

1914.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE

HOPETOUN—MILDURA LINES
CONNECTING RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 9th July, 1914.

By Authority:

ALBERT J. MULLETT, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

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:—

* * * * * * *

(3) The question of connecting the districts lying between the Woomelang to Mildura and Yelta railway and the South Australian Border with the existing railway system by railway extensions, and also linking up the railways leading into these districts by cross-country lines, and the provision of adequate water supplies for settlement purposes.

* * * * * * *

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;	
S. Barnes, Esq., M.L.A., The Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A., The Hon. A. Hicks, M.L.C.,	The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C. (Vice-Chairman), E. C. Warde, Esq., M.L.A.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

Compilation.*	£ s. d
Printing (760 copies)	7 0 0

* 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 connecting the districts lying between the Woomelang to Mildura and Yelta railway and the South Australian Border with the existing railway system by railway extensions, and also linking up the railways leading into these districts by cross-country lines, and the provision of adequate water supplies for settlement purposes, has the honour to report as follows:—

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN MALLEE.

1. Since the construction of the railway from Woomelang to Mildura was authorized by Parliament fourteen years ago there has been a fairly constant demand for an extension of the Hopetoun railway in a north-easterly or northerly direction so as to junction with the Mildura line at some point between Woomelang and Ouyen. In 1903 the Committee inquired into the subject of connecting the western districts of Victoria with Mildura and the Darling River by means of a railway from Hopetoun to a suitable place on the Mildura line. On that occasion the Committee reported against the construction of a connecting railway because of the small traffic likely to pass over it for several years. Very little of the Mallee country between Woomelang and Mildura was settled in 1903. According to the Report of the Victorian Railways Commissioners, the total number of passengers booked at the stations from Lascelles to Yatpool inclusive during 1903-4 was 523. The inwards and outwards goods traffic from those stations during that year came to 5,559 tons, while the total takings amounted to £3,150. Since then, however, there has been considerable settlement in that part of the Mallee, and the area brought under cultivation during the past nine years has very largely increased. The number of passengers booked in 1912-13 at stations on the Mildura railway from Lascelles to Yatpool inclusive was 17,236. The inwards and outwards goods traffic during that year totalled 32,070 tons, while the takings at the stations referred to amounted to £30,048. Moreover, since 1903 the railway from Ouyen westwards to Murrayville, 68 miles in length, has been constructed and the adjacent country taken up. A large portion of it has also been cleared and cultivated. In 1912-13 there were 6,408 passengers booked at the stations on the Murrayville line, and the inwards and outwards goods traffic from those stations during that year totalled 26,757 tons, while the takings amounted to £25,442. During the past nine years both the passenger and goods traffic to and from the Mildura Irrigation Settlement have largely increased.

TRAFFIC IN LIVE STOCK.

2. About three years ago freezing works were established at Murtoa by a co-operative company representing the farmers of the Wimmera and Southern Mallee districts. There are 1,250 shareholders. These works cost £52,230, and their establishment has so far been a success. During the first year of operation 77,384 lambs and 10,130 sheep were killed there and prepared for export, and in the next season, which was an unfavorable one, the number of lambs treated was 66,178, and sheep 2,930. Last year 90,000 lambs were frozen at Murtoa. The works are capable of dealing with 2,600 lambs and sheep per day. It was pointed out that the killing season at these works was at present limited to about twelve weeks, as lambs and sheep for export were drawn from the Wimmera and Southern Mallee districts only. The Committee was informed that if the suggested connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura railways were made it would enable operations at the works to start six or eight weeks earlier, as supplies of lambs and sheep suitable for export could then be drawn from stations along the Lascelles to Mildura line, and also from the districts adjacent to the Murrayville railway. Most of that country will, it is expected, be so improved within the next three or four years as to carry a large number of sheep and lambs combined with wheat-growing. It was urged that the enlargement of the area from which the

Murtoa Freezing Works could draw lambs for shipment and the consequent lengthening of the killing season would greatly benefit those works and strengthen the financial position of the company. Farmers in the Wimmera and Southern Mallee districts expressed the opinion that the opening of the Murtoa Freezing Works had improved the lamb market and steadied prices. When lambs, it was said, were driven three or four days by road, or were trucked long railway journeys before being killed, they lost their "bloom" and also some weight. It was therefore advantageous to have the lambs slaughtered at a suitable place within easy distance by rail of the district in which they were reared. If a railway connexion were made between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines it was estimated by the directors of the Murtoa Freezing Works that from 30,000 to 40,000 lambs would be sent to those works from stations on the Donald to Mildura and Ouyen to Murrayville railways and from the Darling River district during the first year the new line was in operation, and that that number would steadily increase provided the seasons were favorable. It was also represented that, in addition to the annual lamb trade, there would in drought seasons be a large traffic in live stock from the Darling River district to the Western District of Victoria.

