REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

ELMORE TO COHUNA RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND BOOK OF REFERENCE.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 12th December, 1912.

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Railways Standing Committee Report No. 13.—(8d.)—17084.
TUESDAY, 3RD DECEMBER, 1912.

11. **Elmore to Coburn Railway.**—Mr. McBride, 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 Elmore to Coburn be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report.

Question—put and resolved in the affirmative.

**MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.**

(Tenth Committee.)

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

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

The Hon. A. Hicks, M.L.A.,

W. Hutchinson, Esq., M.L.A.,

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

(Vice-Chairman),

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

**APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.**

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The compilation was a portion of the work of the Secretary of the Railways Standing Committee, who is paid by annual salary.
REPORT.

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

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT.

1. In 1911 the Committee, when reporting on the general question of railway extension to Cohuna, recommended the construction of a broad-gauge line from Elmore north-west to Cohuna, a distance of about 57 miles, at a cost of £195,500. It was then stated that when the Committee inquired in 1908 into the question of railway connexion with the Cohuna and Gunbower district it rejected the proposal because of the annual loss, estimated at £3,000 or so, which would result from the construction and operation of the proposed railway. The Committee then expressed the opinion that if the railway were constructed a large yearly deficiency would continue till such time as the irrigable lands to be served by the proposed line were closely occupied and there was more settlement on the Terricks East and Turrumberry plains. Since 1908, however, the Lands Purchase and Management Board has acquired extensive areas of private lands in the neighbourhood of Cohuna, Gunbower, Terricks East, and Turrumberry, and also at Bamawm—between Pine Grove and Rochester. It has subdivided these areas either into farms or irrigated orchards or small agricultural holdings. Nearly all these allotments have been taken up by settlers, so that the present proposition is an entirely different one in that aspect from the proposal which was under the consideration of the Committee in 1908. Moreover, the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission has since then made distributary channels from the main Waranga-Loddon channel into the irrigation settlement at Bamawm so that the settlers there may be supplied with water by gravitation. It has also extended the channels in the Cohuna district and installed a powerful pumping plant on the Murray River to supply ample water to the irrigable lands around that township. The Commission has announced its intention of improving the water supply in the Gunbower district by constructing a weir across the Murray River, so as to allow water to be diverted by gravity during a longer period in summer, and to maintain the flow of Gunbower Creek and supplement the supply in Kow Swamp storage basin. These works are intended to give the holders of irrigable lands in the districts mentioned a sufficient supply of water to enable them to produce lucerne and other fodder for their dairy herds, sheep, and other live stock, and to carry on fruit-growing and market gardening. Mr. Elwood Mead, Chairman of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, informed the Committee that from his experience as an irrigationist and his knowledge of rural industries in Victoria, 50 acres of the Bamawm and Cohuna land were sufficient for a settler to make a living from and pay his way, including the payments he has to make to the Government for the purchase of the land and water charges, and that in closely-settled areas like Bamawm the water allotted to settlers would fully meet the needs of dry seasons, and the State would be able to fulfil all its contracts for the supply of water for irrigation or which the land-owners might claim under their water allotments. Evidence was given before the Committee that the plain country in Terricks East and Turrumberry was occupied 30 or 40 years ago by farmers holding about 320 acres each. But, owing to the poor yields of wheat obtained, the uncertainty of the rainfall, and the long distance which the wheat had to be carted to a railway station, coupled with the low prices sometimes received, most of the farmers were compelled to sell out, and the land reverted to comparatively large holdings for grazing purposes. In recent years, however, yields of wheat averaging from 15 to 20 bushels per acre have been harvested from portions of this plain country with the aid of artificial manures and by the system of fallowing and better working.
the soil before sowing, which now generally prevails, but which was not practised 30 years ago. The few farmers who are growing wheat in the Terricks East and Turrumberry district stated that they had to cart their wheat from 15 to 20 miles to a railway station, at a cost of about 10s. or 12s. per ton, and that if the price of wheat fell they might have to give up cultivating their land unless nearer railway facilities were provided. Some of the land-holders in that country who combined dairying with sheep-raising complained of the distance they had to cart their cream to Echuca or Rochester or to a station on the Kerang railway.

COHUNA, GUNBOWER, AND BAMAWM DISTRICTS.

