

1919.

VICTORIA.

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REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS.

ON THE

MOUNT MORIAC TO FOREST RAILWAY  
(MORIAC TO WENSLEYDALE);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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*Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 5th August, 1919.*

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 3.—[6d.]—11704.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 12TH MARCH, 1918.

7. RAILWAY LINES—TRAFFIC, WORKING EXPENSES, PRESENT CONDITION, FUTURE PROSPECTS, AND COURSE TO ADOPT TO REDUCE LOSS ON CERTAIN LINES—REFERRED TO RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE.—Mr. Wynne moved, pursuant to notice, That the question of the traffic, working expenses, present condition, and future prospects, together with the most advisable course to adopt in the future to reduce loss in the case of the following railways :—

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3. Mount Moriac to Forest Railway (Moriac to Wensleydale) ;

\* \* \* \* \*

be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report.

Debate ensued.

Question—put and resolved in the affirmative.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

(*Twelfth Committee.*)

R. F. TOUTCHER, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman ;\*

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

J. Menzies, Esq., M.L.A.,  
The Hon. H. F. Richardson, M.L.C.,‡  
R. H. Solly, Esq., M.L.A.

\* Appointed Chairman on the 2nd April, 1919.  
† Appointed Vice-Chairman on the 2nd April, 1919.  
‡ Appointed on the 8th July, 1919.

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# REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of the traffic, working expenses, present condition, and future prospects, together with the most advisable course to adopt in the future to reduce loss on the Mount Moriac to Forest Railway (Moriac to Wensleydale), has the honour to report as follows:—

## HISTORY OF THE WENSLEYDALE RAILWAY.

1. The construction of the broad-gauge railway from Moriac, a station on the Geelong and Colac main line, to Wensleydale was authorized by Parliament in 1884, several years prior to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways being constituted. It is a single line of way with 60-lb. steel rails, 11 miles in length, and cost £39,259 to construct. This short railway was opened on 17th March, 1890. Its object was to enable firewood to be supplied to the factories and householders of Geelong, and serve the farmers who had settled in the district a few years previously, and also with the view of later on extending the line towards the sea-side resort of Lorne. Many of these selectors, however, abandoned their holdings in the country to the east and south of Wensleydale after obtaining railway facilities. Their expectation of selling the timber felled on their land in the process of clearing as firewood in Geelong was not realized, owing to supplies being then obtainable nearer to that city, and the quality of the soil being considered to be too poor for cropping, the present widespread practice of applying artificial manures to the land not being then in vogue. Most of these abandoned selections remained for several years as unoccupied Crown lands, and were then merged into the adjacent timber reserve, and are still held for forestry purposes. In addition to these reasons, the volume of traffic over the line was restricted by the nearness of a large portion of its tributary area on the west side to Buckley and Winchelsea stations on the Geelong and Colac main line. These stations, by having a staff to attend to the requirements of the railway users and also a better train service, attracted traffic which, geographically speaking, belonged to the Wensleydale line, and in that way the business of the latter was diminished.

2. In consequence of the traffic being so disappointing and the revenue falling short of the working expenses by about £300 a year, leaving nothing towards meeting the annual interest charge of £1,570, the Railways Commissioner (Mr. Mathieson) proposed in 1897 to close the Wensleydale line. On representations, however, being made by the local residents, it was decided to keep the railway open, but to run only one train weekly. This arrangement was continued till May, 1899, when the line was closed. In the following year it was re-opened on condition that a goods train would be run over the line whenever there was sufficient freight available to fill at least twenty trucks; that being the minimum train load, and that number of trucks had to be paid for on each trip. Moreover, the trucks had to be loaded within four hours, the locomotive which had brought out the empty trucks remaining at the terminus of the line for that time before starting on the return trip and picking up the loaded trucks. A further condition to increase the receipts of the line was that, in addition to the ordinary mileage rate from Moriac station on the main line, the following rate per four-wheeled truck had to be paid:—From Layard station, 4s.; Gherang, 5s.; Wormbete, 6s.; and Wensleydale, 7s. For a few years following this arrangement one, and occasionally two, trains weekly were required to clear the traffic, which consisted mostly of firewood, chaff, and split fencing-posts, the bulk of these being consigned to South Geelong, Geelong, North Geelong, and the lime kilns at Lara. Latterly the township of Queenscliff has been obtaining its supplies of firewood from Wensleydale, while the farmers at Drysdale have been getting fencing-posts from that station. But notwithstanding these new outlets for tonnage, the traffic in recent years was insufficient to maintain

