

1917.

VICTORIA.

R E P O R T

FROM

**THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS**

ON THE PROPOSED

**NEERIM SOUTH TO TOORONGO RIVER
RAILWAY EXTENSION;**

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 16th October, 1917.

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of extending the Neerim South to Toorongo River railway for a distance of not more than one and three-quarter miles, so as to bring the terminus nearer to Fumina, has the honour to report as follows:—

FORMER REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE.

1. In considering, towards the close of 1912, the general question of connecting the Loch, Toorongo, and Latrobe valleys by means of a railway with the existing railway system the Committee was assured by the Conservator of Forests that most of the timber in the Warburton district suitable for milling purposes would be cut out in a few years, or be so situated that the cost of haulage to the railway would be so increased as to necessitate supplies being obtained from the watershed of the Upper Latrobe River. It therefore recommended the construction of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway from Neerim South northwards into the Latrobe Valley and thence eastwards down that valley past the Loch River to “near the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers, a length of 15 miles, at a cost of £99,000,” exclusive of rolling-stock. In that Report the Committee expressed the opinion that if the Neerim South line were to be extended and to become a paying undertaking “it should be carried into the Latrobe Valley and on to the Toorongo River.”

2. Over a year elapsed between that recommendation being made and the matter being again formally referred to the Committee by the Legislative Assembly as a specific question in this form:—“The construction of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway from Neerim South to Toorongo River.” In the meantime, however, the route of this proposed line had been permanently surveyed and a detailed estimate of cost made. Owing to the survey showing that the last 4 or 5 miles of the line would be more difficult to construct than was at first thought, because of the roughness of the country falling into the Latrobe Valley and to wages having advanced in 1913 and new rails being provided for in lieu of second-hand, serviceable ones, Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that it would now cost £112,519 to extend the Neerim South railway “14” miles, instead of £99,000 for a “15” miles line, as was intended in 1912 when the Committee recommended the proposal. This meant terminating the line a short distance below the junction of the Latrobe and Loch rivers in place of near the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers.

3. In its Report (January, 1914) on the specific reference the Committee recommended the extension of the Neerim South broad-gauge railway into the Latrobe Valley, terminating in that valley “half-a-mile down stream from the bridge over the Latrobe River on the Loch Valley-road, and $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles up stream from the bridge crossing the same river on the Toorongo Valley-road.” It added:—“In its former Report the Committee suggested that the line should terminate about 60 chains nearer the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers; but Mr. Kernot reported that the permanent survey which had since been made had shown that the site now selected (for the terminus) was the best position obtainable to suit traffic from both the Loch and Toorongo valleys, having regard to the provision necessary for the reception of large quantities of sawn and split timber at the terminal station.” He also stated that roads having a grade of 1 in 20 could be made from both the Loch and Toorongo road bridges to the terminal station at moderate cost.

4. The increase in the estimated cost of the line from £99,000 in 1912 to £112,519 in 1914, thus swelling the annual interest-charge, caused the expected deficit of the railway in its first year of operation to rise from £328, as estimated in 1912, to £869, as computed in 1914. The Committee then considered that this latter estimated loss

was sufficiently large without adding to it, as would have to be done if several thousand pounds more were expended in carrying the line 60 chains further down stream to near the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers, a total length of "15" miles from Neerim South, as was at first proposed. Consequently, the Committee in January, 1914, recommended that the railway be constructed to near the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers, a length of "14" miles.

REASONS FOR PROPOSED RAILWAY EXTENSION.

5. Those residents and land-owners at Fumina who recently asked for the extension of the railway did so because the Act authorizing the building of the line into the Latrobe Valley was intituled the "Neerim South to Toorongo River Railway Construction Act," and the use of the words "to Toorongo River" led them to believe the railway would be extended as far as that stream; and also because if the line were terminated further up the Latrobe Valley on the east side of the Loch Valley-road it would be about 12 miles from the best of the timber in the Upper Toorongo watershed, about a similar distance from several of the selectors on the tableland at Fumina North, and even further in the case of one or two settlers. The cartage for both timber and farm produce would therefore, they said, be too far, and unless the railway were constructed to the Toorongo River privately-held lands would not be cleared of the good commercial timbers growing thereon, and agricultural production thus retarded. It would be a hardship to them, they added, if the railway were not extended to Toorongo River; and, moreover, unless the line were lengthened to that stream as suggested some of the second-class Crown lands in the Fumina district would not be selected. On the other hand, Dr. Thos. F. Bride said in evidence:—"Settlement will tend towards here (Fumina) now. When the railway is completed there will be an increase in settlement whether it stops at the Loch or the Toorongo." As to the distance timber would have to be hauled over a tramway to the railway terminus this witness said:—"Timber is brought from a saw-milling site in Gippsland (Port Albert district) over a distance of 20 or 22 miles by tram. In many other places the timber is brought by trams for 15 miles to the railway station. In the districts around Warburton timber is brought all sorts of distances to the station, and there is no difficulty at all. A tramway would be put in wherever timber could be got that was worth taking out." At the same time, he strongly urged the extension of the railway to Toorongo River, as was at first recommended by the Committee, contending that those in the Fumina district ought not be made to suffer all the expense and disabilities of a longer cartage merely because there had been delay in authorizing the construction of the railway and constructional costs had advanced in the meantime.