2. Cohuna is situated on Gunbower Creek, an ana-branch of the Murray River. It is 40 miles north-west of Echuca and 22 miles south-east of Kerang. Gunbower is also on Gunbower Creek, 14 miles south-east of Cohuna, in the direction of Echuca. The cost of cartage between Cohuna and Macorna, 19 miles, is 17s. 6d. per ton in summer, and 30s. in winter, when the roads are bad, and from Gunbower to Echuca, 26 miles, 15s. and 25s. per ton respectively. During its visit in 1911 to the district the Committee observed evidences of increased settlement and production around these townships, and also an increase in the number of residences and business premises at Cohuna and Gunbower, but more especially in the former town. Additional areas have been put under lucerne, which with the aid of water grows luxuriantly in this district, and is either cut for hay or used for grazing sheep and dairy herds, the former fattening on the lucerne in a few weeks, while this crop, combined with amber cane, which is extensively grown in the district, maintains cows in milk for the greater part of the year. There are two butter factories at Cohuna and one at Gunbower. While dairying and fattening sheep and raising lambs are likely to be the main industries of the district for some years, a number of the settlers informed the Committee that they either had planted or intended planting fruit trees on their holdings, with the view of ultimately relinquishing dairying, and making a livelihood from their orchards. In the No. 1 Riding of the Cohuna Irrigation District were 34,000 acres. About a third of that area had been resumed by the Government and subdivided into allotments. At Mead Settlement, which is about 6 or 7 miles west of Cohuna, towards Macorna, there are several splendid orchards, giving remunerative crops of citrus fruits, apples, pears, apricots, peaches, and grapes. At Wee-wee-rup and Leitchville, which are between Cohuna and Gunbower, there are a number of settlers engaged in dairying and fruit-growing, and the southern end of Gunbower Island is also well settled by small land-holders, who combine dairying with wheat-growing and some fruit-growing with the aid of irrigation. A portion of Gunbower Island has been reserved for forestry purposes, and evidence was given that if a railway were made through Gunbower to Cohuna a large quantity of sawn redgum and box timber for piles, bridge construction, sleepers, telegraph poles, and for fencing and firewood purposes would be cut annually on the island and despatched over the new line. It was also asserted that a railway from either Rochester or Elmore, passing across the Terricks East and Turrumberry plains, would cause that country to be re-settled in areas of 500 or 600 acres, instead of the existing holdings of from 2,000 to 4,000 acres, as, under the new methods of farming, wheat-growing could be successfully carried on there in smaller blocks if the cartage distance to a railway station were lessened. As already stated, closer settlement on small irrigated allotments has taken place in the Bamawm district between Rochester and Pine Grove. Several of the settlers are engaged in dairying and pig-raising, but it is their intention, if railway facilities are provided within 5 or 6 miles, to plant orchards, and make a living by growing fruit and vegetables. There are 118 allotments, ranging from 2 to 200 acres, occupied in the Bamawm Settlement, and some 20 others scattered throughout the settlement still available for application. About 2,000 acres have been planted with lucerne, and 77 acres with fruit trees. In addition, there are 42 allotments at Ballendella and West Rochester occupied. On these about 500 acres have been planted with lucerne. The total population on these settlements is 750.

RIVAL RAILWAY ROUTES.

3. During the last 20 years, whenever a proposal has been brought forward to connect the Gunbower and Cohuna district with the railway system, there has been much conflict of opinion as to the starting-point of the line. The residents of the district mentioned have always favoured a connexion with the Bendigo and Echuca railway,
but have not concerned themselves deeply as to the starting-point, so long as they got railway facilities. On the occasion, however, of the Committee's inquiry in 1911, most of the residents of Gunbower and Cohuna advocated a railway connexion with Elmore, but at the same time they expressed their readiness to accept a railway branching off the Bendigo-Echuca line at Rochester in the hope that the conflict as to the starting-point would not be further prolonged, and railway facilities be any longer withheld from them.

