 20 chains in length, and that its estimated cost was £53,158 if serviceable second-hand 60-lb. rails were used. If new rails had to be found the cost would be increased by about £4,500, or £250 per mile. This estimate included fencing the line throughout, providing bridges having a total length of 1,200 feet, and three roadside stations, one 7 miles out of Benalla, another within about 2 miles of the Swanpool-bridge, and a third on the Samaria-road, 15 miles from Benalla, and also a terminal station at Tatong with a turntable and water supply. The ruling grade of the line would be 1 in 75. Mr. Kernot informed the Committee that the line could be constructed further southward so as to provide a station within 1 mile by road of Swanpool-bridge. This, however, would increase the length of the railway by 1 mile 44 chains, making its total length 19 miles 64 chains, and its estimated cost £57,014, or £3,856 more than the shorter route besides causing an ugly bend in the line, as it would have to be curved north-east from Swanpool to reach Tatong.

2. Some of the residents of Lima South and Swanpool were not satisfied with the route as permanently surveyed along the east side of Broken River, especially if the station were to be no nearer Swanpool-bridge than about 2 miles. They wished to have the line built along the Mansfield-road on the west side of Broken River to better convenience them, and urged that the objection of the Railways Commissioners to that route, because of a possible danger in junctioning with the North-Eastern main line on the west side of the Broken River-bridge at Alternative route.

Benalla, should be set aside as similar junctions with main lines in other places in Victoria had for years been operated daily with safety. It was also stated that the land for the track of the railway could be purchased at less cost along the Mansfield-road route as the land was not of such good quality, and there would practically be no severance. Moreover, for the greater part of the way portion of the 3-chain road could be used. Mr. W. Fitzpatrick, Chairman of the Victorian Railways Commissioners, was questioned by the Committee on this matter. He said he indorsed the view previously expressed by Sir Thomas Tait, that if the Tatong line junctioned with the North-Eastern railway on the west, or Melbourne side, of the Broken River-bridge near Benalla station there would always be the risk of accident, which should be avoided if reasonably possible on an important main line like the North-Eastern. As that risk could be avoided by constructing the line on the east side of Broken River instead of on the west, and bringing the railway in to Benalla station on the east side, and as the Swanpool and Lima district would be as equally well served by that route the Railways Commissioners were more strongly of opinion that they would not be justified in allowing a "simple" junction to be made with the main line at the suggested point on the Melbourne side of the railway bridge several hundred yards outside of the Benalla station yard. If, however, he added, it were decided to make the junction on the west side of the bridge it would have to be interlocked and a signalman placed in charge, and also a long parallel road consisting of a dead end siding provided on which the Tatong train could be run if it passed the signal at danger. This, he said, would be in accordance with the Board of Trade requirement, but the expense involved in the construction and operation of such a junction would not be justified when a more suitable junction could be made on the east side of the Benalla station yard which would not necessitate the provision of an additional signalman. There were a few cases of "simple" junctions, but they were with comparatively unimportant lines, and were interlocked and had a man in charge. The Commissioners considered that the existence of such junctions did not furnish a good and sufficient reason for the establishment of a similar junction in this case. The Beechworth Junction (with the North-Eastern line) was interlocked and had a man in charge and was equipped as an ordinary station. Mr. Kernot informed the Committee that ample provision had been made for floods where the proposed line would cross Holland's Creek and Blind Creek, the former bridge having a length of 200 feet and the latter 150 feet. He stated that on the west side of Mount Pleasant there would be five small bridges which would enable cattle to pass under the line to water at Broken River, and that additional openings for live stock could be made at a cost of about £100 each. If the line passed on the east side of Mount Pleasant so as to avoid severing the paddocks between Samaria-road and Broken River it would increase its length and cost. The Committee received a telegram from the secretary of the combined railway leagues interested in the proposed line stating that they were satisfied with the route as surveyed along the east side of Broken River as it would, in their opinion, secure all traffic from the west side of that stream, it being intended to make a direct road from the Mansfield-road to the station site at Swanpool.