COST OF SUGGESTED EXTENSION.

6. Mr. Kernot informed the Committee that if the railway were extended 1 mile further down stream than the present authorized terminus, that is, from the 14 to the 15 mile peg, as originally intended by the Committee, and the present station on the east side of the Loch Valley-road were retained the extra mile of construction and additional station would involve an expenditure of £9,100. But the residents of Fumina now asked that the line should be carried half-a-mile further than the Committee had intended, by taking it across the Latrobe River and terminating the railway on the west side of the Toorongo River, adjacent to the junction of that stream with the Latrobe River. If this were done the cost would be £13,130, in place of £9,100. In both estimates new 60-lb. steel rails had been provided for, and certain terminal requirements, such as turntable, engine-shed, water supply, residences for employees, which would be transferred from the Loch Valley terminus to the new terminal station, had been allowed for in each case. Mr. Kernot further stated that if the railway were not extended it would be necessary to construct a new road bridge over the Latrobe River close to its junction with the Toorongo River and a road from there along the south bank of the former stream to the authorized railway terminus on the east side of Loch Valley-road. The bridge would cost about £900, including supervision during construction, and provision, for unforeseen contingencies. The road works would come to about £2,800 additional, including clearing for $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles, also metalling and some cutting to shorten the length and ease the grade of the road. In the latter sum was the expense of supervision during construction and the usual 10 per cent. allowance for unforeseen contingencies.

ROAD IN LIEU OF RAILWAY.

7. An estimate prepared by the local Shire Engineer was submitted by the Fumina residents, showing that the proposed road to give access to the present authorized railway terminus would cost much less than Mr. Kernot had stated. But on comparing the estimates it was seen that the former did not provide for laying a foundation of spalls on the road with a covering of 2½-inch metal, as Mr. Kernot's did; and the new bridge over the Latrobe was not to be of the same length. Mr. W. Calder, C.E., Chairman of the Country Roads Board, however, put the estimated cost of the road down at less than Mr. Kernot. Mr. Calder added that the Board proposed to bring the road from Duggan Township Reserve at Fumina down to Toorongo Valley. It was surveyed as far as the Toorongo River, but not over the Latrobe River and up the 2 miles or thereabouts to the authorized railway terminus. That portion had not been declared a main road within the meaning of the Country Roads Act. At that time the Act limited the special rate for main roads to 6d. in the £1 of the municipal valuation, and when Mr. Calder gave evidence he stated that limitation was preventing the local shire council from entering into an obligation in connexion with this road, as it had already incurred obligations in regard to other main roads in its district. He added:—"I think it would be a very fair proposition if the Government would bear the cost of constructing that 2 miles of road." But since then the restriction of the 6d. rate has been partly removed by an amendment of the Country Roads Act, the limitation now applying only to payments in respect of the construction of main roads, and not their maintenance. Mr. Kernot said the Railway Department was not authorized to construct roads outside of its fences. That could only be done if the Board of Land and Works were given a special grant by Parliament for this purpose.

OPINION OF CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS.

8. Mr. H. R. Mackay, Conservator of Forests, said that the timber in the Parish of Fumina had, to a considerable extent, been ring-barked, but there was a large quantity of good milling timber in the northern part of the Parish of Toorongo. While the proposed railway extension to Toorongo River would be a great benefit to the timber interest and the settlers, he did not consider it essential that the extension should be made if the sawmills will combine and make a tramway to carry the timber to the authorized railway terminus, as a good grade for the tramway could be obtained. In other parts of Victoria, he added, timber tramways are fully the same length—12 and 13 miles, and in some cases longer.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

9. After hearing the recent evidence of land-holders at Fumina and inspecting the country the Committee came to the conclusion that it would be desirable to extend the Neerim South-Latrobe Valley railway towards Fumina by carrying it across the Latrobe River and placing the terminus on the level ground at the foot of the valley on the west side of the Toorongo River, provided that can be done without increasing the expenditure beyond the £112,519 already sanctioned by Parliament, plus the £3,000 that otherwise will have to be expended on the new road to give access from Toorongo Valley to the present authorized railway terminus. This is the utmost outlay that should be incurred if the railway is to have any prospect of paying its way. The estimated deficit on the line now under construction to near the Loch Valley-road is £869 in the first year of operation.