3. Mr. C. H. Barber, Traffic Officer, Victorian Railways, who visited Mildura and Wentworth to obtain information concerning the probable traffic over the proposed Hopetoun-Lascelles and other railway connexions, informed the Committee that in the district north of Wentworth there were at the time of his visit in November, 1913, 293,000 sheep, and that during that year 60,800 sheep were sent from the grazing country northward of Wentworth into Victoria. From a return obtained from the Stock Branch of the Department of Agriculture, Victoria, it was ascertained that the stock crossings at Mildura and Wentworth were as follow:—For the year 1912, crossing the Murray River into Victoria at Mildura—sheep, 4,694; cattle, 995; at Wentworth, sheep, 26,436; cattle, 182. 1911, at Mildura, sheep, 6,875; cattle, 109; at Wentworth, sheep, 15,131; cattle, nil. 1910, at Mildura, sheep, 5,724; cattle, 920; at Wentworth, sheep, 21,625; cattle, 325. 1909, at Mildura, sheep, 43,963; cattle, 361; at Wentworth, sheep, 19,040; cattle, 614. For the year 1912, exported from Victoria to New South Wales, crossing at Mildura—sheep, 329; cattle, 873; at Wentworth, sheep, 2,595; cattle, 912. 1911, at Mildura, sheep, 3,898; cattle, 294; at Wentworth, sheep, 18,518; cattle, 402. 1910, at Mildura, sheep, 2,805; cattle, 497; at Wentworth, sheep, 4,008; cattle, 216. 1909, at Mildura, sheep, 6,447; cattle, 281; at Wentworth, sheep, 4,546; cattle, 194. Mr. Barber stated that in his estimate of traffic he had allowed for 24,000 lambs, representing 200 trucks, passing over the suggested connecting line between Hopetoun and Lascelles for freezing at the Murtoa works, and 8,000 store sheep, approximately 80 trucks, for interchange between Western Riverina and the Wimmera and Western districts of Victoria. Taking the cost of sending lambs alive by rail to Geelong and having them killed and frozen there, as against the rate charged for sending them by rail to the Murtoa Freezing Works and being killed there and then transported to Geelong in a frozen state, it would, he said, pay to forward them from all stations north of Birchip by way of Lascelles and Hopetoun to Murtoa, as the railway rate would be less, apart from the question of the lambs arriving at the nearer freezing works in a better condition "with the bloom on them."

OTHER TRAFFIC.

4. It was urged that, besides live stock traffic, there would for some years be consignments of chaff sent over the line to Mildura and other Northern Mallee towns. Several hundred horses are employed in cultivating orchards and vineyards at Mildura and Merbein Irrigation Settlements, and oaten fodder is required for them. Generally speaking, crops are not cut for hay in the Northern Mallee district during the first few years of settlement because of the difficulty in operating a reaper and binder on the fields until all the mallee roots have been removed from the ground. This usually takes from five to six years. Many of the settlers in the Northern Mallee had gone there from the Wimmera and Southern Mallee districts. Being used to the agricultural implements and machinery manufactured at Horsham and Warracknabeal, they desired to obtain their farm plant and waggons from manufacturers in those towns. Supplies of flour, bran, and pollard would, it was stated, be drawn from the mills in the Warracknabeal, Murtoa, and Horsham districts, while fresh and dried fruits would be sent over the proposed railway from Mildura to the Wimmera towns. It was also expected, when the direct railway from Horsham to Hamilton by way of Toolondo and Cavendish is completed, there would be regular consignments of potatoes and other vegetables

grown on the Portland heath lands to the Mallee towns north of Hopetoun if the desired connecting link between the Hopetoun and Mildura railways were made. In addition to the ordinary passenger traffic arising from commercial travellers, live stock agents, and others associated with trade wishing to have an easy means of passing from one railway system to another in that part of the State, many settlers in the Northern Mallee would be induced to visit their relatives and friends in the Wimmera District if this short connecting line were built. Under existing circumstances they either have to hire buggies or motor cars at Lascelles, Birchip, or Donald to get across to the Hopetoun railway, or travel about 200 miles by rail, *via* Maryborough and Ararat, to reach Warracknabeal, Murtoa, or Horsham.

