

1920.

VICTORIA.

PROGRESS REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

MALLEE RAILWAY CONNEXIONS;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 21st September, 1920.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 4.—[9D.]—12699.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

SATURDAY, 21st DECEMBER, 1918.

27. MALLEE RAILWAY CONNEXIONS.—Motion made and question—That the question of connecting the district around Corack and Bangerang with the existing railway system, and also of providing cross-country connexions between the lines from Charlton to Kulwin, from Donald to Ouyen, and from Murtos to Hopetoun be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report (*Mr. Barnes*)—put and agreed to.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Twelfth Committee.*)

J. MENZIES, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman ;*

The Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A.,
The Hon. A. Hicks, M.L.C., †
The Hon. W. Kendell, M.L.C., ‡

The Hon. H. F. Richardson, M.L.C.
(Vice-Chairman), §
R. H. Solly, Esq., M.L.A.,
R. F. Toutcher, Esq., M.L.A.

* Appointed Chairman on the 28th April, 1920.

† Resigned on the 18th May, 1920.

‡ Appointed a member of the Committee on the 30th June, 1920, in place of the Hon. A. Hicks, M.L.C.

§ Appointed Vice-Chairman on the 6th June, 1920.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

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PROGRESS REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the district around Corack and Bangerang with the existing railway system, and also of providing cross-country connexions between the lines from Charlton to Kulwin, from Donald to Ouyen, and from Murtoa to Hopetoun, has the honour to report as follows:—

CORACK DISTRICT.

1. The Corack district, including Corack East, comprises an area of about 90,000 acres, mostly red loamy land of good quality for the production of wheat and oats and for lamb-raising, lying between the Charlton-Wycheproof railway on the east and the Donald-Watchem line on the west. A space of from 24 to 30 miles separates these railways, so that of the area stated about 60,000 acres are, by the roads which have to be used, more than 10 miles from the nearest railway station. The most distant producers have to cart 16 and 17 miles to the railway. Witnesses who appeared before the Committee stated that where the cartage of grain exceeded 10 miles it caused both the farm hands and teams to spend too much time on the roads, especially in the hot, dusty summer months, when the wheat or oats had to be carted to the railway station. An early start was necessary to avoid having to wait too long on reaching the railway station for the turn to unload. These long hours, extending from before dawn to after dark, including the time occupied in feeding the horses before starting on the trip to the station and, on returning home, going into the paddock in the dusk and loading the farm waggon with grain, made it not only difficult to obtain and retain farm labourers, but the teams, by being on the roads day after day for several successive weeks, became "leg-weary" and slow. They were consequently unfitted without a long rest to work the fallowed land, as they should do during the summer to destroy the weeds and conserve the moisture in the soil, or to drill in oats for next season's hay crop. The result was that the land did not yield as abundantly as it would have done had the fallow been properly worked in the summer. In some instances, too, the acreage sown with oats and with wheat was not as large as it would otherwise have been. This led to decreased production, which was bad for the farmer and also for the State, causing a lessened traffic in agricultural produce over the railways. It was therefore asked that the Corack district should be given nearer railway facilities, either by the construction of a broad-gauge line from Charlton westwards to Wooroonook, 8 miles, and thence north-west, terminating at Corack East, $19\frac{1}{2}$ miles, at a rough estimated cost of £79,950; or, alternatively, that the railway should be made from Charlton, *viâ* Wooroonook and Corack East, through to Watchem, $30\frac{1}{2}$ miles, at an estimated cost of £125,050, thus not only serving the Corack district but also giving a much-needed connexion by rail between the Charlton-Kulwin (Sea Lake) and the Donald-Mildura lines. The farmers at Corack East preferred the through railway. A connexion with Watchem would enable them to send supplies of oats and chaff to Mildura and other Northern Mallee districts, as well as to the Darling River district, in times of drought. It would likewise allow the Corack residents to get fresh and dried fruits from Mildura. Grapes and tomatoes grew well in the Corack district, and if there were a railway and supplies of water for irrigation became available from the existing stock and domestic channels—as the outcome of increased storages—it was thought both vines and tomatoes would be planted and a trade established with the southern areas of the State. The yields of wheat averaged 20 bushels to the acre, and oats 30 bushels, while the carrying capacity of most of the land was a sheep to the acre. The average annual rainfall was between 15 and 16 inches.