10. Should the money available be insufficient to extend the railway the Committee is of opinion that the road from the junction of the Latrobe and Toorongo rivers to give access to the present authorized railway terminus should be regarded as a main road, and be constructed under the conditions set forth in the amended Country Roads Act. The railway cannot but enhance the value of land (especially that on which good timber is growing) in the parishes of Fumina and Toorongo. These privately-held lands should, therefore, in future give increased revenue from rates, thus enabling the local shire council to undertake its share of the cost of making and maintaining this short length of road. As to the contention that unless the railway is taken to Toorongo River it will have a prejudicial effect on the agricultural development of the Fumina country, the Committee repeats the statements it made in its Report of 1914—that such development must necessarily be

slow, because of the heavy timber growing on the land and few of the settlers having capital at their disposal to employ labour in clearing their holdings. Moreover, some of the hillsides are too steep to be cultivated. It was evident from the circumstances the settlers will for some years have to rely, as hitherto, mainly on dairying and pig-raising for their livelihood, which will bring but a small freighting to the railway.

ROUTE OF RAILWAY INTO LATROBE VALLEY.

11. It having been alleged that a mistake had been made in the route of the railway from Nayook into the Latrobe Valley the Committee decided to hear evidence on this matter, though it did not come within the terms of the reference. Nevertheless, as the statement had been publicly made the Committee considered it should be inquired into. It was urged by two of the land-owners that the line on leaving Nayook should be carried westward instead of northward before turning eastward in its course down the Latrobe Valley to Loch Valley-road. This deviation, they said, would enable a station to be placed in the Upper Latrobe Valley, where timber from the State Forest in the parishes of Ellinging and Nayook—which would be the principal traffic on the railway—could be railed instead of having to be taken on a tramway 5 miles further down the Latrobe Valley to the station near Loch Valley-road. It was admitted that this alteration in route would lengthen the railway by about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, but against that an easier grade into the Latrobe Valley could be obtained which would avoid some of the high bridges and deep cuttings on the authorized route, so that the longer line would cost no more than the one adopted by the Railway Construction Branch. This latter statement was supported by Mr. H. E. Coane, civil engineer, who inspected the country and examined both routes. He, however, did not make a detailed survey of the suggested deviation.

12. In 1912 the Committee, having had its attention directed by other local residents to the advantage of the route from Nayook taking a more westerly course, asked the Railway Construction Branch to have the suggested deviation examined, to ascertain “if an easier grade and, consequently, a less costly line could be constructed into the Latrobe Valley.” The suggestion was looked into by Superintending Surveyor Combes, who went over the ground and took levels. He reported that the cost of the new route “would be prohibitive without any compensating advantage.”

13. The Committee recently questioned Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, concerning the location of the railway and the suggested deviation. He said in his evidence:—“The estimate of cost for the deviation supplied by Mr. Coane is based only on an inspection of the country without survey. The country is difficult, and experience shows that reliable estimates in such country cannot be made without survey.” The Committee concurs in the view that estimates of railway construction in rough country, such as the descent into Latrobe Valley, must be based on surveys to be reliable. Mr. Kernot went on to say that the lengthening of the line by $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles would add to the expense of maintenance, and the proposed additional station in the Upper Latrobe Valley would increase the working expenses also. He further said:—“There is no solid reason to justify the supposition that a mistake has been made in choosing the route. The works on the new railway between Nayook station and the Loch Valley-road have been proceeded with, and to stop them now and adopt another route would involve a waste of £15,000. That is the money that would be lost if you dismantled the works, took away what was worth removing, and handed the land back to the land-owners. This £15,000 is about one-fourth of the total cost of the railway works in the Latrobe Valley.” Mr. Kernot added that it was not reasonable to say that the timber tramway from the Upper Latrobe Valley down to the railway station near Loch Valley-road would for 3 or 4 miles “run parallel with the railway.” The railway route rises so fast from Loch Valley-road that it soon reaches an elevation high above the tramway. Beyond that the tramway would deviate from the railway.

14. The land-holders in the Loch and Toorongu valleys and also at Fumina objected to the proposed deviation in the railway route to better serve the timber areas in the Upper Latrobe Valley, contending that they would have to pay extra rates on all goods received or sent away by them, inasmuch as the railway would be lengthened by $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and the rates were on the mileage basis.

15. Section 14 of Act No. 2717 prohibits any member of the Committee taking part in the proceedings when any proposed railway running into or through his electoral district is being considered or reported on by the Committee. Consequently, the Hon. S. Barnes, M.L.A., did not take part in the deliberations when the question of the extension of the Latrobe Valley railway towards Fumina was being considered by the Committee.

D. MELVILLE,
Vice-Chairman.

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

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]