

1917.

VICTORIA.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS.

TWENTY-SEVENTH GENERAL REPORT.

PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE RAILWAYS STANDING
COMMITTEE ACT 1915 (6 GEO. V., No. 2717), SECTION 27.

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TWENTY-SEVENTH GENERAL REPORT.

To His Excellency THE HONORABLE SIR ARTHUR LYULPH STANLEY, *Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Governor of the State of Victoria and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia, &c., &c., &c.*

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY :

In accordance with the requirements of section 27 of the *Railways Standing Committee Act 1915*, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways has the honour to submit the following Report of its proceedings :—

1. From the date (31st May, 1916) of its last General Report the Committee has held 181 meetings, and examined 63 witnesses in connexion with various proposed railways. It was also interviewed by a number of local councillors, progress associations, and residents concerning its investigations into several non-paying country lines. In making its inquiries the Committee travelled 1,051 miles by rail, and 333 miles by road.

2. During the 1916 Session the Committee presented Reports to the Legislative Assembly on the following questions :—

- Railway connexion with Strathbogie.
- Dookie and Yarrawonga lines connecting railway.
- Railway connexion with Ardmona and Wyuna districts.
- Timboon to Port Campbell developmental railway.
- Fyansford district connecting railway.
- Beaumaris connecting electric street railway.

A Report from the Royal Commission on Border (New South Wales) Railways was also presented.

QUESTIONS BEFORE THE COMMITTEE.

3. The following questions have been referred by the Legislative Assembly to the Committee for consideration :—

1. Railway extension in the Eastern Mallee, and the provision of an adequate supply of water for settlement purposes.
2. Railway extension in the Western Mallee, and the provision of an adequate supply of water for settlement purposes.
3. Railway connexion with Wando Vale, Dergholm, Harrow, Edenhope, and Booroopki.
4. Railway connexion with Trida, Geachville, and West Tarwin districts.
5. Warrions connecting railway.
6. Neerim South to Toorongo River railway extension.
7. Financial results of the following railways :—Beech Forest to Crowes, Gheringhap to Maroona, Eltham to Hurst's Bridge, Tocumwal Extension, and Alexandra-road to Alexandra.

PROGRESS OF INQUIRIES.

4. Reports on the questions of railway connexions with the Edenhope and Warrions districts and dealing with the financial results of the Beech Forest, Alexandra, Hurst's Bridge, and Tocumwal railways will be presented to Parliament early in the forthcoming Session. Those relating to the other proposals before the Committee will be submitted later on.

NON-PAYING RAILWAYS.

5. As it had been said in official statements that "a large portion of the railway deficit was due to new railways which were non-paying," the Committee had figures prepared from returns furnished by the Railways Commissioners, and these showed that the new railways opened for traffic since 1911-12 (when there was a railway surplus of £265,000) were responsible for only about one-tenth of the railway deficits in 1914-15 and 1915-16. Therefore, the main causes of the Victorian Railways showing large losses in recent years must be looked for in directions other than the opening of new lines.

6. Whilst dealing with this matter the Committee desires to point out that some of the railways recommended by it have not yet reached their terminal points. Sections, however, of these lines have recently been opened, notably from Neerim South to Nayook, and from Tallangatta to Shelley. As these sections do not serve the areas from which the bulk of the traffic was expected, it must necessarily follow that they will be unpayable. But such results must not be accepted as any guide to the ultimate financial outcome of such lines or their value to the railway system or to the State.

7. One suggestion made for lessening the losses on narrow-gauge railways which are unable to meet the working and maintenance expenses out of their revenue is that such lines should be dismantled, and the tracks converted into motor roads. This suggestion was put forward by those interested in the use of motors. In the first place, the Committee has not recommended nor have any railways been constructed in districts where the existing or prospective traffic was such that it could be successfully handled by a few motor waggons. In the next, recent inquiries made by the Committee from the Melbourne City Council, which has for some years been using motor lorries for the conveyance of metal from its quarries at Clifton Hill over good roads into the city, showed that it costs at least 3d. per ton per mile to haul such traffic. That sum is necessary to cover working expenses, renewals, insurance, depreciation, and interest charges on the lorries. It is based on the assumption that ample back loading is available, but such return loading is not always obtainable in country districts. It does not include any contribution towards the cost of maintenance of the roads or interest on the capital expended on their construction. Such charges, however, are debited each year against the narrow-gauge railways. But, even so, a charge of 3d. per ton per mile, if levied on all goods carried over narrow-gauge railways, would make them payable undertakings, or nearly so. The greater part of the tonnage transported over such railways represents low-rate freight, such as sawn timber, firewood, and agricultural produce, which are carried at less than 1d. per ton per mile.

8. When the Committee recommended the construction of narrow-gauge lines it did so conditionally on special rates being charged for the conveyance of passengers and goods over them. Such charges, however, are, by direction of Parliament, not being imposed. In other countries, notably in India, where there are broad and narrow gauge railways, the charges made on the latter largely exceed those on the broad-gauge railways for similar distance of haulage. That some difference in rates is necessary will, doubtless, be admitted when it is stated that a narrow-gauge locomotive, hauling up a 1 in 30 grade, can take but two-thirds the load a broad-gauge one will pull on a similar incline. A driver and fireman are required on both classes of locomotives, and the wages paid them are equal on both gauges.