4. After hearing the evidence in 1911 the Committee came to the conclusion that the best route to serve this extensive district was a railway branching off the Bendigo and Echuca line at Elmore and proceeding north-west from that station for 7 miles along a 3-chain road, and thence northwards through Warragamba, and passing 1½ miles west of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, and on through Pine Grove and Turrumberry to Gunbower, terminating at Cohuna township. This route was 1½ miles east of the route which had previously been surveyed from Elmore to Turrumberry, and it was considered that it would not only meet the requirements of the settlers in the irrigation area of 23,000 acres at Bamawm, but also the wheat-growers around Drummartin and Tennyson. It was stated at the time that Mr. Elwood Mead, Chairman of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, had informed the Committee that 6 miles was about the limit that an irrigationist should be expected to cart his fruit and other produce to a railway station, having regard to the dusty roads in summer and their muddy state in winter. In order, therefore, to bring the settlers in the Bamawm irrigation area who intended growing fruit within that distance of the railway, the Committee recommended that the line should be moved eastwards so as to run 1½ miles distant from the western boundary of that irrigation settlement. Moreover, the Committee had been furnished by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission with a plan showing that there was irrigable land to the west of that route commanded by the Waranga–Loddon main water channel, and that an area of 41,000 acres lying to the south of that main channel and to the west of the Elmore–Rochester railway could be irrigated from the proposed Eppalock storage on the Campaspe River, the catchment area of which will be 700 square miles, and the storage capacity 107,000 acre feet. Looking to the future, the Committee considered that it would be advisable to start the Cohuna railway from Elmore instead of from Rochester, as the Elmore route would pass through the centre of the 41,000 acres to be irrigated a few years hence when the Eppalock scheme was carried out.

5. After the Committee, however, had recommended the proposed railway from Elmore to Cohuna, Mr. Mead informed it that an error had been made in his office in placing on the plan the area that would be watered from the Eppalock storage. In computing the area it had been overlooked that the proposed reservoir on the Campaspe would also be drawn upon to irrigate land on both sides of the Campaspe River near Rochester, comprising the territory of the old Campaspe Irrigation and Water Supply Trust. Therefore, it would be necessary, he said, to excise from the 41,000 acres shown on the map supplied to the Committee early in 1911 the area lying to the west of the Elmore–Cohuna railway route recommended by the Committee, as there would only be sufficient water stored in the Eppalock basin to irrigate the country to the east of that route and also the area comprising the old Campaspe Irrigation and Water Supply Trust lying on both sides of the river. He also informed the Committee that since he had given evidence before it early in 1911 investigations which had been made had modified the location of the irrigable lands in the Bamawm district. It was now unlikely that portion of the area towards Tennyson and Pine Grove to the west of the route of the railway from Elmore would be irrigated, as the existing western boundary of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement had been fixed as the limit of the good land in that district suitable for intensive culture. In view of these altered circumstances, Mr. Mead asked that if Elmore were to be the starting-point of the railway to Cohuna, the line should strike northwards at a point about 5½ miles out of Elmore and run due north, so as to touch the western boundary of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, and thus be of greater convenience to the settlers there than the route recommended by the Committee. He added that those settlers would by the aid of water produce much heavier crops than the wheat-growers around Tennyson, and as the former would bring a much larger tonnage to the railway they should receive more consideration than the wheat-growers who had only one crop in the year to cart to the railway.
6. When the Committee reported in 1911 in favour of the Elmore connexion there were complaints made that a breach of faith would be committed with the Bamawm settlers if the proposed railway did not start at Rochester. During its recent inquiry the Committee has endeavoured to ascertain what grounds there were for such statements. In the first place, it was stated that the First Railways Standing Committee in 1892 recommended the construction of a railway from Rochester to Gunbower. The records of that Committee, however, showed that a sectional Committee expressed the opinion that the Gunbower district would be best served by a line from Rochester, but, on the suggestion coming before that Committee a few days later, a resolution was carried asking the general (full) Committee to withhold their decision respecting the various routes to Gunbower and Cohuna until the surveyor’s report and a detailed estimate (of cost) are received.” All the rival routes, including the one from Rochester, came under review of the Committee again during the 1908 inquiry, and it then set the whole of them aside, because none of the lines would become payable till irrigation settlements had been established, which had since been done. Therefore, all the routes started on the same level so far as the 1911 inquiry was concerned. During that inquiry Mr. Elwood Mead, after he had returned from his visit to Europe and America, was asked by the Committee—“Do you know if any promise, or implied promise, was made by the Government or by any Government official, that a railway would be constructed through the Bamawm Irrigation District?” He replied—“I do not.” The Committee, in consequence of this evidence and the wording of the reference to it, which was to serve not only Cohuna and Bamawm, but “the district between the Bendigo and Kerang and Bendigo to Echuca railways” felt itself free to exercise its discretion as to the route of the railway, and it therefore recommended that the line as surveyed several years ago from Elmore to Pine Grove should be moved 1½ miles eastward so as to bring it within 6 miles of any portion of the Bamawm Irrigation District. If there were circumstances known to any Department which pledged the Government to start the railway from Rochester then that knowledge should have been placed before the Legislative Assembly and the wording of the reference amended accordingly, instead of allowing the question to be remitted to the Committee in general terms.