Description of  
country.

3 The object of this proposed railway is to serve the settled country in the valley of the Broken River to the south of Benalla, and also the belts of rich basaltic land on the timbered hills beyond, as well as the State forests in the direction of Mansfield and Tolmie. The flat country around Lima, Swanpool, and Tatong has been in occupation for about forty years, and is principally used for grazing sheep and dairy herds. Many of the land-owners cultivate small portions of their holdings, the crops grown being mainly oats for grain and hay and potatoes. On ascending the hills further on large patches of rich volcanic soil are met with at Toombullup, Round Camp, and Fern Hill. This soil, when cleared of the heavy timber, yields exceedingly good crops of potatoes and oats without the aid of fertilisers. There is, however, some poor land on the hill sides, and also small areas of country which are either too stony or too steep to cultivate. Most of the volcanic country has been taken up by selectors, but in consequence of the labour required to clear the land and the difficulty of getting produce to a market, owing to the bad roads, which in the hills are merely bush tracks, and the distance to the nearest railway station, the total acreage under cultivation in the Toombullup district is comparatively small. There is an annual rainfall of from 30 to 40 inches, and the district being a late one, the

potato crop has to be carted in the winter months over roads which have been cut up by the timber waggons, necessitating light loads and causing a high charge for cartage. It was stated that if railway facilities were provided the area under cultivation would rapidly increase, as there were always good markets in the North-Eastern and Riverina districts for potatoes and oats. Some of the inferior land in the Toombullup country, and also small areas of good soil, which were selected years ago and abandoned because of the difficulty of making a living under such circumstances off selections from 25 to 30 miles from a railway, are still in the possession of the Crown, and will no doubt be again taken up if a railway is constructed into the district. While the acreage under crop on the flat country between Tatong and Benalla could soon be increased if the holders were so disposed, it should not be overlooked that clearing land on the thickly-timbered hills must necessarily be a slow and costly undertaking, and, consequently, no rapid expansion in the production of that part of the district can be expected.

4. When the Committee inquired, in 1909-10, into the question of railway communication with Uddi's Crossing and Toombullup, it then stated that if a line were built into that country it would for a long period have to depend largely on the timber traffic for its revenue, and that the connexion should be with the North-Eastern railway in preference to an extension of the Mansfield line, as the chief demand for timber and potatoes from the Toombullup country would be in the Yarrawonga, Rutherglen, Albury, and Riverina districts. Evidence was then given that the proposed railway to Tatong would tap three extensive State forests—Too Rour, Dueran, and Toombullup—from which supplies of good marketable timber, and also mining timber, would be drawn for many years to meet the requirements of towns in the North-Eastern and Riverina districts and of the alluvial mines at Rutherglen and Chiltern. Mr. H. R. Mackay, Conservator of Forests, informed the Committee that there were 34,000 acres of State forest in the parishes of Too Rour and Tallangalook, on the west side of the Mansfield and Benalla road. The greater part of this reserve falls towards that road. The forest consists chiefly of peppermint, intermixed with bluegum and messmate. He stated that, on the whole, it was now the most valuable timber area in the North-Eastern district. There was a saw-mill belonging to Mr. B. Howes in the south-eastern part of that reserve. The timber from that mill was carted 32 miles to Benalla, the cost of cartage being 4s. per 100 feet super. in summer, and 4s. 6d. in the winter, but the latter charge was practically prohibitive. It was difficult to get teams to cart in the wet season, and the mill had to be closed down during part of the winter. The output of Mr. Howes' mill was somewhat under 750,000 feet super. per annum, but with a railway to Swanpool double that quantity could be cut and sent over the line, as the plant was more than able to deal with that increased output, and the cartage distance to Swanpool would be little more than half that to Benalla and should reduce the charge for road haulage to about 2s. per 100 feet in summer and 2s. 6d. in winter. Mr. Mackay added that this firm, from its present licensed area and neighbouring sites, could command about 12,000 acres of good milling timber, and that the life of the mature timber thereon should be about 20 years. There was, however, an abundant supply of young spar timber to furnish a further crop. If a second mill were established in Too Rour forest it would command separate areas in the north-eastern part of that reserve, and its outlet would also be to Swanpool, a distance of 12 or 13 miles. Referring to the Dueran forest, Mr. Mackay said—"This reserve of 15,000 acres lies on the eastern side of the Benalla-Mansfield road. It contains peppermint, bluegum, and messmate of good quality, and is practically a virgin reserve, as no mill has worked within its boundaries. There is a fine area of mill timber on the eastern side at the head of Wild Dog Creek, and on the Blue Range, containing about 4,000 acres. The outlet for this timber would be by a spur falling easterly to Holland's Creek; the carting distance from a mill site would be about 10 miles to Tatong. There is also an area of 6,000 acres of fine timber of the same kind at the southern part of Dueran reserve. The outlet from it would be by a ridge running westerly to the Benalla-Mansfield road, and thence to Swanpool, a distance of about 12 miles. In addition to that, on the lower western slopes of Dueran forest, falling towards the Broken River, there are considerable areas of yellow and red box. About 60,000 sleepers for railway purposes could be obtained there."