2. It was stated that the cartage charge to the existing railway stations was 1d. per bag per mile, but there was a difficulty in getting carters. Consequently, nearly the whole of the carting had to be done by the farm teams, and these were too long occupied in hauling the wheat and oat crops to the railway stations to have the fallowed land worked properly. The railway, by lessening the cartage period, would permit farmers to use their teams more on their holdings, causing the area cultivated to be increased by about one-fourth or one-third the present acreage. But unless nearer railway facilities were provided it was probable a number of the larger land-holders—having from 1,000 to 1,500 acres each—while recognising that grain-growing was more profitable than lamb-raising, would go out of cultivation and use their properties for grazing only, especially if the present prices of wool and meat are maintained. So desirous, however, were the farmers of the Corack district to have a railway brought within a few miles of them, thus allowing the cropping of their lands to be continued, that they offered to pay a special railway rate of 6s. per

ton above the ordinary rate for the carriage of their grain over the new line during the first ten years it is opened for traffic, or, alternatively, to have a tax varying from 1s. to 9d. per acre—according to the distance from the line—placed on their land for the same period so as to diminish the loss on the line. This special land tax was estimated to produce £4,000 per annum, or about as much as the proffered extra railway rate. The farmers at Wooroonook, who are from 9 to 11 miles or so from Charlton, offered to pay a special railway rate of 3s. a ton for five years, or, alternatively, an extra land tax of 6d. per acre per annum to add to the revenue of the new line. It was admitted, however, that the railway would increase the value of the land in the Wooroonook and Corack East districts by 20s. or 30s. an acre.

3. Statistics submitted by the Corack Railway League showed that for the season 1919-20, which was not a good year, there were produced in the area that would be served by the proposed Charlton-Watchem railway, from Wooroonook Township to a point 3 miles west of Corack Township, 73,460 bags of wheat, 16,531 bags of oats, 4,515 tons of chaff, 930 bales of wool, and 322 trucks of live stock.

BANGERANG DISTRICT.

4. It was proposed to continue the Charlton-Corack-Watchem railway south-west from Watchem through Bangerang to Warracknabeal, which is the leading town in the Southern Mallee, a distance of 29 miles, at an estimated cost of £118,900, thereby giving a connexion by rail between the Charlton-Kulwin (Sea Lake) line, the Donald-Ouyen (Mildura) railway, and the Murtoa-Hopetoun line through the areas that are the most distant from railway stations. The Bangerang country is practically level, like other parts of the Southern Mallee, and lends itself to the building of a railway, having no river or other natural obstacle to cross. The soil is not so loamy as that in the Corack district, being heavier. It is also of a reddish colour, but containing more clay and less sand the roads become sticky after an inch or so of rain, and are difficult to cart over in the winter. Consequently, the conveyance of the grain crop to the railway stations has to be done in the summer months. It was computed by the Bangerang Railway League that there are 64,000 acres more than 9 miles from a railway station in a strip of 5 miles on either side of the proposed Watchem-Bangerang-Warracknabeal railway. These 64,000 acres are held by about 50 owners, of whom 36 belonged to the League. It was explained that the long carting distance was leading to the aggregation of holdings. Of the area mentioned, 13,440 acres were cropped with wheat in 1916-17, and produced 95,580 bags, or slightly over 21 bushels per acre. In 1917-18 there were 11,732 acres under wheat, which gave a return of 81,650 bags, or a little under 21 bushels. In 1918-19 there were 11,809 acres sown with wheat, and 61,182 bags were harvested, being just under 18 bushels per acre. The same area in 1916-17 grazed 9,700 sheep. In 1917-18 there were 13,600 sheep kept on this land, and in 1918-19 the number grazed reached 18,060. In 1916-17 there were 6,300 lambs reared on the 64,000 acres; in 1917-18 the number was 8,600; and in 1918-19 it reached 11,400. There were 280 bales of wool produced in 1916-17 on the area; 385 bales in 1917-18; and 500 bales in 1918-19. The oat crop averaged over 21 bushels for the three seasons stated. The average annual rainfall for the last sixteen years was 15.35 inches. The cartage charge was 1d. per bag per mile. If a railway were constructed through Bangerang district about one-fourth more acreage would, it was said, be cropped annually.

