

1912.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS**

ON THE

BARMAH CONNECTING RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 17th October, 1912.

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EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

FRIDAY, 8TH DECEMBER, 1911.

5. LINES OF RAILWAY REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEE.—Mr. A. A. Billson moved, pursuant to notice, That the following questions be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report :—

* * * * *
(6) The question of connecting Barmah by means of a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway with the existing railway system.
* * * * *

Debate ensued.

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

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 Barmah by means of a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway with the existing railway system, has the honour to report as follows :—

DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY.

1. The small township of Barmah is situated on the Murray River, about 9 miles west of Picola, which is the terminus of a broad-gauge railway branching off the main Goulburn Valley line at Numurkah, and running westwards through Nathalia. Between Picola and Barmah the country is flat. The land is used for agricultural purposes, dairying, and grazing, the district having an average annual rainfall of 18 inches. Broken Creek, and also Deep Creek (a small tributary of the Murray River) intersect the country. Much of the land, however, at Lower Moira, to the south of Deep Creek, towards the Goulburn River, is subject to flooding in the winter and early spring months from the overflow of the latter stream. This trouble will be minimized, if not altogether removed, by the construction of levee banks along the Goulburn River, to confine the flood waters. But, in the meantime, several of the land-holders between Deep Creek and the Goulburn River, who would be served by the suggested railway extension to Barmah, abstain from cultivating their land. They said it would be cropped if the danger of having the soil flooded and the seed destroyed were lessened. To the north of the proposed line, at a distance of from 2 to 5 miles, is the Barmah State Forest, covering an area of about 50,000 acres, with an extensive frontage to the Murray River. This redgum reserve has been well cut over by the sawmillers, who either cart the timber to Picola railway station or, when the river is navigable, send it by steamer to Echuca, to be placed on the railway there. Many hundreds of redgum logs have also been cut in this forest and taken by steamer to Barmah, to be sawn up there and despatched by train from Picola or by boat to Echuca, and thence by rail to Melbourne and other parts of the State, redgum being extensively used for building and mining purposes, bridge and wharf construction, and also for street paving. It was stated by Mr. J. Evans, sawmiller at Barmah, who owns a steamer in connexion with his business, that it costs 5s. per ton to send sawn timber from his mill to Echuca by boat, including the wharfage charge, and that the cost of carting it from Barmah to Picola, a distance of a little over 9 miles, was 6s. per ton. In addition to the operations of the sawmillers, sleeper hewers have been at work in the Barmah State Forest for some years, but, nevertheless, the local forest officer, Mr. H. A. Bell, estimated that if the railway were extended to Barmah there would, with the two mills now operating at that township, be an annual output of about 3,000 tons of sawn timber from the Barmah State Forest, in addition to a great quantity of piles from 20 to 50 feet in length, besides sleepers, firewood, and charcoal. Supplies of redgum logs and piles are also obtained from the New South Wales side of the Murray River, opposite Barmah, and as far up stream as Tocumwal and Cobram. One sawmiller at Barmah informed the Committee that his present output was about 2,800 tons of sawn timber a year, and the other put his quantity down at a little over 800 tons. They said, however, that with a railway siding running into the mills at Barmah their output would be increased by about 50 per cent.

OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED RAILWAY.

2. When the Railways Standing Committee in 1891 recommended the extension of the railway from Nathalia to Picola, it was stated by it that a line stopping at Picola, instead of running through to Barmah, would bring a railway "within the reach of everybody in the district." It was admitted that the extension to Picola had been of service to those at Barmah East and Barmah, and had induced cultivation as far as the latter township on one side, and Deep Creek on the other. But the cost—6s. a ton—of carting wheat from those places to Picola, 10 or 12 miles, was a handicap

on the producers, which the suggested railway extension would not only remove, but would cause additional areas to be put under crop. Witnesses at Barmah estimated the average wheat yield of their district during each of the last two seasons at 25 bushels per acre, but the farmers between Picola and Barmah East stated their average yield was about 14 bushels for the last five seasons. Several of the latter opposed the extension of the railway because they considered it would not pay, as nearly all the cultivable land between Picola, Barmah, and Deep Creek was now within 10 or 11 miles of the Picola railway station, and that, they considered, was not an unreasonable distance to cart grain over flat country. Beyond Deep Creek, towards the Goulburn River, the liability of the country to flooding would prevent much of the land there being cropped until the levees were made. As to the timber traffic, a large portion of the sawn redgum would, they asserted, be still sent by steamer from Barmah to Echuca to supply orders in the Midland and Western districts of Victoria, and one witness, who had been in the firewood trade at Nagambie, declared that redgum was an unsuitable fuel for household use, and would not be in demand for that purpose.