Toombullup  
State forest.

5. Mr. Mackay further stated that the Toombullup State forest consisted, roughly, of 28,000 acres. He added—"A considerable portion of the central and southern area towards the heads of Ryan's Creek and Middle Creek is tableland. This is the portion that was thrown open for selection some twenty years ago in areas of 700 to 1,000 acres and ringbarked. In my opinion this was the most valuable forest in the whole of the North-Eastern district in the quality of its timber—messmate, bluegum, and peppermint—the size of the trees, and the number of trees to the acre. In some of the areas northward of Round Camp, which has the best patch of volcanic soil in the district, the trees would have yielded 40,000 feet to 50,000 feet to the acre; and the value of the timber at market rates for building and other purposes would have ranged from £70 to £100 to the acre. This timber was in great part ringbarked, and the live timber areas of value left to the State extend northward between the courses of Boggy, 15-Mile, Middle, and Ryan's creeks. The heads of all these streams are in deep gorges narrowing greatly as they approach their source, and for this reason it would be very difficult for any saw-mill in any part of the reserve to command the greater portion of the timber left without being shifted several times. A mill of Messrs. Hill and McPherson is working about 4,800 acres on the tableland and on the western fall towards Holland's Creek. I estimate that they should have about five years' cutting there without moving their plant. The outlet for the timber sawn at this mill is at present northward by Tiger Hill and Tatong to Benalla, a distance of 30 miles, the cost of cartage being 3s. per 100 feet super. in summer and 4s. in winter. With a station at Tatong the mill could command a fair body of timber with a mill tramway within 12 to 13 miles, and a larger body within 15 or 17 miles. A railway from Benalla by way of Swanpool to Tatong will be the means of providing for some years to come all the timber likely to be required by the North-Eastern towns and Eastern Riverina."

Royalty to the  
Crown.

6. It was stated that not only would the proposed railway to Dodd's Crossing lead to the development of the Swanpool and Toombullup country, but that by enabling the saw-mills to work during the wet season it would increase the royalties paid to the Crown by the timber-getters, and afford constant employment to a large number of hands. Mr. Mackay said that with better railway facilities the royalty which the State received should be increased from £1,400 a year to about £3,000 as the output of sawn timber alone should be doubled.

Demand for  
sawn timber.