one train per week; and in consequence of this and the inability to obtain rails from abroad during the war, the Railways Commissioners proposed that the line should be closed and dismantled so that the rails might be used in a district where there were greater prospects of settlement and production.

#### INWARDS AND OUTWARDS TONNAGE AND TRAINS.

3. The annual inwards and outwards tonnage and the number of trains run over the Moriac-Wensleydale line in the past twelve years were as follow :—

Year ending 30th June—				Total tons Inwards.	Total tons Outwards.	Number of Train Trips Run.
1907	..	..	..	74	6,593	45
1908	..	..	..	111	7,220	48
1909	..	..	..	98	6,116	50
1910	..	..	..	146	7,671	48
1911	..	..	..	130	6,565	42
1912	..	..	..	124	7,483	49
1913	..	..	..	153	7,504	46
1914	..	..	..	142	8,234	45
1915	..	..	..	143	5,959	35
1916	..	..	..	99	6,117	36
1917	..	..	..	91	5,880	34
1918	..	..	..	111	7,680	42

4. It should be explained that owing in recent years to the newer 15-ton open steel trucks supplanting some of the older open wooden trucks, which were of but 10 tons capacity, it did not require so many of the former to carry the same tonnage of firewood, and, therefore, while the output of the district did not diminish to any large extent, fewer trucks and consequently a lesser number of trains sufficed to remove the loading.

#### FINANCIAL RESULTS OF LINE.

5. The following table shows the financial results of the Moriac-Wensleydale railway in recent years :—

Year ending 30th June—	Line Earnings, Tolled Revenue.	Credit for Traffic brought to Other Lines.	Total Revenue credited to Line.	Total Working Expenses.	Profit on Working.	Loss on Working.	Interest at 4 per cent.	Loss after meeting Interest Charges.	
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
1907	..	315	338	653	371	282	..	1,571	1,289
1908	..	375	359	734	262	472	..	1,571	1,099
1909	..	373	351	724	606	118	..	1,571	1,453
1910	..	401	392	793	310	483	..	1,571	1,088
1911	..	349	348	697	406	291	..	1,571	1,280
1912	..	382	348	730	1,172	..	442	1,570	2,012
1913	..	342	342	684	925	..	241	1,570	1,811
1914	..	333	368	701	1,007	..	306	1,570	1,876
1915	..	231	306	537	733	..	196	1,570	1,766
1916	..	273	292	565	462	103	..	1,570	1,467
1917	..	230	279	509	492	17	..	1,570	1,553
1918	..	281	514	795	429	366	..	1,570	1,204

6. An investigation of the figures in the foregoing table showed that the working expenses in 1912 and the three succeeding years were unusually high. This was due to portions of the line requiring re-sleepering and some of the small wooden bridges and culverts having to be renewed after having done service for twenty-two years or so. These renewals can be expected to be necessary from time to time, so that the profits on working will every few years be mostly absorbed by expenditures on re-sleepering and repairs to bridges, culverts, fences, platforms, crossings, &c. It was ascertained

that if the line were dismantled, as had been suggested, the total value of the rails, sleepers, &c., which were worth removing for use elsewhere would be but £4,464, after allowing for the expense of lifting them and the cost of railage of these secondhand materials to the railway depôt at Melbourne.