PROPOSED ROUTES.

5. Several routes for connecting the Hopetoun and Mildura railways were placed before the Committee. For some years the railway leagues from Ballarat westward throughout the Wimmera and Western districts have been urging an extension of the Hopetoun railway either to Lascelles or to Gama or Turriff, stations immediately north of Lascelles on the Mildura railway. The likelihood, however, of a connecting railway being made between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines led to a number of other routes being suggested, partly in the interests of the towns which would be the starting or terminal stations of the connecting train service, and partly to give better railway facilities to the farmers carrying on operations on the lands between those towns. Roughly speaking, the distance between the Hopetoun and Mildura railways is about 18 or 22 miles. This means that farmers situated in the central position have to cart their wheat 10 or 13 miles or a little further, according to the roads traversed, to the nearest railway station. It was represented that if that distance could be shortened it would give the farmers more time to put increased areas under crop or to employ their teams in better working their fallowed land, and so secure larger yields. The country between Minyip and Donald and also between Warracknabeal and Litchfield or Watchem is of good quality and produces heavy crops. Further north, however, the soil is more loamy and sandy in places and does not, as a rule, give such large yields. All the land between the two lines is well suited for grazing—producing sound sheep and lambs.

6. No surveys had been made of most of the suggested connecting routes. It was pointed out, however, that some of the lines could for the greater part of their length be constructed along existing roads 2 or 3 chains in width, thus saving the cost of land resumption for the railway track. Mr. M. E. Kerrot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that the country between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines was fairly level and presented no engineering difficulties so far as railway construction was concerned. Several of the towns mentioned as the starting or terminal points of the proposed railway had good supplies of water for locomotive purposes. Some of them were also locomotive depôts, having engine sheds, turntable, ashpits, water-crane, &c., as well as facilities for junctioning stations. He approximately estimated the cost of the lines at £3,000 per mile, exclusive of land and rolling-stock. The rough estimates of lengths and costs of the several routes, based on a wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers, were as follow:—

Route.	Length in Miles.	Approximate Cost.
Minyip to Donald	24 ..	£72,000
Sheephills to Litchfield	20 ..	63,000
Warracknabeal to Litchfield	26 ..	78,000
Warracknabeal to Watchem	27 ..	81,000
Warracknabeal to Birchip	34 ..	102,000
Hopetoun to Woomelang	19 ..	58,000
Hopetoun to Lascelles	16 ..	48,000
Hopetoun to Turriff	22 ..	66,000
Hopetoun to Walpeup	46 ..	138,000

7. The last-mentioned route would run parallel with the Mildura railway from Lascelles to Onyen, at a distance of 16 or 18 miles westward. Being of greater length than any of the other suggested lines, it would open up more country. But as a large part of that area consists of sand hills it is likely that much of this poorer land would remain unoccupied or, at any rate, be unproductive for years. The Committee drove for over 30 miles north-west of Hopetoun towards Walpeup, crossing several wide belts of sand. Along this route, however, at both Yallum and Patchewollock are some

large patches of good mallee country suitable for settlement and wheat-growing, and the question of serving these areas with a railway and providing them with a supply of water will be dealt with by the Committee in another Report. One objection raised to the Hopetoun-Walpeup proposal was that it would connect with a branch line and there would be delay in reaching the main Mildura line, on which a fast passenger service is run.

DARLING RIVER-MILDURA TRADE.