CLAIM FOR RAILWAY.

3. The claim for the proposed railway extension rested principally on two grounds. First, that the line to Picola was paying, and next, that the extension ought to be a profitable undertaking, because the same train and crew could operate the extension of 9 miles to Barmah which was asked for, and, moreover, the gathering ground of the line would extend across the Murray River into Riverina, where there were a number of farmers holding areas of from 400 to 500 acres, and using a third or so of their holdings for wheat-growing, obtaining good yields. One witness stated that the proposed Barmah extension would serve from 60,000 to 80,000 acres of agricultural and pastoral lands in New South Wales, all settled; but another, who resided across the Murray River, put the area down at 15,000 acres. As, however, the Moama and Deniliquin railway is not more than 9 or 10 miles in a direct line from Barmah, the latter acreage may be considered to be nearer the area. There is no siding between Moama and Moira stations on the Deniliquin line which would serve the farmers on the New South Wales side of the river, but that difficulty would, no doubt, be overcome by the company owning the railway providing a siding if it thought the probable goods traffic justified the outlay. In the absence of a siding the farmers in New South Wales, opposite Barmah, cart their wheat to Echuca, from 15 to 20 miles, although they are nearer to Picola. Where they pay cartage the charge is 1s. a bag, or 12s. a ton. The reasons for the longer cartage are that Echuca is 10 miles nearer Melbourne by rail than Picola, and there is only a punt on the Murray River at Barmah, and the road to it is sandy in places, with a steep sand-hill near the punt. Representations were made to the Committee that if the railway were extended to Barmah the farmers on the New South Wales side of the river hoped to induce the Government of that State to erect a bridge over the Murray at Barmah, and to have the sandy road improved. It was urged that live stock would be trucked at Barmah if the railway were extended, but the Committee is of opinion that the minimum local rate of £1 a truck, which would be charged between Barmah and Picola, would cause all the live stock, except lambs and pigs, to be driven to Picola, and put on the rails there, instead of at Barmah.

COST OF EXTENSION.

4. Mr. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that the extension from Picola to Barmah would be $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length, and would cost £35,390. This is close on £4,000 per mile. A local estimate was submitted, stating that the extension could be constructed for £2,000 a mile, but, as the gentleman who prepared it did not appear before the Committee, there was an opportunity of questioning him concerning the details of his estimate. The Committee ascertained that the railway from Nathalia to Picola, $6\frac{3}{4}$ miles, was constructed in 1896 for £1,751 per mile. Since then a turntable and trucking yards have been provided at Picola, and the bridges over Broken Creek have been decked and ballast placed thereon. These and other improvements brought the capital expenditure up to £2,037 per mile. Nevertheless, the latter sum was so much below the estimate of £3,921 per mile for the proposed extension from Picola to Barmah that the Committee sought an explanation from the Construction Branch of the Railway Department concerning the

increased cost of the new line. In the absence of Mr. Kernot, through illness, the Committee questioned Mr. H. O. Sheeran, Assistant Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, on the matter. He stated that when the Nathalia-Picola line was built the rate of wages to labourers was but 6s. per day, compared with 8s. 6d., the present ruling rate. In 1896 60-lb. steel rails were obtainable at £464 per mile. To-day the price was £850. Sleepers had increased in price from 2s. 8d. each to 3s. 9d. delivered on the track and made ready to have the rails placed on them. Ballast had also advanced in price, and so had the cost of station buildings and residences for employés. Again, in consequence of the country towards Barmah being liable to flooding by the overflow of the Murray River, the railway track had to be raised well above the surface of the ground, necessitating a larger quantity of earthworks per mile and also greater lengths of bridging and culverts than on the Nathalia-Picola section. If serviceable secondhand rails become available the cost of the proposed extension will be reduced by about £250 per mile.

WATER STORAGES.