5. In order to secure nearer railway facilities and also enable land which was now used for grazing to be put under cultivation, the members of the Bangerang Railway League said they were prepared to pay a special railway rate of 6s. a ton above the ordinary rate for the carriage of their farm produce over the new line. That extra rate would be charged, if necessary, for ten years towards making the railway pay, and would give a return of about £2,000 a year. Or, alternatively, the members of the League would consent to have a special land tax placed on their holdings for ten years to supplement the railway receipts. That tax would be at the rate of 1s. per acre per annum on holdings in the zone nearer to the suggested railway, and 9d. per acre on those in the outer zone. This special land tax would bring in £2,800 yearly.

THE DONALD CONNEXIONS.

6. An alternative proposal to the Corack-Watchem route was submitted by the residents of Donald, which is the leading town and municipal head-quarters in that district. It was that the proposed line from Charlton on reaching Wooroonook should be continued about 2 miles westward to near Granite Flat, where there would be a station to serve the Corack East district, and then turn south-west to Donald. This route, it was explained, would give a shorter connexion of 24 miles, at an estimated outlay of £98,400, between the Charlton-Kulwin (Sea Lake) and Donald-Ouyen (Mildura) railways than the suggested Corack-Watchem proposition of 30½ miles, at a cost of £125,050. Moreover, at Donald station there was a commodious locomotive shed, turntable, water supply, and all the necessary requirements of a junctioning railway, which would have to be provided at Watchem at a cost of several thousand pounds. Much of the land, it was said, lying to the east of Watchem towards Corack was wet or fit for grazing only. The residents

of Corack East, however, objected to the suggested Charlton-Donald connexion, as it would pass along the southern fringe of their district, and the best of the agricultural lands, from which there was a larger production, were in the northern portion. But their main opposition to the Donald route was that the Corack East farmers would, to reach the railway, have to cart over sandhills which ran from near Granite Flat in a south-westerly direction towards Donald. These sandhills would so restrict the load that it would pay the farmers better to continue carting to Wycheproof or Watchem. The existence of these sandhills was admitted by the advocates of the Donald connexion, but they pointed out that the Corack East producers could, by making a slight detour, cart to Granite Flat station without crossing sandhills. One advantage claimed for the Charlton-Donald route was that it would pass close to the foot of Mount Jeffcott, where a large supply of stone suitable for road-making could be obtained. At present the stone required for such purpose in the Donald and more northerly shires has to be brought by rail from Talbot—a distance of 80 miles or so. When the Country Roads Board was questioned by the Committee concerning the suitability of the Mount Jeffcott stone for road-making, it replied that a valuable deposit of stone exists there, but the Board had not sufficient information to form even an approximate estimate of the tonnage of metal which might be used from Mount Jeffcott, or “whether it would warrant the Board in committing itself to the cost of constructing a loop line from the proposed railway to the quarry.”