7. Apart, however, from that aspect of the matter, the Committee recently learnt that the publications sent by the Government to England and America for circulation among those who thought of settling in Victoria contained a map of the northern irrigation areas, showing that it was proposed to start the Cohuna railway at Elmore and not at Rochester, and to run west of the area now occupied by the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement. As this Bulletin was “issued by direction of the Government,” and as it was stated “The information it contains has been carefully prepared under the supervision of members of the Government . . . . and every promise made will be carried out,” it is evident that there could not have been any undertaking given by the Government to start the railway from Rochester. Still, the settlers at Bamawm, when giving evidence before the Committee a few days ago, said that they were led to believe that the railway would start at Rochester and run through the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement. They submitted a plan showing the route of the railway marked as “Proposed Railway” only, and stated that Mr. F. Bassett, an officer of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, who accompanied them in their inspection of the district prior to their applying for the land, and also Mr. Fricke, an officer of the Lands Department, had assured them that the Rochester route had been selected,” and there was “no doubt that would be the way the railway would come.” Mr. Fricke is now in America, so he could not be examined by the Committee. But as Mr. Bassett was in Melbourne, the Committee questioned him on the matter. He said that, as far as he could recollect, any plan he had placed before intending settlers showed the Rochester route passing through Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, but the plan had the following words printed on it in large letters:—“The Railway Route shown on this Plan is only Proposed, and may subsequently be Altered.” He also stated, “I may have led the settlers to believe there was every possibility of the railway to Cohuna going through the settlement. I may have made remarks which may have led them to that conclusion without definitely stating so.”

8. An additional reason given in support of the Rochester connexion was that an irrigation settlement had been established at Nanneella, to the north-east of that town, and, as it was proposed to erect factories at Rochester for canning fruits and vegetables and bacon-curing, it was desirable that the settlers at Bamawm, Gunbower,
and Cohuna should be brought in direct communication by rail with those establish­
ments. It was also urged that Rochester was a good local market town, having sale­yards, banks, stores, and a butter factory. Opposition was shown by the farmers
around Tennyson and in the parish of Pannoomiloo to the Rochester connex­
ion, especially if the railway were to pass through the centre of the Bamawm Irrigation
Settlement. They said that such a line would be of no service to them, as they would
still have to cart their wheat from 15 to 20 miles into Rochester, because the roads
leading to Prairie and Dingee stations on the Bendigo and Kerang railway were too
bad to cart wheat over, being subject to flooding by the overflow of Piccaniny
Creek. Several of them also asserted that a large area on the west or Tennyson side
of the route of the Elmore-Cohuna railway recommended by the Committee was irrigable,
and that that area was in 1910-11, together with the Bamawm land, included in the
Rochester Irrigation District. A number of the land-holders were in consequence
notified by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission that if they were not prepared
to pay the irrigation rate of 5s. per acre foot they should treat with the Closer Settlement
Board for the purchase of the whole or part of their holding. Under the belief that
they were within the irrigable area and would therefore be rated accordingly, they sold
part of their holding to the Government. They could not understand why they had
since been excised from the irrigation area and one or more of them left with holdings
which were now too small for dry farming.

COST OF PROPOSED RAILWAYS.

9. Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee
that a broad-gauge railway along the route from Elmore to Cohuna, recommended by the
Committee in 1911, would be 56 miles 62 chains in length, and that it would cost
£201,193, or £3,553 per mile, based on an average wage of 9s. per day for labourers.
If serviceable second-hand rails become available this cost would be reduced by about
£300 per mile. The cost of the rails and laying the permanent way came to about
one-third of the total estimated expenditure. Sleepers, ballast, metal for roads in
station grounds, and bridges and culverts represented another third of the estimated
cost. The principal remaining items were:—Earthworks, £19,291; station buildings and residences for employees, £10,600; fencing and cattle pits, £5,500; and engineering, supervision, general expenses, and unforeseen contingencies, £19,700. Provision had
been made in the estimate for ten roadside stations, and also a terminal station at Cohuna. The sleepers would mostly be obtained from the redgum areas along the Murray
River, and gravel from the neighbourhood of Bendigo would be used to ballast the
railway. The ruling gradient of the line would be 1 in 100. Mr. Kernot added that the
proposed railway from Rochester through Bamawm Settlement to Cohuna would
be 50 miles in length, and would cost £182,000, based on an average wage of 9s. per
day for labourers. In answer to a question asked by the Committee he stated that if the
Elmore route were deviated eastwards after crossing the Waranga-Loddon main water
channel so as to intersect the Tennyson-road between Tennyson Hall and the south­
western corner of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, and then proceed northwards
along the western boundary of that settlement, and strike north-west on to the
permanent survey again above Pine Grove, the length of the railway would be increased
by about three-quarters of a mile as the result of this deviation, and the cost would be
£2,000 more than the estimate for the permanent survey along the route recommended
by the Committee in 1911.