5. As the Committee learnt that the Inter-State Conference of Engineers dealing with the Murray Waters question had under consideration a proposal to construct extensive storage basins in Barmah State Forest to impound the flood water of that river in winter and liberate it in summer, so as to supplement the flow of the stream in the hot months of the year, the Committee heard evidence from Mr. E. Checchi, engineer, of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, concerning the proposal. It was thought that if such basins were made the water stored therein might injure the growth of the redgum saplings and seriously interfere with sawmillers and others obtaining logs, piles, and sleepers from the forest, and thus considerably lessen the traffic over the proposed Barmah railway. Mr. Checchi explained that on the Victorian side of the Murray, between Barmah township and Tocumwal-bridge, there were 50,000 acres of Crown lands, and portion of that area was nearly every year inundated to a mean depth of 5 feet by the overflow of the river. The flood waters usually spread over these low-lying lands in August, and when the Murray began to fall, two or three months later the water receded from the greater part of the inundated land, leaving a few shallow lagoons here and there. The suggestion placed before the Conference by him, together with proposals for other storages higher up the Murray, was that an embankment with flood gates should be constructed along the Victorian bank of the river between Barmah township and Tocumwal-bridge, at a cost of about £150,000, which would permit approximately 300,000 acre feet of flood water to be impounded from August or September till the following January or February, when the supply would be released so as to raise the summer level of the Murray at Barmah, Echuca, Gunbower, and further down stream. The low-lying depressions in the State forest would, if the embankments were made, have a maximum depth of 10 feet of water covering them. But there was no timber growing in those swamps. The belts of redgum were on the higher ground, which would not be flooded to a greater depth than 5 feet or 6 feet for some four or five months. This suggestion, however, was not likely to be carried out for the next ten or fifteen years, as the Conference favoured the building first of other storages higher up the river above Albury. Mr. H. R. Mackay, Conservator of Forests, was informed of the possible construction of these shallow basins in Barmah State Forest to impound the flood waters, and he assured the Committee that the few months the redgum timber would be under water would not interfere with its growth, provided such storages were emptied by the end of January. More timber fallers, however, would have to be put into the several logging camps, and a large number of teams employed so as to complete the work of getting logs for the sawmillers by the end of May in each year.

PRODUCTION AND TRAFFIC.

6. Mr. C. Barber, Superintendent of Station Service, Railway Department, visited the district to report on the probable traffic over the new line. He stated that the extension of the Picola railway to Barmah would serve an area of 25,000 acres in Victoria, and 50,000 acres in the parish of Bama, New South Wales. In that area of 75,000 acres there were 6,050 acres under crop in the season 1911-12. He considered that the acreage under cultivation in Victoria would not be largely increased because of the extension of the railway, as most of the farmers were within a reasonable distance of the Picola station. Along the Broken Creek, in the parishes of Narioka, Barmah, and Moira, there are quantities of good dry box timber, suitable for firewood, and he thought it possible that with a railway handy this fuel would be cut and sent to

Melbourne, as local railway rates were not charged on firewood carried over new lines. The population of the district was estimated at 700, of whom 320 were in Victoria, and 380 in New South Wales. Included in the latter were 250 blacks at the aboriginal station opposite Barmah. The quantity of wheat despatched from Picola last year was 5,951 tons, and there were 1,600 tons of sawn timber from Barmah State Forest loaded into trucks at that station during the same period. In his estimates of traffic he had allowed for 2,500 tons of grain, 3,200 tons of sawn timber, and 3,000 tons of firewood being forwarded from stations on the new line during the first year it was open. The inwards traffic included 200 tons of artificial manures. In answer to a question, Mr. Barber said that, in computing the gathering ground for traffic in connexion with the new line, he had gone to within $2\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 miles of the Deniliquin and Moama line, because there was no goods siding on it nearer Barmah than Moira. The charge for the carriage of wheat from Moira to Echuca would be 2s. 6d. per ton, and from Echuca to Melbourne 9s. 4d., or a total charge of 11s. 10d. per ton. The rate from Barmah to Melbourne would be 12s. per ton, including the local rate.

ADDITIONAL TRAIN.

7. The Railways Commissioners were asked by the Committee whether the train and crew operating the line from Numurkah to Picola could run on to Barmah if the extension were made, and maintain the present connexions with the trains on the Goulburn Valley railway, and, if not, how far beyond Picola the existing train and crew could work the line. They replied that the present train to Picola could not be utilized to operate a service for more than 3 miles beyond that station, if the connexions with the main line had to be preserved, and, therefore, a separate train and crew would be necessary to provide for any extension to Barmah. The wages of a second crew would be £330 per annum, and interest at 4 per cent. per annum on the cost of the locomotive, passenger car, and van would be £220, making a yearly charge of £550.

ESTIMATES OF ANNUAL CHARGES AND REVENUE.