7. Those advocating the linking up of the Charlton and Donald railways by a line *via* Wooroonook and running towards Granite Flat also asked that that line should be extended from Donald south-west to near Laen, and thence on to Minyip, thus connecting the Charlton (Sea Lake), Donald (Mildura), and Hopetoun railways. The line from Donald to Minyip would be 24 miles in length, and was estimated to cost £98,400, or about £106,000 if it were kept a little to the southward nearer to Laen public hall, as was generally desired, thereby extending the through distance to close on 26 miles. It was explained that the land between Donald and Minyip was exceedingly good cereal soil, producing 25 bushels of wheat and 40 of oats to the acre. About one-third of this area is cropped annually, the ordinary rotation being one-third of a holding under fallow, one-third under crop, and one-third in grass. Latterly, however, the acreage under crop had been increased by sowing oats on portion of the wheat stubble. While nearer railway facilities would not cause the acreage under crop or fallow to be increased to any marked extent it would, it was urged, result in the fallow land being better worked in the summer months, as the time saved in cartage would be put on the land, causing heavier yields to be obtained. Moreover, with a railway station not more than 8 miles distant it would pay to grow hay, and that would give a greater tonnage of freight per acre for the railway than grain. If the line were brought a little nearer to Laen it would better serve the lands on the western side of Rich Avon Estate—which had been purchased for returned soldier settlements—and allow the dried box and bullock timbers on those lands to be marketed as firewood. The farmers around Laen who were more than 8 miles from a railway stated it cost them 1d. per bag per mile to cart their grain to the railway station, and as an inducement to have the proposed line between Donald and Minyip built they offered to pay a tax of 1s. per acre per annum for several years to help in making the railway a payable undertaking. It was pointed out that the Charlton-Donald-Minyip connexion would be shorter by 10 miles and cost £40,000 less than the Charlton-Corack-Watchem-Warracknabeal route, and would pass through equally as good, if not better, country.

OTHER PROPOSED CONNEXIONS.

8. Other proposed connexions between the southern portions of the Mildura and Hopetoun lines brought under the notice of the Committee, but not so widely urged as those already referred to, were from Litchfield to Mellis, 23 miles, estimated to cost £92,250; Litchfield to Sheep Hills, 20 miles, £82,000; Birchip to Warracknabeal, 34 miles, £135,000; and from Kinnabulla southward through Pine Grove or Reedy Dam, Wilkur, Bangerang East, Areegra, and Booloit to near Laen, and thence westward to Minyip. This connexion would be about 46 miles in length, running for the greater part of its distance parallel with the existing railways, and at no part more than 15 miles from them. It would cost close on £190,000. The few supporters of this parallel route claimed it would better serve the areas needing nearer railway facilities than any of the other proposals. This was generally admitted, but it was considered its length and cost made it impracticable.

PROPOSED HOPETOON RAILWAY EXTENSIONS.

9. The Murtoa-Hopetoun railway, after proceeding northward for 70 miles, terminates at the latter town. Several proposals were placed before the Committee for extending that railway and connecting it with the Mildura line. One was to carry the Hopetoun railway north-east for 15½ miles, linking up with the Donald-Ouyen (Mildura) line at Lascelles. It was pointed out that this was the shortest of all the suggested connexions, and would cost the least, namely £60,450. It would be of service to several returned soldiers who had recently been placed on resumed farm

areas about midway between Hopetoun and Lascelles, as there would be a station or siding provided near their holdings. A further proposition was that the Hopetoun railway should be run northward close to Wathe, and thence to Turriff—a station on the Mildura line 12 miles north of Lascelles. It would be slightly over 22 miles in length, and would cost about £87,000. Those urging this route stated it would serve the country around Wathe and also that towards Yallum. This country is patchy, some of it being sandy and inferior, and they thought the extension of the railway would cause some of the unoccupied blocks there to be taken up and cultivated. Witnesses stated that if the Hopetoun railway were extended either to Lascelles or Turriff it could be operated by the same train and crew as ran on the Hopetoun line, thus securing economy in working.

10. A third proposal was to continue the Hopetoun railway in a north-westerly course for 25 miles or slightly more through Wathe and Yallum to Patchewollock, and then to swing the line eastward for about 15 miles to Speed—a station on the Mildura railway 16 miles north of Lascelles and 4 miles beyond Turriff. No estimate of cost of this route had been made by the Railway Construction Branch. But scaled on the map its length would be close on 40 miles, and its cost of construction, roughly, £155,000. While three or four belts of sandy country, each about a mile in width, would have to be crossed in following this route, there are, both at Yallum and Patchewollock, some large areas of good, hard, mallee country suitable for settlement and wheat-growing if supplies of water could be brought by channels into the district from a reliable outside source, should the boring operations now being carried out there by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission fail to find a suitable and adequate supply for stock and domestic purposes. Yields of wheat averaging 15 and 20 bushels to the acre for the years 1915-16, 1916-17, and 1917-18 had been obtained. Evidence was given that the 80 settlers at Yallum and Patchewollock, of whom 22 are married, are occupying in the aggregate about 50,000 acres, and were from 10 to 18 miles from Turriff or Speed stations. That was a long way to cart wheat and water. Witnesses stated if they were to remain on the land they must have nearer railway facilities. Moreover, a railway to Patchewollock would, it was said, serve a block of unoccupied country about 8 miles square, or 40,000 acres, on the west side towards Pine Plains. It was red, sandy loam, growing large mallee and bullock, with pines on the ridges, and would be readily applied for by returned soldiers if a railway were made to Patchewollock. Some of the Patchewollock country grew good nutritious grass, the cattle and sheep doing well on it. A still further suggestion was to carry the railway from Patchewollock northward to Ouyen, instead of swinging it eastward to Speed, to there link up with the Mildura line. This route would traverse a belt of very poor sandy country a few miles north of Patchewollock, but would then pass through some good land from Yellangip to Ouyen.