7. During its inquiry in 1909-10 the Committee was informed by those engaged in the timber trade at Albury, Benalla, and other towns in the North-Eastern district, that the two mills carrying on operations in the Benalla district were unable to fulfil the orders they received for sawn hardwood because of the difficulty and cost of carting timber from the Too Rour and Toombullup forests to Benalla station during the five or six wet months of the year, and the impossibility of guaranteeing prompt delivery on being offered orders. It was explained that the increasing demand for sawn timber from these forests, apart from its superior quality to other timber obtainable in the North-Eastern district, arose from the supply of Murray pine in the Albury and Corowa districts having become almost exhausted through thousands of such trees in Riverina having been destroyed by the settlers as the result of closer settlement there, and clearing the land for wheat-growing. Closer settlement had also taken place in the northern areas of Victoria, and this, coupled with the general prosperity of the North-Eastern and Riverina districts, was causing every year a better demand for the Too Rour and Toombullup timber. For these reasons the Benalla Railway League put the total annual output of sawn timber from the three forests—Too Rour, Dueran, and Toombullup—down at 16,666 tons, as Messrs. Hill and McPherson, who were cutting at Toombullup, were prepared to establish a second mill in that forest, or in the Dueran reserve. These representations so impressed the Committee that it asked the Railways Commissioners to send one of their Traffic Officers (Mr. J. S. Mitchell) to the Riverina district to check the statements made by the saw-millers and timber merchants at Albury and other towns. He reported that in every case the timber merchants and others agreed that the supply of Murray pine was almost exhausted in the areas accessible to Southern Riverina and the border towns. This view was supported by the retail prices then being paid at one of the border towns for Murray pine as compared with hardwood and redgum. The prices were as follow:—Murray pine, undressed, 20s. per 100 feet super.; redgum, 17s. 6d.;

hardwood (other than bluegum), 14s.; bluegum, 18s. Mr. Mitchell added that the timber merchants complained of being unable to have their orders for hardwood fulfilled, one firm mentioning that it had placed orders with seven different mills to be executed. An examination of the racks in the various timber yards showed that the stocks on hand were very light. As the result of these inquiries and the evidence given before the Committee, the Railways Commissioners increased their estimate for sawn hardwood to be sent over the proposed line from 5,000 tons, which was the quantity put down in 1907, to 10,000, and since then, owing to the increasing demand throughout Victoria for timber, they have further increased the estimated annual output of the saw-mills to 12,000 tons. Their reason for not adopting the estimate of 16,600 tons given by the Benalla Railway League was that the views of that body were rather optimistic as regards the demand for hardwood in the Wagga and other districts north of Albury. They explained that there was a junction charge of 1s. 6d. per ton at Albury, and also a further charge of 1s. a ton for transferring the timber from one truck to another, owing to the break of gauge. This additional expense of 2s. 6d. a ton on the ordinary freight charge was a heavy tax on timber going further north than Albury.

8. It was estimated in 1909-10 by the Benalla Railway League that 10,000 Mining timber. tons of mining timber would be sent over the new line, and its anticipations in that respect were supported by evidence which the Committee received at Rutherglen concerning the quantity of timber required annually by the alluvial mines in that district. Here, again, the Railways Commissioners differed from the local people as to the quantity of mining timber which would be despatched over a line from Dodd's Crossing to Benalla. The Commissioners then expressed the opinion that but 4,000 tons of mining timber, consisting chiefly of slabs and laths, would be carried over the new line, as most of the round timber (props) required by the mines could be obtained for some time to come in the areas adjacent to the Rutherglen and Chiltern district. Mr. H. R. Mackay, when questioned at the time by the Committee as to the supplies of mining timber, said that with the gradual exhaustion of accessible supplies fit for props and laths in the Ovens valley and Lower King valley the large messmate and peppermint areas of Too Rour, Dueran, and Toombullup must soon be drawn upon for the Rutherglen and Chiltern mines. Indeed, these reserves would at the present time be resorted to by mine contractors but for the prohibitive cost of cartage to Benalla and Moyhu. Owing, however, to the decrease in the last year or so in the number of mines operating in the Rutherglen and Chiltern district the Railways Commissioners have in their recent estimate reduced the quantity of mining timber likely to be carried over the new line from 4,000 to 2,000 tons annually.

9. In addition to the mining timber, the Commissioners considered that 2,000 Firewood traffic. tons of firewood would be despatched annually over the proposed railway.

