

1915.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF

RAILWAY CONNEXION WITH STAUGHTON VALE CLOSER
SETTLEMENT AREA, BALLIANG, AND ANAKIE;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 28th October, 1915.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 8.—[6d.]—15078.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

THURSDAY, 17TH DECEMBER, 1914.

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

* * * * *

(4) The question of connecting the Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area, and the districts of Balliang and Anakie 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.

(*Eleventh Committee.*)

S. BARNES, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman;

The Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A.,
The Hon. A. Hicks, M.L.C.,
The Hon. D. Melville, M.L.C.
(Vice-Chairman),

R. H. Solly, Esq., M.L.A.,
R. F. Toutcher, 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 Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area, and the districts of Balliang and Anakie, by means of a 5ft. 3in. gauge railway with the existing railway system, has the honour to report as follows:—

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT.

1. Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area and the districts of Balliang and Anakie are situated at the foot of the Brisbane Range in the eastern portion of the triangle formed by the Melbourne to Geelong, Geelong to Ballarat, and Ballarat-Bacchus Marsh-Melbourne railways. The districts referred to are to the west of the Werribee River and You Yangs, and are drained by the Little River, which rises in the Brisbane Range and flows south-east into Port Phillip Bay. The greater part of the area for which nearer railway facilities were sought is open, undulating country, and is of basaltic formation. Three hills, however, on the east side of Brisbane Range, called the Anakies, are of granitic origin. Formerly the lands were held in several large estates, and used for grazing only. But during the last eight years some of these holdings have been subdivided and made available to farmers, and goods crops of wheat, barley, oats, &c., have been grown on the reddish, volcanic loamy soils. Among the estates subdivided was Staughton Vale, which was resumed by the Government towards the end of 1907. This property comprised an area of 9,830 acres, and was subdivided by the Lands Purchase and Management Board into 50 farm allotments, varying in area from 120 to 356 acres, the average size of the farms being a little under 200 acres. The prices asked for these holdings ranged in value from £4 to £7 15s. per acre. Adjoining these resumed lands, at the foot of the Brisbane Range, is Staughton Vale homestead block, comprising 3,300 acres. It contains some rich agricultural lands, especially along the banks of the Little River, where good crops of lucerne were growing at the time of the visit of the Committee. These richer lands, containing alluvial soil, are well suited for dairying and for fattening sheep and lambs. It was represented to the Committee by several of the settlers of Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area that they were from 10 to 14 miles from a railway station, and that the cost of cartage thereto was from 10s. to 12s. per ton, which made hay-growing unremunerative when chaff was selling at £3 a ton in the Melbourne market. They also stated that in consequence of the distance from an existing station it did not pay to cart straw to the railway for transport to Melbourne, and that each season, except in a drought year when there was a good market for that article, farmers had to burn off some thousands of tons of straw which could be marketed profitably if the cartage distance to a railway were 5 miles or under, permitting two loads daily to be delivered from the farm into the railway truck. Most of the settlers cart either to Parwan or to Rowsley railway stations, near Bacchus Marsh. Those proceeding to the former station have to cart over an incline in the road near the base of Bald Hill. The grade on this road, however, is not steep, but in winter the track becomes boggy and sticky in consequence of the clay coming near to the surface on that portion of the road. This restricts the load to a few hundredweights and adds to the cost of cartage. Evidence was given that the settlers at Staughton Vale obtained yields of wheat from 15 up to 30 bushels per acre, while barley and oats ran from 25 to 60 bushels. Statistics were submitted showing that in the vicinity of Staughton Vale and Balliang there were 12,056 acres under cultivation out of 50,328 acres held by farmers, and it was stated that if a railway came into the district the acreage cultivated would be doubled. From the area referred to 63,266 bags of grain, 3,390 tons of hay, and 2,014 tons of straw were produced in the season 1913-14. There were that season 23,485 sheep on these holdings and 1,448 cattle. In the production of cereal crops 522 tons of artificial manures were used. Some of the settlers spent from 30 to 40 consecutive days carting their produce to a railway station, and this was a heavy task on their teams. It was

explained that the soils at Staughton Vale and Balliang, being a strong heavy loam, required a good deal of working in the summer months to prepare a good seed-bed for the coming crop, and this could not be done unless the cartage period was lessened by having railway transport closer at hand. Several witnesses stated that owing to the closer settlement allotments at Staughton Vale being small, averaging only 180 or 200 acres, it was impossible for the settlers to make a livelihood off them unless better railway facilities were provided. The average annual rainfall in the district is about 20 inches. Supplies of box and bulloak firewood could, it was said, be forwarded for a few years from Staughton Vale to Melbourne in the event of a railway being constructed into the district.