POPULATION AND PRODUCTION.

10. The Traffic Officers of the Railway Department stated that the area tributary
to the proposed Rochester-Cohuna railway passing through Bamawm Irrigation
Settlement was approximately 300,000 acres, of which 35,000 were under cultivation
in 1910-11, and that the area benefited by the suggested Elmore-Cohuna line was 390,000
acres, out of which about 50,000 were under crop in 1910-11. They estimated that
16,150 tons of agricultural produce, 1,150 tons of dairy produce, 350 tons of wool, and
600 tons of other goods, including fruit, hides, skins, &c., in addition to 5,000 tons of
firewood, and a similar tonnage of redgum timber from Gunbower Island would be
despatched from stations on the Elmore–Cohuna railway during the first twelve months following the opening of the line. The population in the area tributary to that railway was approximately 4,700. The Railways Commissioners expected that the Elmore connexion would show a profit of £3,576, and the Rochester connexion a profit of £1,589 the first year.

REVENUE AND EXPENSES.

11. The details of the estimated annual revenue and charges in connexion with the proposed Elmore to Cohuna line, as furnished by the Railways Commissioners, were as follow for a daily train service each way:

ANNUAL REVENUE.
(Based on local rates being charged between Elmore and Cohuna on all traffic except firewood and timber.)

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<tr>
<td>Parcels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mails</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timber and firewood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dairy produce</td>
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<td>233 6 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manures</td>
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<tr>
<td>All other traffic</td>
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£16,978 13 1 £3,510 6 8 £20,488 19 9

ANNUAL CHARGES.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £210,613, being £201,193, the cost of constructing a 5ft. 3in. railway from Elmore to Cohuna, 57 miles, with £9,420 added for rolling-stock

Traffic expenses
Maintenance charges
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock
General expenses

£16,912 13 3

Estimated annual profit £3,576 0 6

RECOMMENDATION.

12. After again inspecting the district and hearing additional evidence, the Committee is of opinion that the Elmore connexion is the one that will best meet the requirements of all concerned in the railway, notwithstanding that the western part of the area to be irrigated from the proposed Eppalock storage on the Campaspe River is to be excised from the scheme as previously placed before the Committee by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission. At the same time, however, the Committee has noted that since it reported in October, 1911, on the general question of railway construction in this district, the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement has been extended northward, and several allotments suitable for fruit-growing have been occupied in this enlarged area and will, it was asserted by the occupiers, be so used if railway facilities are brought within 5 or 6 miles of them. As these settlers are more distant from Cornelia or Strathallan, the new station on the Echuca railway, than those on the east side of the proposed township of Carmichael, the Committee recommends
that the proposed railway to Cohuna start at Elmore and proceed north-west from that town for about 7 miles so as to serve the farmers at Drummartin, and should then follow the permanent survey northward till crossing the Waranga-Loddon main water channel, where it should curve north-east to near the south-west corner of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, and thence northward along the western boundary of that settlement so as to better serve the recent settlers in the northern extension of Bamawm Settlement, and then turn north-west and join the permanent survey again to the north of Pine Grove, and proceed through Turramberry North and Gunbower township to Cohuna. The length of this deviated route will be 57½ miles, and the estimated cost £203,193, to which has to be added £9,420 for rolling-stock. The Committee also considers that provision should be made for three sidings or stations, instead of two, along the western boundary of the Bamawm Irrigation Settlement, including the station or siding to be placed on the Tennyson-road about a mile east of the Tennyson Hall, so that should the development at that settlement expected by Mr. Mead take place during the next few years, these receiving places for consignments of fruit and agricultural produce could be established as soon as the traffic offering warrants it. As to the proposed canning and bacon-curing factories, it is more than likely, seeing that an irrigation settlement is being established near Tandarra, on the Kerang railway, and that intensive culture is extending in the Kerang and Swan Hill districts, it will be found that Bendigo will be a more suitable centre than Rochester for such establishments, as, in addition to the places named and also the Bamawm, Cohuna, and Nanneella settlements, Bendigo could readily draw supplies of fruit suitable for canning from Harcourt and other places around it.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 12th December, 1912.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]