11. Several of the witnesses from Patchewollock said that, had it not been the question referred to the Committee for inquiry was linking up the Hopetoun and "Mildura" railways, they would have urged the extension of the Hopetoun line to Patchewollock, and thence either northward to Walpeup, on the Ouyen-Murrayville railway, or westward to Pine Plains, and then northwards to Underbool. Mr. W. E. Poulton, a farmer near Hopetoun, who spent many years at Pine Plains, and knows the surrounding country thoroughly, also supported the Hopetoun extension to Patchewollock and Pine Plains. He added:—"On the plan it looks very well to extend the Yaapect railway to Pine Plains, but unfortunately there is so much sand in the 25 miles of intervening country that it would not be practicable to take the line through that way."

HOPETOUN AND MILDURA RAILWAYS CONNECTING LINE.

12. There were a number of reasons given in support of making a railway connexion between the Hopetoun and Mildura lines which were common to all the proposals for linking up those railways. The first was that any of these suggested connexions would shorten the distance from Murtoa by rail to Ouyen or Mildura by about 140 miles compared with the present roundabout route *via* Ararat, Maryborough, and St. Arnaud. This would be a great public convenience, and would induce many persons to travel over the railways in that part of the State. A large number of settlers in the Northern Mallee, including returned soldiers who were going into that country and to the Mildura settlements, were from the Wimmera district, and if this facility to travel cheaply and quickly were provided it would be availed of by the settlers and their relatives, who desired to make more frequent visits to each other. The orchardists and vine-growers at Mildura and Merbein purchased annually from 7,000 to 8,000 tons of chaff, oats, &c., for the teams working their plantations, and the proposed extension of the irrigation settlement at Red Cliffs would add to the quantity of fodder required. It did not pay to grow lucerne or oaten hay at Mildura.¹ Owing to the small acreage of the holdings, the cost of the land, and the high charges for water for irrigation the land had to be used for more remunerative crops, such as vines or citrus fruits. This year some of the chaff supplies had to be railed from South Australia. If a connexion were made with the Hopetoun line most of the chaff, &c., could be drawn from the Warracknabeal, Murtoa, and Wimmera districts. Upwards of 1,000 tons of flour, bran, and

pollard were now railed annually from the flour mill, Warracknabeal, round by way of Ararat and Maryborough. A connecting line would save about 180 miles of railage on that tonnage. The Committee was informed by witnesses representing the Mildura Traders' Association that the potato and onion supplies for their district totalled 1,500 tons a year, and that the main portion came from Koroit and Warrnambool, so that there would be a saving of over 50 miles in railway haulage on every ton of the latter supplies if the desired connexion were made with the Hopetoun-Murtoa line. The same would apply to the supplies of cheese for Mildura, which mostly came from the Western District. At present it usually took a fortnight to get these supplies through by rail from the Warrnambool district, due mostly to the congestion of traffic at stations nearer Melbourne. It was thought the opening of another railway route to Mildura *via* the Murtoa-Hopetoun line would not only assist in relieving that congestion by tending to lessen the centralization of traffic, but would facilitate the transit of goods, enabling the trucks to do more journeys in the year, and so increase their earning capacity.