#### EXPECTED INCREASES IN TRAFFIC.

7. Since the Railways Commissioners made the suggestion some two years ago that this line should be closed and dismantled, developments have taken place which promise to bring a considerable increase in traffic to the railway. In the first place, the firewood within cartage distance of Geelong and Queenscliff has now been practically cut out, and the fuel merchants at those places are looking to the Wensleydale district for their supplies. The quantity of firewood carried over the line in 1916 was 4,627 tons; in 1917, 4,785 tons; but in 1918 it increased to 6,071 tons. A syndicate, of which Mr. H. Khyat, of Melbourne, is the principal member, has recently selected 960 acres of Crown lands adjoining Wensleydale station for the purpose of establishing the sericultural industry on a large scale in this State, and also growing almonds extensively. He has been promised by the Lands Department two additional neighbouring blocks of about 1,000 acres each, provided he shows his *bonâ fides* by clearing and planting with mulberry and almond trees the greater part of the 960 acres in the next two or three years, as he has stated he will do. These three blocks are at present mostly covered with a thick growth of indigenous timbers. The trees are of low or medium height, and although the wood has not the burning or heating quality of box, it nevertheless is suitable for engine fuel, lime and brick kilns, and also for household purposes if mixed with a little of the better class of firewood. Mr. Khyat estimated he would obtain from 40 to 50 tons of suitable firewood to the acre, and as he proposed to clear the land at the rate of about 600 acres each year, he would have from 25,000 to 30,000 tons of firewood to transport over the railway annually for five or six years. He expects to sell the greater part of that output to the Railway Department, and the remainder to the fuel merchants and factories at Geelong. He hoped to have 1,500 acres under white mulberry trees and 1,000 acres under almond trees in six years, and to give employment to several hundred men and women at Wensleydale. From his experience in silk culture at Syria he considered the soil and climate at Wensleydale suitable for such an industry, and his knowledge as a clothing manufacturer in Melbourne enabled him to say with confidence that the silk which would be produced and treated at Wensleydale could be profitably used for hosiery and knitted goods. Experiments had shown, he said, that when silkworms became acclimatized to Victoria they produced a larger cocoon than those of France or Japan. As, however, the silk-producing season was limited to a few weeks, he intended growing almonds on a large scale to keep many of the workers at Wensleydale employed all the year. This State had to import almonds to meet the local demand, and a large confectionery manufacturer in Melbourne was prepared to purchase the full crop of almonds at a price which Mr. Khyat stated would make the culture of those trees profitable. Unless, however, the Wensleydale railway remained open so that he could clear the land and send the firewood to market at a profitable rate, and bring building materials for the 100 families or so he hoped to settle on the land, and also groceries and other food supplies into the district at a reasonable cost, he would have to abandon the proposal.

8. Mr. D. Martin and Mr. T. G. Horobin, members of the Committee of the Victorian Sericulture Association, gave evidence before the Committee strongly supporting the retention of the Wensleydale line so that Mr. Khyat might have an opportunity of showing, without any State aid, that the silk industry can be profitably established in Victoria.

9. A further development occurred when the Committee was hearing evidence at Geelong against the proposal to close and dismantle this line. It was stated by the Mayor of Geelong that the gravel pits at Chilwell were becoming exhausted, and that the Geelong and neighbouring councils would soon have to get supplies of road-making material from elsewhere. Adjacent to the Gherang station on the Wensleydale railway is a large deposit of quartz gravel. This material was used to ballast that line and to form roads leading to the station platforms. The gravel had also been used with satisfactory results in making roads in the Moriac district. The municipal councils were satisfied both as to the extent of the deposit of gravel at Gherang and its quality for road-making where the vehicular traffic was not heavy.