8. It was represented by witnesses at Ballarat that the proposed railway connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines would secure to this State a much larger portion of the Darling River trade than it now obtains by providing a direct route by rail to the seaboard at Portland. They, however, overlooked the fact that even if the suggested connexion were made Portland would be a greater distance by rail from Mildura than either Geelong or Melbourne are at present. As a matter of fact, the nearest port by rail will be Port Adelaide when the short connecting line between the Murrayville and Pinnaroo railways, which has been authorized and is about to be constructed, is completed. The distances from Mildura by rail to the several ports are as follow :—

	Miles.
Mildura, <i>viâ</i> Ouyen, Murrayville, and Pinnaroo, to Port Adelaide	316 $\frac{1}{2}$
Mildura, <i>viâ</i> Maryborough and Ballarat, to Geelong	336 $\frac{1}{4}$
Mildura, <i>viâ</i> Maryborough and Castlemaine, to Melbourne	351 $\frac{1}{4}$
Mildura, <i>viâ</i> Lascelles, Hopetoun, Horsham, Toolondo, and Hamilton, to Portland	352 $\frac{1}{2}$
Mildura, <i>viâ</i> Lascelles, Hopetoun, Murtoa, Ararat, and Ballarat, to Geelong	355

9. As railway charges for the carriage of goods and live stock are based on distances, it is obvious that the proposed connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines will be of little benefit to the traders of Ballarat or Geelong as a means of enabling them to expand their business with Mildura and the Darling River district. This much was admitted by Mr. E. H. Lascelles, who, speaking on behalf of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce, said—"I feel as far as the trade goes that the existing line through Maryborough is the best for us. It is in just as good a position as the proposed line across country from Hopetoun to a point on the Mildura line." The chief complaint of the Ballarat traders and manufacturers was that their business frequently took them or their representatives to towns in the Wimmera District, and when they wished to get across from there to towns on the Mildura line they had to lose much time and incur extra expense in travelling by rail *viâ* Ararat and Maryborough. They also had to send duplicate exhibits and additional attendants to shows in the Wimmera and Donald-Mildura districts, whereas if a connexion by rail were made between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines the one set of exhibits would often serve both districts. There is no doubt that the proposed connecting line would in this way be of service, but the revenue which would be obtained by affording the Ballarat traders this convenience would be comparatively small for many years.

10. Another matter which appeared to be overlooked by those who spoke enthusiastically of the volume of trade which would result from the suggested connecting line giving direct access by rail from the Darling River district to Portland was that wool represents a large portion of the trade from western New South Wales, and that sales of that product are not held at Portland, as they are regularly at Adelaide, Geelong, and Melbourne. Consequently, one of the principal articles of commerce from the Darling River district would not find an outlet at Portland.

REPORT OF TRAFFIC OFFICER.

11. The Committee, after hearing the evidence and inspecting the country, came to the conclusion that the traffic to be obtained from an intermediate station on any of the proposed connexions would be comparatively small, owing to the operation of "local" rates and the roads being in fair condition when the wheat grown on the areas about midway between the Hopetoun and Mildura railways is carted to stations on those lines. There was no justification for building a railway solely to shorten that cartage distance, though in a few instances it involved a long day's work and a severe

strain on the horse teams when continued day after day for several weeks. Therefore, the proposal had to be looked at almost wholly as a connecting link between two railway systems affording a convenience to the public travelling across the north-west and western parts of the State, a saving in freight rates to some Western traders, enabling them to expand their business, and an advantage to owners of and dealers in live stock. As the prospective revenue to be obtained from such traffic was not large, the Committee asked for estimates of income and annual charges for the three least expensive proposals. It was recognised that the Sheephills-Litchfield route, by inducing lambs from the Donald district to be trucked to the Murtoa Freezing Works, would secure more live stock traffic than any of the others. The drawback to the Turriff proposal was that it would not, by reason of the freight rate, attract lambs to those freezing works from the Birchip district, as would the Woomelang or Lascelles connexions. Moreover, the line to Turriff would pass through some sandy country of little productive value.

