

1913.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE

DUGGAN, FUMINA, HILL END, AND WILLOW
GROVE CONNECTING RAILWAY ;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 27th August, 1913.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 1.—[6d.]—10757.

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 :—

* * * * *

(10) The question of connecting the districts of Duggan, Fumina, Hill End, and Willow Grove by means of a 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 the districts of Duggan, Fumina, Hill End, and Willow Grove by means of a railway with the existing railway system, has the honour to report as follows :—

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT.

1. The district for which nearer railway facilities were sought lies between the La Trobe River and the eastern branch of the Tanjil River. To the west of this area is the Warragul-Neerim South railway, with its proposed extension 15 miles northwards to the junction of the La Trobe and Toorongo rivers, and to the east the narrow-gauge line from Moe to Walhalla. Between the La Trobe River and the western branch of the Tanjil River is a gradually ascending ridge extending from Moe northwards through the townships of Willow Grove and Hill End to near the Duggan township reserve. From the latter point the country ascends rapidly, and is more broken, reaching the summit of the Divide on the western slopes of Mount Baw Baw. The southern portion of this area is fairly well populated around Willow Grove and Hill End, and in a lesser degree near Duggan, but from there northwards are very few settlers. Throughout the whole area to be served by the proposed narrow-gauge railway from Moe to Duggan the soil varies considerably. Along the main ridge from Willow Grove to Hill End the land is of good quality, and is mostly occupied in holdings of from 30 to 200 acres. There are also several narrow alluvial flats in the valleys of the La Trobe and Tanjil rivers within easy access of Willow Grove, on which maize, millets, and potatoes have been grown, and good yields obtained. Above Hill End the country on the western side, drained by Hawthorn Creek and the La Trobe River, containing about 9,000 acres, is of poor quality, timbered with stringybark, and is but sparsely settled, notwithstanding that it has been available for selection for several years. To the north of Hill End, at a distance of about 8 miles, is Duggan township reserve. The country around there, known as Upper Fumina and Toorongo, is of good quality but heavily timbered. The soil on the hilltops and slopes towards the numerous creeks which run through this area is of a volcanic nature and of good quality. Bordering on these perennial streams are fertile alluvial lands covered with dense undergrowth of dogwood, tree ferns, musk, hazel, &c. These rich lands were divided into blocks ranging from about 80 to 200 acres, and were eagerly applied for when made available by the Lands Department some years ago ; but several of the settlers, finding themselves too far removed from a railway station, abandoned their holdings. Those remaining gain a livelihood from grazing and dairying, and they believed that if a railway were made into the district it would enable them to sell the timber growing on their holdings, and so assist them to clear their land and put it under crop. The soil is capable of producing heavy yields of potatoes and onions, while oats, maize, and millets also do well, the district having an average annual rainfall of 40 inches. Very little agricultural produce, however, is grown in Toorongo and Upper Fumina beyond what is necessary to meet local requirements, as the cost of cartage to Moe or to Neerim South is about 30s. per ton, and in ordinary seasons it absorbs practically all the profit. Only in exceptional years would it pay under existing conditions to market potatoes grown in that district. The charge for carting cream from Duggan to Moe is 2s. per can. Around Hill End potatoes and onions are more extensively grown, but as the cost of cartage from there to Moe is likewise a heavy item the landholders rely mostly on dairying for their income.

ROUTE AND COST OF RAILWAY.

2. Formerly the settlers in the northern part of the Fumina country, and also those in the parish of Toorongo, asked that the Neerim South railway should be extended to the junction of the La Trobe and Toorongo rivers, as the terminus would bring almost the whole of them within 10 miles of a broad-gauge railway. Since then, however, the majority of the settlers referred to have changed their minds as to the route of the railway, and are now asking for a narrow-gauge line from Moe to Duggan. They explained that when they had previously urged the extension of the Neerim South railway the Moe-Duggan proposal had not assumed a definite shape, and, moreover, since the former visit of the Committee some fertile allotments in the parish of Fumina North had been settled, and the best outlet for those settlers was to Duggan. They said that all the settlers in the Fumina and Toorongo country could reach Duggan without any difficulty, but if they had to take their produce to a station at the junction of the La Trobe and Toorongo rivers it would have to be carted down a steep hill about 3 miles in length, and the stores and artificial manures required by them hauled up that road, which had a grade of 1 in 11 for nearly 60 chains, and after that 1 in 14. Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that a 2 ft. 6 in. gauge railway from Moe to Duggan would leave the Moe-Walhalla line at a point about $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles from Moe, and would run north-west through Willow Grove and Hill End, terminating at Duggan township reserve. This line would involve 25 miles of new construction, and it was estimated to cost £84,000 exclusive of land and rolling-stock. These figures were based on an average wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers. Provision was made for fencing and for new 50-lb. steel rails. If serviceable second-hand 60-lb. rails became available the cost of the railway would be reduced by £250 per mile. There had been no survey made for the route of the railway, and the cost quoted was based on a recent inspection of the country by Mr. Combes, Superintending Surveyor. It was proposed that the railway should follow approximately the route of the main road along or near the top of the range separating the La Trobe and Tanjil rivers for 19 miles, or about 4 miles beyond Hill End. From this point the line would leave the top of the range and descend about 200 feet in 6 miles on sideling country to the terminal point near the south-east corner of Duggan township reserve. This railway would have curves of $2\frac{1}{2}$ chains radius, and a ruling grade of 1 in 30. There would be no engineering difficulties on the first 17 miles. From 17 to 19 miles the country was somewhat rougher, but no expensive works would be necessary. On the last 6 miles, however, the country was heavily timbered and intersected by a number of gullies, causing the estimated cost of this section to reach about £4,000 a mile. In order to lessen the cost of the last 6 miles the Moe-Duggan Railway League suggested that the line should descend along the slopes of the Tanjil River and then follow that stream, or Icy Creek, to a terminus to be fixed. When this deviation was inspected by Mr. G. Beauchamp, Inspecting Engineer, he reported that "the cost of this route would not differ from that suggested by Mr. Combes, but it would better serve the timber areas."