10. The Traffic Officers who visited the Moorngag district reported that the projected extension to Tatong would serve about 75,000 acres, and, in addition, Area of country served; production. would tap the timber reserves at Too Rour, Dueran, and Toombullup. The privately-held lands consisted mainly of good grazing and dairying land with rich flats, and also included an area of rough mountainous country, with rich volcanic soil on the tablelands. During the year 1908-9 the total area under cultivation in the district considered tributary to the proposed railway was not more than 5,000 acres, of which 1,700 produced oats and 361 wheat for grain, 2,200 oats and wheat for hay, and 400 were under potatoes. The average yield of wheat in the district for that year was 20 bushels per acre; oats, 30 bushels; and potatoes, 2½ tons. The estimate of traffic from potatoes over the new line was set down at 2,000 tons per annum, and agricultural produce at 750 tons. It was also stated by the Traffic Officers that the population of the district was estimated at 1,000 persons. The number of live stock was given as follows:—Horses, 900; cattle, 4,000; dairy cows, 2,800; sheep, 38,000; pigs, 500. According to the figures submitted by the Benalla Railway League, 2,000 tons of potatoes and 4,000 tons of farm produce would be transported from the district. The difference in the estimate of the League and that of the Traffic Officers as to the tonnage of farm produce which would be carried over the line was partly accounted for by the latter stating that most of the oats and hay were grown for local consumption.

Revenue and  
working  
expenses.

11. The Railways Commissioners estimated the annual interest charges, working expenses, and revenue of the proposed line for a daily train service each way as follows:—

#### ANNUAL CHARGES.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £61,788, being the cost (£53,158) of constructing 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles of 5ft. 3in. railway from Benalla along the east side of Broken River towards Swanpool, and thence to Tatong, with £8,630 added for rolling-stock	...	...	...	...	...	£2,471 10 5
Traffic expenses	...	...	...	...	...	420 18 11
Maintenance charges	...	...	...	...	...	1,186 0 0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs, renewals, and replacement of rolling-stock	...	...	...	...	...	1,131 0 0
General expenses	...	...	...	...	...	67 0 0
						<u>£5,276 9 4</u>

#### REVENUE.

	On New Line.	On other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.	
Passengers	£500 0 0	£150 0 0	
Parcels	45 0 0	...	
Mails	136 17 6	...	
Class goods	190 1 8	...	
Live stock	80 0 0	...	
Timber	1,008 6 8	1,670 0 0	
Dairy produce, rabbits, &c.	343 15 0	202 15 0	
Farm produce, potatoes, &c.	260 0 0	134 15 0	
All other traffic	35 0 0	...	
	<u>£2,599 0 10</u>	<u>£2,157 10 0</u>	£4,756 10 10
Estimated annual loss	...	...	<u>£519 18 6</u>

Sawn timber  
rate.

12. In making the foregoing estimate of revenue the Railway Department allowed for the ordinary through mileage rate being charged on sawn timber carried over the new line instead of the local rate. The former would result in the line being credited with about 1s. 6d. per ton on sawn timber despatched from Tatong, and 1s. on that consigned from Swanpool. If the local rate were charged on that hardwood it would bring in a revenue of 2s. 6d. per ton to the new line. In its Report on the general question of railway connexion with this district the Committee stated that the saw-millers were willing to pay the local rate. The Committee, therefore, recommends that if the Railways Commissioners decide not to charge the local rate on sawn timber carried over the new line, a special rate of 6d. per ton should be imposed in addition to the ordinary through mileage rate. This will increase the annual revenue estimated by the Commissioners by about £300, and, consequently, reduce the yearly loss to a little over £200.

#### RECOMMENDATION OF COMMITTEE.

13. The Committee recommends the construction of a 5ft. 3in. railway from Benalla, on the east side of Broken River, to within about 2 miles of Swanpool-bridge by the existing road and thence to Tatong, a length of 18 miles 20 chains, at an estimated cost of £53,158 with £8,630 added for rolling-stock conditionally on either the local rate, or a special rate of 6d. per ton in addition to the ordinary through mileage rate, being charged on all sawn timber carried over the new line.

E. H. CAMERON,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
Melbourne, 20th September, 1911.