12. Mr. C. H. Barber, Traffic Officer, Victorian Railways, visited the districts concerned, including Mildura and Wentworth, to inquire into the probable traffic over the proposed connecting lines, Hopetoun to Lascelles, Hopetoun to Woomelang, and Sheephills to Litchfield. He reported that the areas tributary to these proposed connexions are reasonably served by stations on the existing Mildura and Hopetoun railways, and from the small area in the immediate vicinity of suggested intermediate stations no appreciable amount of local traffic would be derived. Practically all the land in the area tributary to these proposed lines is in occupation, excepting a portion of the Parish of Wathe north of the suggested Hopetoun-Lascelles connexion. This area is available for settlement, but it is within the radius of either Gama or Turriff stations on the Mildura railway. The land traversed by the extensions from Hopetoun is average mallee land suitable for wheat cultivation. The area traversed by the Sheephills-Litchfield route is first class land, timbered with bullock, box, and large mallee. He further said that the roads leading to the existing railway stations are level and in good order, and offer no disadvantage either by distance or cartage. A considerable portion of this district is used for grazing sheep. In the parishes tributary to the proposed Hopetoun-Lascelles and Hopetoun-Woomelang connexions the cultivation last season consisted of 13,704 acres under wheat, 2,130 acres under oats, and 2,328 acres under hay, while in the parishes which would be better served by the suggested Sheephills-Litchfield connexion the area under wheat was 26,456 acres, under oats 5,262 acres, and under hay 11,965 acres. Owing, however, to the operation of "local" rates on the proposed lines, he was of opinion that fully 90 per cent. of the exportable produce would be carted by the farmers to the nearest stations on the existing railways, so that little revenue would be derived from local traffic over the new lines. In the estimates provision was made for an intermediate station between Hopetoun and Lascelles or Woomelang, and one station and also an unattended siding between Sheephills and Litchfield. The extension from Hopetoun either to Lascelles or to Woomelang could be worked with the existing trains now terminating at Hopetoun, but in the case of the Sheephills proposal, it being a branch line instead of an extension, an additional train and crew would have to be provided and a station-master put in charge of Litchfield station in lieu of the present caretaker. He added that the little local traffic which would be obtained from farms close to the intermediate stations would not of itself justify any of the suggested lines being built. "The residents in the districts interested," he said, "are of opinion that a large traffic in hay and chaff to the Darling River country would be induced by the construction of one of these connecting lines, but the operation of 'local' rates on all traffic carried over them, combined with the ordinary mileage rates over existing lines as compared with the rates charged from Waubra, Newlyn, Maryborough, and adjacent district stations, from whence these supplies are now largely drawn, would operate adversely against any such development. Similarly flour, bran, pollard, &c., in the Wimmera would not be able to compete against mills at Donald, &c. The propositions therefore resolve themselves into—(a) Stock traffic to Murtoa Freezing Works; (b) interchange of store stock between the Darling River and Riverina districts and the Wimmera and Western districts; (c) agricultural implements from factories in the Wimmera district consigned to newly-settled lands on the Mildura and the Ouyen-Murrayville lines; (d) exchange of fruits, &c., between Mildura and the Wimmera and Western districts by a more direct route; and (e) convenience for passengers having business in the respective divisions of the State."

13. He further informed the Committee that he expected 350 tons of grain from neighbouring farms would be carried over the proposed connecting line,

Hopetoun to Lascelles or Hopetoun to Woomelang, during the first year it was opened for traffic. In addition he had allowed for the following through traffic:—500 tons of chaff and other agricultural produce, 60 tons of fresh and 20 tons of dried fruits, and 240 tons of agricultural implements and machinery. In consequence of there being a grade of 1 in 75 against the traffic towards Melbourne on the Mildura line between Lascelles and Woomelang, a 100 per cent. locomotive could haul but 480 tons over that section, while the same engine could pull 750 tons from Lascelles, *viâ* Hopetoun, to Glenorchy. From Stawell to Ararat the haul is 455 tons, and from Ararat, *viâ* Maroona and Gheringhap, to Geelong 500 tons, whereas on the Mildura line, from Cope Cope to Maryborough and Ballarat the maximum load is only 270 tons.

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND WORKING EXPENSES.

14. The Railways Commissioners furnished the Committee with the following estimates of annual charges and revenue for a tri-weekly train service each way over the proposed connecting lines:—

HOPETOUN TO LASCELLES.

Annual Charges.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £48,736, being cost (£48,000) of constructing 16 miles of 5ft. 3in. railway between Hopetoun and Lascelles, at a wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers, with £736 added for rolling-stock	..	£1,949	8	9
Traffic expenses	.. .. .	40	11	9
Maintenance charges	.. .. .	1,088	0	0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock	.. .. .	442	14	0
General charges	.. .. .	39	5	6
Total annual charges	.. .. .	£3,560	0	0

Revenue.