They were prepared to make arrangements with the owner of the gravel and to rail at least 10,000 tons of it annually from Gherang to Geelong and neighbouring stations provided satisfactory arrangements could be come to with the Railway Department regarding an improved train service over the Wensleydale line, so that the municipal employees working at the gravel deposit could be fully employed in excavating the material and filling it into railway trucks. The Committee thereupon communicated this information to the Railways Commissioners, who stated that they would assist the councils in utilizing this gravel deposit although the freight, which was carried at an exceptionally low rate to aid municipalities in road-making, was not a remunerative one. At the request of the councils the Commissioners recently sent an engineer to inspect the deposit and railway siding arrangements at Gherang in company with several councillors and the municipal engineers, so that a scheme for the rapid loading of the railway trucks might be determined. The Commissioners have since asked representatives of the councils to confer with them as to the improved train service required, and there is every reason to believe now the Committee has brought the councils and Commissioners together that a satisfactory outcome will be reached. Evidence was also given to the Committee that a fair quantity of the Gherang gravel may be used yearly by the Fyansford Cement Company in making reinforced concrete pipes, &c.

#### EXTENSION OF THE LINE.

10. Representations were made to the Committee by the residents of Lorne that the dismantling of the Wensleydale line would destroy their prospects of having the railway brought nearer to that popular sea-side resort. It was stated that the nearest railway station to Lorne was Dean's Marsh, 14 miles distant, but there was no hope of railway extension from that direction owing to the hilly nature of the intervening country. The only practical route is carrying the Wensleydale line southwards on a rising grade to near Peter's Hill, and thence, still ascending, on to Benwerrin, which is on the summit of the coastal range, about 1,300 feet above sea level, 7 miles from Lorne. The journey by coach from Dean's Marsh to Lorne occupies about four hours owing to the steep grades and bad roads, and it is considered that if the trip could be lessened to half that time by shortening the distance to 7 miles, by having the railway extended to Benwerrin, it would make Lorne more accessible, especially in the winter months, and largely increase the number of holiday-makers to that sea-side resort. Moreover, the train operating the Wensleydale-Benwerrin line could leave Geelong early in the afternoon, allowing visitors from Bendigo and northern districts to reach Lorne in one day's travel instead of two, as now. In addition to the passenger traffic, groceries, flour, and other provisions would, it was urged, be carried by rail to Benwerrin and carted from there to Lorne. Occasionally small vessels visited Lorne with consignments of hardware, drapery, and other goods, but owing to the bay being unsheltered from the southerly and easterly winds it was not infrequently difficult to unload these consignments at the jetty. As no certainty could be placed on the arrival of the boats or on their being able to discharge their cargoes when moored at the jetty, the practice was to get all the perishable goods and many of the other stores by train to Dean's Marsh and then cart them over the coastal range to Lorne, the cartage charge being about 25s. a ton. The freight by boat was 20s. a ton on flour and 22s. 6d. on chaff, plus 1s. a ton wharfage.

11. It was further stated that the extension of the Wensleydale line to Benwerrin would enable large supplies of firewood and fencing-posts between the former place and Peter's Hill to be cut and sent by rail to Geelong and other districts for sale there. Between Peter's Hill and Airley's Inlet, on the slope towards the coast, there is a small forest of ironbark suitable for sleepers and telegraph poles. Approaching Benwerrin at the heads of the valleys and beyond it on the plateau of the coastal range the timber is larger and fit for milling, consisting principally of bluegum and messmate with some mountain ash and spotted gum. An extension of the line would cause these supplies of sleepers, telegraph poles, and milling timber to be marketed, thus giving freight to the railway.