13. These witnesses pointed out that for several years there is likely to be a large tonnage of cement used in constructing locks on the Murray and Darling rivers, and these supplies would have to be railed from the Geelong and Western District to Mildura. Moreover, a connexion with the Hopetoun line would be very servicable in moving live stock between the Darling River country, in the south-west part of New South Wales, and the Wimmera and Western districts of Victoria. That means of direct transport by rail would develop the traffic in live stock and lessen the practice of driving flocks from stations on the Ouyen-Donald line to the western part of Victoria, where both store and starving sheep from New South Wales were often depastured. A new traffic that would also be developed by the suggested railway connexion with the Hopetoun line would be blood manure from the Murtoa Freezing Works. This fertilizer was required by the fruit and vine growers at Mildura and Merbein. They also got softwood cases for packing their dried fruits from Warrnambool, where the timber was imported from New Zealand. The connecting line would allow fresh fruits, such as grapes and oranges, to be railed direct from Mildura to the towns in the Wimmera and Western districts, where there is an increasing demand for such fruits. At present the supplies had to be sent by way of Ballarat or Melbourne, and being three or four days on the journey they deteriorated greatly.

14. Another advantage claimed for a railway connexion between the Mildura and Hopetoun lines was that it would enable the makers of agricultural implements and machinery and builders of farm waggons and buggies at Hopetoun, Warracknabeal, and Horsham to send their manufactures into the newly-settled districts in the Northern Mallee and also to the enlarging irrigation settlements at Merbein and Red Cliffs. It would, in addition, give to the Mildura residents an easy means of reaching the Melbourne-Adelaide main line. However, they can now get to that line by way of the Ouyen-Pinnaroo railway.

MILDURA AND KULWIN (SEA LAKE) CONNEXIONS.

15. The residents of Ouyen and a number of soldier settlers at Kulwin asked that the main Mildura and Kulwin railways should be linked up by a line from Ouyen, 18 miles eastwards, to Kulwin, which is the present terminus of the Sea Lake railway. They pointed out that this connexion would open up a tract of about 60,000 acres of fair Mallee country, mostly in the Parish of Wagant, about midway between Ouyen and Kulwin, which they considered suitable for settlement by returned soldiers, and that many of their comrades seeking land were anxious to get allotments there. It would also form the first section of a national line running eastwards from Kulwin through Manangatang to Piangil, linking up all the Eastern Mallee railways, and thence across the Murray River to the New South Wales railway terminus at Hay, thus giving a second and more direct railway route from Adelaide to Sydney by way of Murray Bridge, Pinnaroo, Ouyen, and Hay than through Melbourne. A further reason given in support of the proposed Ouyen-Kulwin connexion—which was estimated by Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, to cost £70,200—was that Ouyen was the head-quarters of the Walpeup Shire Council, and was the largest and most progressive town in that part of the Mallee, having banks, stores, flour mill, and cool stores. The soldier settlers wished this connexion, not only because it would bring them in closer touch with Ouyen, where the parents of some of them resided, but would enable them to take advantage of the daily and quicker train service on the Mildura line when visiting their relatives and friends in the Donald, Hopetoun, and Wimmera districts. Sea Lake, the nearest town by rail, was 36 miles from Kulwin, or just twice the distance to Ouyen. Doctors are in practice at Ouyen, and it is intended to erect a district hospital there.

16. Other connexions between the Mildura and Kulwin railways asked for were from Speed to Nyarrin, about 16½ miles; Turriff to Ninda, 18 miles; and Birchip to Wycheproof, 19 miles, each of which would cost about £4,000 a mile to construct. It was suggested, however, that instead of building the line direct from Birchip to Wycheproof it should be taken southward for a few miles

to the plains of Thalia, and thence eastward to Wycheproof, so as to better serve the lands in the northern part of the Corack East district, which were more productive than those on the southern side. This deviation would lengthen the proposed connexion to about 22 miles.