TRAMWAY COMPETITION WITH RAILWAYS.

9. Attention has recently been directed to the loss of railway revenue due to the competition of the Melbourne and Burwood electric tramway, which charges a fare of 1d. only between Richmond railway station and Swanston-street, Melbourne, whilst the railway fare is 2d. second class single, and 3d. return. The first class single fare is 3d., and the return, 4½d. When this tramway proposal was being considered by the Committee in 1912, evidence was given by Mr. C. C. Blazey, Town Clerk of Richmond, who was honorary secretary of the Burwood-Melbourne Tramway Conference, that the tramway fares were to be "uniform with the railway fares, based on penny sections." He added the length of the sections had not been decided, but, "generally speaking, the idea is to have penny sections, but not to clash with the railway single fare." Councillor F. F. Read, a member of the Camberwell Council, said in his evidence:—"As to the

question of fares the Conference, I think, is absolutely of the one mind, that those fares should be a uniform charge with what is charged by the railways, at the same time giving a penny section. Those sections have not been worked out, and it would be impossible to do so until such time as we have authority to construct the tram." He was asked:—"What was the idea as to the sections"? He replied:—"They have not really been marked off yet; the idea is we do not want to clash with the railways."

10. The Committee in its Report to Parliament on this tramway stated that no estimates of revenue and working expenses had been furnished by a traffic expert, and that the lengths of the penny sections had not been determined. The Report went on to say—"In answer to a question by the Committee why these tramway proposals had been placed before it in such a crude form, the councils explained that they considered they were not justified in incurring a large expense obtaining estimates from electrical and traffic experts till they had been given authority by Parliament to acquire the Hawthorn horse tramway and convert and extend it. When that authority was given these necessary particulars would be obtained for the information of the councils concerned. The Committee, understanding that the Honorable the Premier desired its Reports on the several proposed suburban tramways in time to allow legislation dealing with these matters to be introduced during the current (1912) Session, had, under the circumstances, to be satisfied with this explanation. Nevertheless, the Railways Standing Committee Acts would not allow a proposed railway to be sanctioned on such crude material." The question of inquiring into the construction of electric tramways in East Brunswick, Coburg, Campbellfield, Richmond, Hawthorn, Camberwell, and South Melbourne was referred to the Committee on the 3rd October, 1912. The following month its Report on the East Brunswick, Coburg, and Campbellfield proposals was furnished, and on the 6th December, 1912, its Report on the Richmond, Hawthorn, and Camberwell electric tramways was completed.

11. It was stated by the Committee in paragraph 11 of its Report that the Swanstreet (Richmond) route would be an active competitor with the neighbouring railway at Burnley, East Richmond, and Richmond. The Report went on to say—"The extent of that competition would, of course, largely depend on the fare charged for the journey from South Richmond to the city, and *vice versa*. As previously stated, the lengths of the penny sections and the fare to be charged for the through journey had not yet been determined, and, consequently, it was difficult, if not impossible, to gauge the effect which the electric tramway competition would have on the railway revenue. Generally speaking, the proposal was to fix fares that would correspond with the railway fares, but no undertaking to that effect was given by the councils concerned."

12. Nevertheless, the Committee in recommending this tramway had in mind the assurance given it by the members of the Burwood-Melbourne Tramway Conference that the fares charged "would not clash with those of the railway." Furthermore, it was aware that an Order in Council would have to be passed authorizing the lengths of the sections and the fares to be charged thereon. The Committee also saw that the Bill to authorize the construction of the Melbourne to Burwood tramways contained a clause (20) giving Parliament the right at any time to revise the fares charged on such tramways without compensating the Trust in consequence of such alteration, revision, or modification.

13. These provisions were considered to amply safeguard the interests of the railway and prevent undue competition with it by the tramway. On 6th September, 1915, however, an Order in Council was passed authorizing the tramway to charge a penny fare "from Prince's Bridge to Richmond Railway Station." Although no evidence was given as to the definite lengths of the sections, it was assumed by the Committee, in view of the assurance that such sections "would not clash with the railway fare," that the penny section from Prince's Bridge would terminate in Swanstreet west adjacent to the recreation ground formerly belonging to the Friendly Societies, Flinders Park, and near the footpaths leading on one side to the Melbourne Cricket Ground and on the other to the Botanical Gardens. On no other tramway (cable or electric) are passengers carried from a suburb into the city for 1d.

14. As the Order in Council passed is not in conformity with the evidence on which the Committee recommended the tramway, the fares between Prince's Bridge and Richmond not being uniform with those charged on the railway, the Committee is of opinion that Parliament should at an early date exercise its power to revise such tramway fares.

RECENT RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION.

15. An impression having gone abroad that the Committee had in recent years too readily acceded to the general desire that railway extensions in Victoria should precede settlement, advantage is taken of this opportunity to state the facts. The more vigorous railway-construction policy was entered upon in 1909. From the end of that year to the close of 1916 the Committee inquired into 50 railway proposals, and recommended the construction of 27 new lines, rejecting 23. The latter were separate propositions, and not merely rival routes to the lines recommended. They were set aside because there was likely to be an insufficiency of settlement, production, or traffic to justify the belief that they would become payable undertakings within a reasonable period.

SAMUEL BARNES,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 12th June, 1917.