LAND SETTLEMENT.

3. According to a return and plans supplied to the Committee by Mr. J. M. Reed, Surveyor-General of the Lands Department, a total area of 106,681 acres would come within the influence of the suggested narrow-gauge railway from Moe to Duggan. Of this area 22,710 acres had either been sold by the Crown or were in course of alienation, while 5,540 acres were held as grazing areas under section 35 of the *Land Act* 1901. Of the remainder, 37,500 acres were reserved as a State forest, and 40,931 acres were available for selection, comprising 1,316 acres classified as first class land, 19,730 as second class, 19,694 as third class, and 191 as village settlement allotments. The Traffic Officers of the Railway Department put the total area to be served by the proposed railway down at 80,000 acres, but they excluded some of the forest lands, as they considered the timber obtained therefrom would find its way to either the extension of the Neerim South railway, which has been recommended by the Committee to terminate at the junction of the La Trobe and Toorongo rivers, or to the Walhalla railway. They also exclude from the area regarded by the Lands Department as being tributary to the proposed narrow-gauge line some

privately-held lands near Willow Grove, as they were of opinion that the produce and live stock therefrom would be carted or driven to Moe in order to save the local rates and cost of transference to the broad-gauge trucks which would have to be paid if the goods and pigs were railed at Willow Grove

REPORT OF TRAFFIC OFFICER.

4. Mr. C. H. Barber, of the Traffic Branch of the Railway Department, who visited the district to report on the probable traffic over the proposed narrow-gauge railway from Moe to Duggan township reserve, stated that the area tributary to the proposed line was, roughly, from 70,000 to 80,000 acres, of which from 18,000 to 20,000 acres were held by settlers, the remainder being Crown lands available for selection and areas reserved for State forests. The total area used for dairying and grazing was approximately 16,000 acres. This represented about 10,500 acres of ringbarked timber country, and 5,500 acres partly cleared and under grass. The cream produced in the district was conveyed by road to the Moe Butter Factory, the collecting waggons visiting Willow Grove, Hill End, and Duggan at regular intervals. It was estimated that with railway facilities there would be an increased output of dairy produce, and that some of it would be railed to Melbourne. Apart from pigs, which would probably be trucked to Dandenong, most of the live stock raised would be disposed of in the district. The area cleared for cultivation did not exceed 1,200 acres. Under present conditions the agricultural produce grown was mostly consumed locally, but with railway facilities a small traffic in grain, potatoes, and onions would be obtained. He did not anticipate that any considerable development in the timber industry would take place for some years, as the milling areas closer to Melbourne could undersell in that market any sawn timber forwarded from Fumina. Railway facilities would probably not induce more than two small sawmills to commence operations, and the average output would not be more than two trucks per day for three parts of the year. He had allowed for 36 tons of fencing posts and split timber being forwarded by rail weekly from the State and private areas. The railway would serve 135 settlers and an estimated population of 675. It was estimated that the outwards goods traffic would come to 6,196 tons, comprising 5,000 tons of sawn and split timber and 1,196 tons of agricultural produce, while the inwards traffic would total 364 tons, made up of groceries, wire netting, drapery, flour, bran, pollard, &c.

REVENUE AND WORKING EXPENSES OF RAILWAY.

5. The Railways Commissioners furnished the Committee with the following estimates of annual expenses and revenue for a narrow-gauge line from Moe to Duggan, providing for three trains each way per week, to be operated by the train and crew now working the Moe to Walhalla railway:—

ANNUAL CHARGES.

| | | | |
|---|---------------|-----------|----------|
| Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £85,260, being the estimated cost (£84,000) of constructing 25 miles of 2 ft. 6 in. railway from Moe to Duggan at a wage rate averaging 9s. per day, with £1,260 added for truck stock | £3,410 | 8 | 0 |
| Traffic expenses | 118 | 0 | 0 |
| Maintenance charges | 2,250 | 0 | 0 |
| Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock | 854 | 12 | 3 |
| General expenses | 108 | 13 | 10 |
| Total | £6,741 | 14 | 1 |

REVENUE.