8. The Railways Commissioners supplied the Committee with the following estimates of annual charges and revenue for a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway from Picola to Barmah, providing for one train each way per day:—

ANNUAL CHARGES.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £42,640, being the cost (£35,390) of constructing $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles of railway from Picola to Barmah, with £7,250 added for a locomotive and other rolling-stock	...	...	...	...	£1,705	12	0
Traffic expenses	...	...	...	...	181	6	1
Maintenance charges	...	...	...	...	592	0	0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock	...	...	...	...	706	0	2
General expenses	...	...	...	...	44	7	6
					<u>£3,229</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>

REVENUE.

(Based on local rates being charged between Picola and Barmah on all traffic except timber and firewood.)

	On New Line.	On other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.	
Passengers	£152 0 0	£36 0 0	
Parcels	120 0 0	...	
Mails	67 10 0	...	
Class goods	134 3 4	9 10 0	
Wool	7 4 0	...	
Live stock	55 0 0	...	
Timber and firewood	130 16 8	904 3 4	
Grain	312 10 0	133 0 0	
Manures	8 13 4	...	
All other traffic	20 0 0	...	
	<u>£1,007 17 4</u>	<u>£1,082 13 4</u>	... 2,090 10 8
Estimated annual loss	...	...	<u><u>£1,138 15 1</u></u>

REDUCTION IN ESTIMATED ANNUAL LOSS.

9. As already stated, the foregoing estimate provides for an additional train and crew to operate the proposed $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles extension of the Picola railway. If that train and crew could be dispensed with there would be a reduction of about £500 in the estimated annual loss, bringing it down to £638. The train at present working the branch line from Numurkah to Picola is timed to arrive at the latter station at 2 p.m. each day, and to leave there on the return trip at 2.50 p.m. Of the 50 minutes at Picola, 25 are required for shunting and other terminal work. If the line were extended this work would be transferred to the new terminal at Barmah. The remaining 25 minutes would be absorbed in stoppages on the "down" and "up" trips at Picola and at a station required between there and Barmah. Therefore, it would be necessary, in order to obtain the 43 minutes in which to run the train the $18\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Picola to Barmah and back, that the "down" Goulburn Valley train should reach Numurkah 18 minutes earlier in the forenoon than it does now, and leave that station 18 minutes later in the afternoon than at present scheduled, and that the time taken to bring the Picola train into the platform at Numurkah (after the departure of the main line train) and to despatch it therefrom, should be no longer than that occupied in running the Yarrawonga train into the single-faced platform at Benalla and despatching it from that station. Correspondence passed between the Railway Department and the Committee to see if this could be accomplished by converting the limited through mixed train running daily between Seymour and Numurkah, and *vice versa*, into a purely passenger train, and having it run at the same speed as the passenger train operating the North-Eastern line between Seymour and Benalla. The Department explained that it was impossible, with safety, to increase the speed of the Goulburn Valley train by more than five minutes, as that line had not been so substantially constructed as the North-Eastern railway, having lighter rails and less ballast and sleepers. Therefore, the train could not be run over the Goulburn Valley line at express speed. The five minutes it is proposed to save in the running time of this train from the 1st December, 1912, is to be utilized by extending the time for refreshments at Shepparton from 15 to 20 minutes. Consequently, the train will not reach Numurkah any earlier than now.

DECISION OF COMMITTEE.

10. The Committee could not recommend the construction of a short railway from Picola to Barmah at a loss of £1,138 per annum. While it believes that the diminishing revenue from firewood will be about made up by an increase in the grain traffic, it could not overlook the fact that there is not much room for expansion in the acreage to be placed under cereals on the New South Wales side of the Murray, owing to the Moama and Deniliquin railway cutting at right angles across the area to the west of Barmah suitable for wheat-growing, and thus restricting the acreage to be drawn upon for traffic for the new line. However, the Committee hopes that the increasing settlement taking place in the irrigation areas in the Goulburn Valley, and the additional traffic which will result to the Victorian railways on the completion of the Finley-Tocumwal line, will cause such a re-arrangement of the train services in the Goulburn Valley as will enable the Department either to dispense with a second train and crew to operate the Barmah extension, and thereby reduce the expenses of the new line by about £500 a year, or, if two trains and crews are unavoidable, to so utilize their spare time on the main line as will curtail the estimated running charges of the extension by the sum stated. Provided that can be done by the Railways Commissioners, the Committee recommends the construction of a 5ft. 3in. railway, $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length, from Picola to Barmah, at a cost not exceeding £35,390.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 17th October, 1912.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]