2. To the south of Staughton Vale and Balliang is the Woolamanata Estate, comprising 11,000 acres, lying between the Anakies and the You Yangs. Over 7,000 acres of this estate were sold to the Lara Lands Proprietary Limited, which said it was prepared to subdivide that area if a railway were constructed into the district. The northern portion of Woolamanata Estate is covered with a good growth of grey box timber suitable for fencing posts, droppers, house blocks, sleepers, felloes, and naves. The Committee was informed that the cost of carting this timber to Geelong or Lara would be 15s. per ton, and this prevented the trees being felled and used for the purposes stated. But if a railway were made to Anakie or Balliang the timber would be utilized by sawmillers. The plain land and timbered country in the northern part of Woolamanata Estate is suitable for cereal-growing. Towards the western and southern boundaries of the estate the land is more stony. To the west of this property is the settlement of Anakie at the foot of the hills of the same name. A few farmers are carrying on operations near this township and also on Marathon Estate, which lies to the south of Anakie towards Moorabool railway station, and which before subdivision consisted of 14,500 acres. Here also it was represented to the Committee that the distance—about 12 or 13 miles by road—to the Moorabool or Lara railway stations was a hindrance to the extension of agricultural operations.

FIREWOOD.

3. Around Anakie and on the eastern slope of the Brisbane Range is an abundant supply of box, messmate, and stringybark timber suitable for firewood. But the cost of carting it into Geelong, a distance of about 15 or 20 miles, prevented large supplies for that city being drawn from this district. Evidence was tendered to the Committee that the price of coal at Geelong advanced about 2s. a ton in 1914, and that there were difficulties in obtaining supplies of firewood for household purposes at that city. In recent years the price of firewood has advanced in consequence of the increasing scarcity. It was therefore desirable that a railway should be constructed from Moorabool to Anakie to enable fuel to be obtained in that district for the residents of Geelong and suburbs, who annually required about 25,000 tons of firewood.

PROPOSED RAILWAY ROUTES.

4. There was much conflict of opinion as to the route of the railway to serve Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area and the districts of Balliang and Anakie. This arose mainly from the market favoured by the producers—whether Melbourne or Geelong—and from the question of railway construction in this area being interwoven with the larger question of a “national” railway to be constructed either from Guildford and passing through Daylesford, Leonard’s Hill, Ballan, and Anakie, to Geelong, or from Kyneton or Macedon through Bacchus Marsh and Balliang to Geelong. The object of this larger railway proposal was to relieve the Bendigo–Melbourne main line of some of its traffic, and also the congestion which was said to exist during the wheat and meat export seasons at the piers and wharfs at Melbourne by diverting traffic from Riverina and the northern areas of Victoria to North Shore, Corio Bay, where the Geelong Harbor Trust had erected freezing works and was providing facilities for the increasing export trade in frozen meat and wheat. Some of the settlers at Staughton Vale and Balliang stated that they were desirous of continuing to send their produce and live stock to the Melbourne market, and they would be content with a short cockspur line from either Parwan or Rowsley running southwards for about 10 miles into the midst of those closer settlements. Others asked for a through line from either Parwan or Rowsley, passing across Staughton Vale or Balliang and Woolamanata Estate, to Moorabool or Lara, so as to give settlers the choice of either the Melbourne or Geelong market. They pointed out that a short

branch line running from Moorabool to Anakie would be of no service to them, as they would have to cart up-hill to a station near Anakie, and that that terminus would be not much nearer to them than the existing stations at Rowsley or Parwan, and would give them a connexion with the Geelong market only. On the other hand, the settlers at Anakie stated that a cockspur line running southward from the Bacchus Marsh railway and terminating on the north side of the Little River in Staughton Vale settlement would be of little value to them, because of the distance and roads to be traversed. Moreover, their trade relations had always been with Geelong, which was a much nearer market than Melbourne, and they wished to continue that connexion. One suggestion made was that the railway should start at Moorabool and run northward through Marathon Estate towards Anakie Township and then curve north-eastward into Woolamanata Estate, and thence northward to the Little River, terminating there. It was pointed out that such a railway could be cheaply constructed, as it would traverse fairly level country presenting no engineering difficulties, and would adequately serve the Anakie, Staughton Vale, and Balliang districts. A further reason given in support of this route was that a station could be placed between Moorabool and Anakie, which would serve the farmers on Sutherland's Creek and in the Parish of Darriwil, who had now to descend into the valley of the Moorabool River and climb out again on the west side to reach Bannockburn or Lethbridge stations, on the Geelong and Ballarat railway.

5. Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that a broad-gauge line from Moorabool through Marathon and Woolamanata estates to the Little River would be about 17 miles in length, and would cost close on £70,000, exclusive of land and rolling-stock. This estimate was based on a wage rate of 9s. per day for labourers and on an inspection of the suggested route without survey. He added that this cost provided for two roadside stations and also a terminal station in the southern portion of Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area on the south side of Little River. If serviceable second-hand rails became available, the cost would be reduced by about £5,000. Mr. Kernot also stated that a 5ft. 3in. railway from Moorabool to Rowsley would be approximately 27 miles in length, and would cost, roughly, £100,000. It would serve about 100,000 acres. A broad-gauge line from Parwan, running 11 miles south into Staughton Vale Closer Settlement Area would cost a little over £40,000, and would serve about 80,000 acres. There were, however, he reported, not more than 13,000 acres at a greater distance than 10 miles by an air line from an existing railway. But a much larger acreage than that would be more than 10 miles by road from an existing railway station.

MARKETS FOR LIVE STOCK AND PRODUCE.

6. A railway from Parwan, running 11 miles south into Staughton Vale settlement, would be of no value to the farmers at Anakie unless it were extended at least 4 miles across Little River towards that township, at an additional cost of about £17,000. If this were done it would give the farmers at Anakie railway facilities with the Melbourne market only, while if a line were constructed from Moorabool to near Anakie and on to Little River it would give the Anakie and Staughton Vale settlers direct railway connexion with the Geelong market only. In order to ascertain which was the market more favoured by the producers in the adjoining Werribee, Little River, and Lara districts, who have direct railway facilities with both Melbourne and Geelong, the Committee obtained from the Railway Department the following return, showing the number of trucks of live stock and the tonnage of agricultural produce forwarded from those stations to those markets or ports during the twelve months ended 31st March, 1914 :—

Trucks of Live Stock forwarded to Geelong and Sidings near Geelong.						Agricultural Produce.
Forwarding Station.	Pigs.	Horses.	Cattle.	Sheep.	Total.	Tons.
Werribee	3	10	1	17	31	100
Little River .. .. .	..	2	3	..	5	328
Lara .. .. .	..	..	..	..	..	639
Total	3	12	4	17	36	1,067

Trucks of Live Stock forwarded to Melbourne and Suburban Stations.							Agricultural Produce.
Forwarding Station.	Pigs.	Horses.	Cattle.	Sheep.	Total.	Tons.	
Werribee	8	47	238	420	713	20,478	
Little River .. .. .	..	3	9	76	88	9,973
Lara .. .. .	..	12	..	27	39	893
Total	8	62	247	523	840	31,344	

PROPOSED "NATIONAL" RAILWAY.

7. As already stated, the question of railway extension into the district of Staughton Vale, Balliang, and Anakie became involved with the larger issue of a direct "national" railway from the northern areas of Victoria to Geelong, the object of which was "to relieve the shipping congestion at Williamstown and Melbourne in the wheat and meat export seasons, and also to give effect to the decentralization policy of the Ministry." The Committee was not unmindful that the reference to it did not include this larger question; but, nevertheless, some attention had to be given to the bearing which the construction of a railway in this district to meet local requirements might have on the route of a future railway intended to relieve the Bendigo-Melbourne main line of some of its traffic. The advocates of the Anakie-Ballan-Guildford national railway pointed out that if a line were made from Parwan or Rowsley to the Little River, or extended further to Moorabool or Lara, it would give the rival national railway through Bacchus Marsh to Macedon or Kyneton an undue advantage over the Ballan-Guildford route when the merits of the two proposals came to be considered. They therefore urged the construction at present of a cockspur line from Moorabool to Anakie, which, they thought, would meet the existing local requirements and would not complicate in any way the larger issue of the route of the "national" railway. This would be the first section of the main line they advocated, and later on it could be extended from Anakie and ascend the Brisbane Range, and thence along the plateau on to Mount Wallace and Ballan, following approximately the road from Anakie to Ballan. In travelling along the suggested route the Committee noted that the country on the plateau from above Anakie to Durdidwarrah reservoir (in connexion with the Geelong water supply) was inferior sandy land, growing stunted eucalypts, grass-tree, and heath. Between Durdidwarrah and Mount Wallace, however, and on to Ballan the country improves in quality, and is occupied by graziers and farmers.