(Based on local rates on all goods except timber and firewood carried over the new line.)

| | | | On New Line. | | | On Other Lines from New Traffic from New Line. | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|--------------|---|---|--|-------|---|---|--------|----|---|
| Passengers | ... | ... | £240 | 0 | 0 | ... | £36 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Parcels | ... | ... | 147 | 0 | 0 | ... | ... | | | | | |
| Mails | ... | ... | 188 | 0 | 0 | ... | ... | | | | | |
| Class goods | ... | ... | 88 | 0 | 0 | ... | ... | | | | | |
| Live stock | ... | ... | 104 | 0 | 0 | ... | ... | | | | | |
| Timber | ... | ... | 625 | 0 | 0 | ... | 275 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| Agricultural produce | ... | ... | 104 | 0 | 0 | ... | 121 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| All other traffic | ... | ... | 114 | 0 | 0 | ... | 42 | 0 | 0 | | | |
| | | | ----- | | | | ----- | | | | | |
| | | | £1,610 | 0 | 0 | | £474 | 0 | 0 | £2,084 | 0 | 0 |
| Estimated loss first year of operation | ... | ... | | | | | | | | £4,657 | 14 | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | | ----- | | |

TIMBER TRAFFIC.

6. As it was admitted by those urging the construction of the Moe-Duggan railway that the bulk of the revenue of the line would for several years be obtained from the carriage of timber the Committee had the country inspected by Mr. D. Ingle, an experienced officer of the Forests Department. He reported that, taken as a whole, the timbered country could only be classed as "patchy" from a forest point of view. Here and there were a few hundred acres of good timber, but generally it was poor to medium, much of it being over-mature, and large areas had suffered severely from repeated fires. The timber consisted of messmate, silver-top ironbark, yellow stringybark, mountain ash, woolly-butt, and blue gum. The areas growing the two last-mentioned timbers were very valuable, as the trees were young, about three-quarters grown, and of good quality. Unfortunately, about 3,000 acres of woolly-butt on the slopes of Mount Baw Baw had been killed by fires. At some future time, he added, the timbered areas in the Tanjil watershed would be worked, but it was out of the question for sawmillers operating there to compete with those at Warburton or in the Upper La Trobe Valley. In answering a question put by the Committee, he said that the milling timber around Duggan, and on the slopes of Icy Creek, could easily be taken by tramways down to the junction of the La Trobe and Toorongu rivers, the terminus of the broad-gauge extension of the Neerim South railway which has been recommended by the Committee, but it would not pay to do so at present prices. In the Warburton district a road grade of 1 in 10 was considered safe and easy for a wooden tramway, and 10 miles' haulage over a tramway from the mill to the railway was regarded as a fair day's work for a team of horses. The expense of transporting timber over the narrow-gauge railway from Duggan and the charge for transferring it to the broad-gauge trucks at Moe, added to the cost of railway carriage from the latter place to Melbourne, would, he considered, make it impossible for millers in the Tanjil watershed to successfully compete in ordinary building timber with those in the Warburton district, where there was still fifteen years' cutting. As soon as the wholesale price of sawn unseasoned timber delivered in Melbourne reached 8s. 6d. per 100 feet super. there was the likelihood of supplies from Tasmania being put on the market because of the cheap water carriage from that State. Mr. H. R. Mackay, Conservator of Forests, concurred in this view, and stated that, as the number of licensed sawmills is in excess of the requirements, so far as ordinary building timber is concerned, it is very improbable that any additional mills will be licensed for some time to come. The valuable forest north of Duggan township reserve towards the Divide—much of which was in the immature stage—should, he added, be kept in reserve till the Warburton and Upper La Trobe forests are cut out.

DECISION OF COMMITTEE.

7. The Committee considers that the larger portion of the Fumina and Toorongoo country will be reasonably served by the extension of the Neerim South broad-gauge railway to Toorongoo River which has been recommended by the Committee. At the same time, it is recognised that a railway terminating near Duggan township reserve would be of more convenience to the settlers in that country. The Committee is also of opinion that Willow Grove and the adjacent lands are already served by the railway at Moe, and that road improvements would meet their needs. As regards the Hill End district, which lies between Willow Grove and Toorongoo, and is at present from 15 to 20 miles from a railway, the Committee considers that the area of good land there is too limited to justify the construction of a narrow-gauge line from Moe, especially as it is unlikely that the timber along the valleys of the two branches of the Tanjil River will be milled until the forests in the watershed of the Upper Yarra become cut out some fifteen years hence. With respect to agricultural development following railway extension into the Hill End and Duggan districts, the Committee cannot overlook the fact that it recommended the construction of the Moe-Walhalla railway, which at Moondarra passes through a belt of volcanic country quite equal in fertility to any patches of good soil in those districts, in the hope that crops would be grown and despatched over the line on its completion. Yet, from the 3rd May, 1910, to the 31st March, 1912, 5 tons only of agricultural produce, including potatoes, were consigned from stations around Moondarra. Such a result does not encourage further railway construction in similar neighbouring country. Under the circumstances the Committee is of opinion that it not expedient to connect Duggan, Fumina, Hill End, and Willow Grove by means of a railway with the existing railway system.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 26th August, 1913.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]