(Based on local rates for the carriage of all traffic except timber and firewood over the new line.)

	On New Line.	On Other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.		
Passengers	£304 4 5	£6 0 0		
Parcels	30 0 0	..		
Mails	127 10 0	..		
Class goods	9 18 4	15 2 0		
Fruit	8 0 0	..		
Live stock	279 0 0	..		
Agricultural machinery	75 0 0	151 4 0		
Manures	2 0 0	..		
Grain	43 15 0	..		
Chaff	62 10 0	105 0 0		
All other traffic	10 0 0	..		
	£951 17 9	£277 6 0	£1,229	3 9
Estimated loss first year of operation	..	..	£2,330	16 3

HOPETOUN TO WOOMELANG.

Annual Charges.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £58,736, being cost (£58,000) of constructing 19 miles of 5ft. 3in. railway between Hopetoun and Woomelang, at a wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers, with £736 added for rolling-stock	..	£2,349	8	9
Traffic expenses	.. .. .	43	12	2
Maintenance charges	.. .. .	1,292	0	0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock	.. .. .	517	0	11
General charges	.. .. .	46	6	3
Total annual charges	.. .. .	£4,248	8	1

Revenue.

(Based on local rates for the carriage of all traffic except timber and firewood over the new line.)

	On New Line.			On Other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.		
Passengers	£339	15	7	£6	0	0
Parcels	30	0	0	..	..	..
Mails	142	10	0	..	..	..
Class goods	10	8	4	15	0	0
Fruit	9	10	0	..	..	..
Live stock	279	0	0	..	..	..
Agricultural machinery ..	84	0	0	151	4	0
Manures	2	0	0	..	..	..
Grain	43	15	0	..	..	..
Chaff	62	10	0	105	0	0
All other traffic	10	0	0	..	..	..
	<hr/>			<hr/>		
	£1,013	8	11	£277	4	0
	<hr/>			<hr/>		
Estimated loss first year of operation .. ..	..			£2,957 15 2		

SHEEPHILLS TO LITCHFIELD.

Annual Charges.

Interest at 4 per cent. per annum on £72,970, being cost (£63,000) of constructing 20 miles of 5ft. 3in. railway between Sheephills and Litchfield, at a wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers, with £9,970 added for rolling-stock ..	£2,918	16	0
Traffic expenses	358	3	0
Maintenance charges	1,360	0	0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock	832	0	4
General charges	63	15	1
	<hr/>		
Total annual charges	£5,532	14	5

Revenue.

(Based on local rates for the carriage of all traffic except timber and firewood over the new line.)

	On New Line.			On Other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.		
Passengers	£357	11	1	£6	0	0
Parcels	30	0	0	..	..	..
Mails	150	0	0	..	..	..
Class goods	11	5	0	13	2	0
Fruit	9	10	0	..	..	..
Live stock	480	0	0	..	..	..
Agricultural machinery ..	87	0	0	151	4	0
Manures	2	0	0	..	..	..
Grain	43	15	0	..	..	..
Chaff	62	10	0	105	0	0
All other traffic	10	0	0	..	..	..
	<hr/>			<hr/>		
	£1,243	11	1	£275	6	0
	<hr/>			<hr/>		
Estimated loss first year of operation .. ..	..			£4,013 17 4		

REDUCTION IN ESTIMATED DEFICIT.