8. While not offering any opinion on the respective merits of the Guildford-Ballan-Anakie connexion with Geelong, or the Kyneton or Macedon proposal through Bacchus Marsh and Staughton Vale to that port, or on the facilities which could be given at North Shore, Corio Harbor, for the shipping of grain (in bag or bulk) or frozen meat, compared with those which existed or could be provided at Hobson's Bay or Victoria Dock, the Railways Commissioners pointed out that any increase in the goods and live-stock traffic over the Bendigo-Melbourne main line could be dealt with by the use of heavier locomotives.

9. They also forwarded a memorandum from Mr. C. H. Barber, Superintendent of Station Service, dated 7th July, 1914, which said:—

"Assuming that mainly wheat and oats will be the cereals grown for export, that the rate of increase in cultivation of the area in the counties served by the main line, viz., Gunbower, Bendigo, Gladstone, Tatchera, Karkaroc, Weeah, and Millewa, progresses at the same rate during the next ten years as it did in the decade 1901-2 to 1910-11, and that the average production during the past three seasons (1912, 1913, and 1914) is maintained, there does not appear to be any necessity to build a cross-country line from either Castlemaine or Kyneton to Geelong for the purpose of relieving the main line or the congestion at the docks or at Williamstown. As a matter of fact, any congestion that occurred during last season was greater at Geelong than at either Melbourne or Williamstown. The total area of the counties referred to is 14,047,360 acres, of which 1,213,900 acres were under cultivation in 1901-02, and 1,698,500 acres in 1910-11—an increase of 40 per cent. If a further increase of 40 per cent. is made during the next ten years and the average yield is obtained, the harvest will amount to 2,377,900 bushels, or 642,676 tons, to which must be added the tare of trucks, &c. To move this tonnage during the season December to March—say 100 working days—would involve the running of 3,492 trains, or 35 trains daily, or 1.4 trains per hour, during the period. The section Bendigo to Castlemaine or Kyneton—whichever starting point be decided upon—would be the determining factor, and the double line could easily be made to carry a little over one train hourly by establishing closer block posts and shunting sidings to allow goods trains to be side-tracked

for passenger trains, &c., to precede. To reach the Melbourne shipping port some of the northern and north-western grown wheat could, if the main lines were unable to take all the traffic, be sent *via* the Heathcote line, which at present is only occupied by about two trains each way daily. I have not inspected the country to be traversed by either of the proposals, and cannot, therefore, offer any opinion as to which of the suggested routes would be preferable.

RECOMMENDATION.

10. Should the construction of a direct railway from the northern areas of Victoria to Corio Harbor become necessary, no doubt the traffic that would be obtained *en route* from the neighbourhood of Staughton Vale and Anakie would assist the earnings of such a main line. But the Committee is of opinion that, viewed from their stand-point alone, the districts of Staughton Vale, Balliang, and Anakie do not contain a sufficiently large area of agricultural land to justify a cockspur railway being constructed into them, as the resultant traffic would be inadequate to make the railway a payable one. Excluding the forest and water reserves on the Brisbane Range, there are not more than 35,000 acres of occupied land in these districts more than 10 miles by road from an existing railway station, and the production from this area, after allowing for the stony land, which could only be grazed, not cropped, would not warrant an expenditure of £50,000 or £60,000 in railway construction to serve the Anakie, Staughton Vale, and Balliang farmers. Therefore, the Committee recommends it is inexpedient to connect Staughton Vale Closer Settlement, Balliang, and Anakie by means of a 5ft. 3in. gauge line with the existing railway system.

11. In outlying parts of the State producers have to cart their grain 10 miles and more to a railway station and then pay in railway mileage rates double or treble the charges borne by the farmers at Anakie, Staughton Vale, and Balliang for the transport of their produce to the Geelong or Melbourne markets. This gives the latter a considerable advantage over the cultivators in the distant parts of the State, and should be kept in mind when reference is made to the cartage charges across the Little River plains. Moreover, as the country around Staughton Vale and Balliang is of volcanic formation ample basaltic stone for road-making purposes is obtainable either alongside the roads or within a short distance of them. Therefore, any disability which the settlers at Staughton Vale or Balliang suffer as regards bad roads is largely in their own hands to remove through the agency of their municipal councils.

SAMUEL BARNES,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 27th October, 1915.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]