12. A further source of probable traffic was stated to be deposits of brown coal which have been proved to exist to the south-west of Wensleydale and below Benwerrin, on the northern slope of the range. The latter deposit was worked some years ago,

the coal being hauled over a broad-gauge tramway laid with steel rails down to Dean's Marsh station. But the mine, which was worked by a tunnel, was not payable, and the rails, which had been supplied by the Railway Department, were removed. Mr. H. Herman, Director of Geological Survey, Mines Department, said that the geological survey of the country indicated that the formations in which this brown coal occurred restricted the deposit to probably 20 acres. The seam was 6 or 7 feet in thickness, and as it required underground mining to extract the coal he was of opinion it was not a commercial proposition, because the working costs and interest charges on the tramway were high for the limited output. An adequate quantity of coal, he added, was not available and also saleable at a price to return full interest on the capital outlay on the tramway and mine after deducting working expenses. He said there was another deposit of brown coal on Wormbete Creek, nearer to Wensleydale, within 4 miles of that station. It, however, was partly on private property, and the owner had under the law under which his title was issued the right to the coal. This seam is about 27 feet in thickness where it had been exposed, and being closer to the surface there was a possibility of its being worked by an open cut, which would reduce the cost of extraction compared with underground mining. The extent of this deposit would, however, have to be tested by boring operations before anything definite could be said about it; but in any case it would require an assured large market to justify the capital expenditure needed to properly equip and open out the mine. It required, roughly,  $2\frac{1}{4}$  tons of lignite or brown coal to raise the same steam as 1 ton of black coal; and if Newcastle coal dropped to the pre-war rate of 20s. a ton landed at Geelong the Wormbete brown coal would have to be delivered at that city at about 8s. a ton to compete with the black coal. It was questionable if the brown coal could be mined and railed to Geelong for 8s. a ton and give an adequate return on the capital invested. As to the suggestion that the Wormbete coal deposit might be used to generate electric power for the tramways and factories at Geelong, he thought the absence of a large supply of water at Wormbete for condensing purposes would operate against that proposal.

#### COST OF PROPOSED EXTENSION TO BENWERRIN.

13. In 1917 it was estimated that the cost of the proposed extension of the Wensleydale line to Benwerrin would be £75,000, to which would have to be added £13,750 for rolling-stock, and an expenditure of £5,323 for equipping Moriac as a junction station. A further outlay of about £1,000 would be necessary to put the station and sidings on the Wensleydale line in order to carry a mixed train service. Although Benwerrin is only 9 miles from Wensleydale in a direct line the railway would have to take a circuitous route owing to the hilly nature of the country, making the length  $11\frac{3}{4}$  miles. The ruling grade would be 1 in 30, and the sharpest curve 8 chains radius. The Traffic Officers of the Railway Department estimated that in the first year this extension was opened 5,100 tons of firewood, 3,000 tons of sawn timber, 1,800 tons of posts and rails, 300 tons of agricultural produce, and 70 tons of class goods would be despatched from stations on the new line, and 2,400 tons of firewood, 1,200 tons of agricultural produce, and 43 tons of class goods from stations on the existing line. The estimates of revenue and working expenses submitted by these officers were for the through line from Moriac to Benwerrin. They showed that the interest charge would come to £5,380, including that on the capital expended on the Moriac-Wensleydale section, and the working expenses £4,176, or a total charge of £9,556 for the first year of operation. The revenue, they estimated, would only reach £1,898, including credit for £1,021 for the line's share of new traffic brought by it to the other railways, leaving a loss of £7,658.

#### RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

14. The Committee considered it was justified in hearing the representations of the residents and property-owners at Lorne and placing the same before Parliament, as they had a direct bearing on the question of dismantling the Wensleydale railway. At the same time the Committee abstains from offering any opinion on the suggestion that the Wensleydale line should be extended to Benwerrin, as that matter was not referred to it for inquiry and report. In view of the promised large additional firewood and gravel traffic on the Wensleydale line and the effort which is to be made, without

any State aid, to establish the sericultural industry in that district, which, if successful, will give employment to 100 or 150 families, the Committee recommends that the Moriac-Wensleydale railway be not closed and dismantled, but that provision be made for an improved goods train service to remove the expected increased traffic in firewood and gravel.

R. F. TOUTCHER,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
Melbourne, 5th August, 1919.

*[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]*