15. After receiving the foregoing estimates of revenue and working expenses the Committee asked the Railway Department if the bringing into force on the 1st January, 1912, of By-law 214, making the freight rate on wheat forwarded from the north-west of Victoria to Geelong for shipment at least 1s. 3d. per ton less than the charge to Williamstown, had caused an increased export trade in grain from Geelong. The Department replied that such was the case, the quantity of wheat forwarded to Geelong from stations nearer to that port than Williamstown for the years ended 30th June, 1911, 1912, and 1913 being as follows:—1911, 1,288,243 bags; 1912, 1,048,290 bags; 1913, 1,405,173 bags. These figures represented 42·02 per cent., 45·69 per cent., and 52·81 per cent. respectively of the total quantity of wheat forwarded from such stations to Melbourne and suburbs and to Geelong. The Department added that it considered the rebate of 1s. 3d. per ton referred to above would, combined with improved facilities for shipping grain at Geelong, continue to exert an attraction towards an increased quantity of wheat from the North-Western District of Victoria being shipped at Geelong. In answer to further questions the Department stated that if the proposed railway connexion was made between Hopetoun and Lascelles, and the loading was despatched to Geelong, *viâ* the Maroona-Gheringhap line, there would be an increase in the mileage of 29½ miles. But at the same time the increase in haulage by passing over easier grades would represent 10 per cent. in favour of this new route over the existing direct one *viâ* Maryborough and Ballarat. It would therefore be more economical to haul the loading by the longer route, as the grades would be better and a quicker transit could be given. On being asked to express in money the probable saving of train mileage which would be effected, the Department replied that if produce for Geelong and Melbourne were carried by the proposed line instead of by the Maryborough and Ballarat route, the saving during the grain season, when special goods trains are run, would be approximately £800, and if credit be taken for this amount the estimated loss on the Hopetoun-Lascelles proposition will be reduced to £1,530.

VIEWS OF THE RAILWAYS COMMISSIONERS.

16. The Railways Commissioners informed the Committee that a railway connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines was not required for the interchange of rolling-stock or other departmental reasons. Nevertheless, they added that, as such a connexion would enable produce trucked at stations beyond Lascelles to be hauled, *viâ* Murtoa, Ararat, and Maroona, to Geelong, and save by the easier grades on that route approximately 18¾ per cent. of the train miles involved in hauling the same tonnage by way of St. Arnaud and Maryborough, and would, moreover, give the advantage of direct communication between the South-Western and North-Western railway systems, as well as affording facilities for stock traffic which does not contribute at present to the railway revenue, they were of opinion that such a connexion should be made as a question of State policy.

COMPARISON WITH ESTIMATES OF 1903.

17. In 1903 Mr. Barber prepared estimates of revenue for a railway connecting Hopetoun with Lascelles, or Minapre, as it was then called. These estimates showed a much larger income from the carriage of grain from the intermediate station between those towns than is allowed in his recent estimates. Mr. Barber explained that in 1903 that part of the Mallee was being settled, and the farmers endeavoured during their first few years of occupation to get as much of the mallee as possible rolled down and burnt off and the land cropped so as to kill the scrub and bring on the natural grasses, thus making a large part of the holding fit for grazing. When that stage was reached the settler, as a rule, cropped but a third of his holding annually, and that reduced the tonnage of grain forwarded by rail. Moreover, since 1903 roads had been made to Gama, Lascelles, and Woomelang, and only those farmers living close to the intermediate station would now cart wheat to it, the others taking their produce a short distance further to Hopetoun, Gama, Lascelles, or Woomelang to save the "local" rate, which would be charged on all goods despatched from the intermediate station. The working expenses were also larger now than in 1903, due to a general advance in wages and to a train service of three days a week being provided in lieu of two days as in the former estimate.

ABOLITION OF "LOCAL" RATES.

18. As the Ministry has announced its intention to introduce a Bill abolishing railway "local" rates for the carriage of passengers, goods, and live stock over new lines, the Committee asked the Railways Commissioners what effect the charging of the ordinary through mileage rates instead of "local" rates would have on the revenue of the suggested connecting line from Hopetoun to Lascelles. They replied that "if the estimated revenue on the proposed line from Hopetoun to Lascelles be based on a proportionate mileage rate, the total estimated revenue will be reduced from £1,229 to £960, whilst the estimated loss during the first year of operation will be increased from £2,330 to £2,600, the difference being made up as follows:—Passengers, £17; parcels, £2; class goods, £8; fruit, £4; live stock, £134; manures, £2; grain, £38; chaff, £41; and agricultural machinery, £22."

DECISION OF COMMITTEE.

19. The Committee concurs in the view expressed by the Traffic Officer of the Railway Department that the proposed connecting link between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines, if made, would cause but little local development. It, nevertheless, recognises that such a connexion would be an advantage to a few traders and manufacturers in the Wimmera and Western districts of the State, besides affording a convenience to commercial travellers and such of the public as may occasionally desire to be carried by rail from the Northern Mallee to the Western districts of Victoria and *vice versa*. That the suggested connexion would be of assistance to the Murtoa Freezing Works, enabling it to enlarge its area for the purchase of lambs and sheep, and thus extending its killing season, is also admitted. But all these advantages do not, in the opinion of the Committee, justify the State constructing a railway which will for many years cause an annual loss of about £1,500 if "local" rates are charged, and £1,800 if such rates are abolished, without resulting in any appreciable settlement or development of country lands or benefiting the producers of the State to any great extent. As has been already pointed out, the ports of Geelong and Melbourne are now nearer by rail to Lascelles and to all towns north thereof as far as Mildura than they would be to Portland, even if the Hopetoun and Mildura lines were linked up by extending the former railway to Lascelles. Moreover, when the connecting railway between Murrayville and Pinnaroo, which has been authorized by the Parliaments of the two States, is completed the extensive wheat-growing territory served by the Ouyen to Murrayville railway will be nearer to Adelaide by rail than to Portland, Geelong, or Melbourne, and a large portion of the grain traffic from that area will be diverted to Port Adelaide. Consequently, the Committee believes there would not be the number of special wheat trains run over the proposed Hopetoun-Mildura connecting line that the Railways authorities expected when they allowed £800 per annum reduction in the haulage expenses by conveying by that route wheat grown in the Mallee districts beyond Lascelles to the sea-board at Geelong or Melbourne.

20. Seeing that flour-mills and agricultural implement works were established at Warracknabeal and Donald soon after those districts were settled, it will doubtless be but a few years before similar undertakings are in existence in the Northern Mallee, and the necessity of obtaining flour, bran, and pollard, and also ploughs, harrows, &c., from towns on the Southern Mallee fringe will then be removed. As the northern lands become cleared of mallee roots, hay for chaffing will be grown in those areas, so that supplies of fodder will no longer be required from the Wimmera and Southern districts, except in a drought season. Store sheep are usually purchased in New South Wales in September after shearing, and are travelled by road from there to the Western portion of Victoria in the spring months, when there is an abundance of feed and water along the roads. Few store sheep are likely to be trucked even if the connecting railway were made.

21. In view of the foregoing statements and the fact that the Railways Commissioners do not require a connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines for the transfer of rolling-stock or for other departmental reasons, the Committee cannot recommend the construction of any of the suggested railways to link up the North-Western and South-Western railway systems of the State. According to the estimates supplied by the Railways Commissioners, it will require annual charges totalling £3,560 to earn £1,229 even if "local" rates remain in force. The Committee is of opinion that the money required for the construction of the proposed connecting line could be expended more advantageously in other parts of Victoria where there is country to be settled and developed.

DIVISIONS.

22. The following extracts from the minutes of the proceedings of the Committee show the divisions that took place during the consideration of this question :—

TUESDAY, 7TH JULY, 1914.

The Committee proceeded to further consider the evidence received regarding the question of linking up the Hopetoun and Mildura railways by a cross-country line.

Mr. Melville moved, That the Committee recommends the construction of a 5ft. 3in. railway from Hopetoun to Lascelles, 16 miles, to connect the Hopetoun and Mildura lines.

Debate ensued.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 1.
Mr. Melville.

Noes, 5.
The Chairman
Mr. Barnes
Mr. J. W. Billson
Mr. Hicks
Mr. Warde.

And so it passed in the negative.

WEDNESDAY, 8TH JULY, 1914.

The Committee proceeded to consider the Draft Report on the question of linking up the Hopetoun and Mildura railways by a cross-country line.

Paragraph 21 of the Draft Report—

Mr. Melville moved, That the following words be omitted from this paragraph :—“ The Committee is of opinion that the money required for the construction of the proposed connecting line could be expended more advantageously in other parts of Victoria where there is country to be settled and developed.”

Debate ensued.

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the paragraph—put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 5.
The Chairman
Mr. Barnes
Mr. J. W. Billson
Mr. Hicks
Mr. Warde.

Noes, 1.
Mr. Melville.

And so it was resolved in the affirmative.

E. H. CAMERON,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 8th July, 1914.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]