17. While none of the suggested connexions between the Mildura and Kulwin (Sea Lake) lines would shorten the distance from Mildura to Melbourne by rail by more than 3 miles or so compared with the present route *via* Donald and Maryborough, thus leaving fares and goods rates practically the same as now, it was pointed out that any of them would lessen the distance between Mildura and Bendigo by about 50 miles compared with the existing route *via* Maryborough and Castlemaine. Fresh fruits were sent from Mildura to Bendigo for canning and jam-making, and various manufactures from Bendigo to Mildura, so that this saving in distance and freight rates was a consideration in maintaining and expanding that trade. Moreover, Bendigo is a good live stock market, and freezing works are being established there. Furthermore, having direct railway connexion with Bendigo would allow the Mildura express train to be run to and from Melbourne through that city without passengers having to change carriages at either Castlemaine or Maryborough, as now.

OPPOSITION TO THE MILDURA-KULWIN CONNEXION.

18. The suggested linking up of the Mildura and Kulwin (Sea Lake) railways was opposed by the municipal councils and traders of Maryborough and Ballarat. They contended there was no real public need for such a connexion; that it would divert traffic from the Maryborough-Donald-Birchip line and turn the railway into an unprofitable one; and that established trade relations between both Ballarat and Maryborough and railway towns on the Mildura line would be disturbed and probably lessened by the trains being run through Bendigo instead of Maryborough. This diversion of traffic would, they said, tend to centralize business in Melbourne, and also delay consignments of perishable fruits, such as grapes, apricots, and citrus fruits from Mildura to Maryborough and Ballarat, as they would, being less than truck-load consignments, most likely be carried by way of Bendigo, and have to be transferred at Castlemaine, causing extra handling and deterioration.

TRANSFER OF RAILWAY ROLLING-STOCK.

19. A reason that was frequently urged in support of these cross-country railway connexions was that they would allow the Railway Department to transfer its rolling-stock, particularly goods and live-stock trucks, from one part of the State to another, and thus secure economy in handling traffic and assist in meeting the increasing demand for trucks. The Railways Commissioners, however, informed the Committee that in practice such transfers of rolling-stock would be rarely made, because the seasons and production were much the same throughout the whole of the Mallee country, and consequently there was little interchange of commodities. For instance, any empty trucks in the Wimmera or Southern Mallee in the grain season could always be filled in those districts with wheat for the sea-board. It was the same with trucks unloaded in the Northern or Eastern Mallee in the grain season; they too would be filled with wheat offering at the same or neighbouring stations. In the spring the movement of sheep and lambs, particularly the latter, from both the Southern and Northern Mallee was to the freezing works at Melbourne or Geelong. In the winter any trucks unloaded in the Wimmera or Southern Mallee were required at stations in the vicinity of Stawell or Ararat to load firewood, and those emptied at stations on the Donald-Ouyen line were wanted at stations between St. Arnaud and Maryborough for the same purpose. Therefore the proposed connexions would be of little or no value to the Department for the transfer of rolling-stock, and the Commissioners do not require them for that purpose.

RAILWAY GRADES AND TRAFFIC ROUTES.

20. Passengers generally travel by the shortest and quickest railway route. But with goods the way they are transported is left to the discretion of the Railway Department, which, however, charges the freight on the shortest available route, though the goods may, for departmental reasons, be hauled the longer way, on which the grades are easier and the haulage costs, perhaps, less. It is not usually recognised that our first railways were constructed to Ballarat and Bendigo, where gold happened to be found and where large populations were consequently attracted. Later on the Ballarat line was extended westward to Beaufort, Ararat, and Stawell, where gold had also been discovered, and the Bendigo line was carried to Maryborough, Dunolly, and St. Arnaud, where mining too was the main industry. Subsequently these gold-field railways were further extended into the Wimmera and Northern agricultural districts and became main lines. As gold-field railways they were in their best positions, but as main lines from productive agricultural districts they were wrongly located, having bad grades, switchback contours, and reaching altitudes of about 1,800 feet. This defect, so far as the Ballarat extension is concerned, has been largely rectified by building the Maroona and Gheringhap railway across the Western Plains *via* Cressy, which gives a steady falling grade from Ararat to the sea-board at Geelong.

21. No improved route, however, has been provided for the midland gold-fields or Maryborough line. But it was suggested that this could be done by diverting the traffic from the Mildura railway (which traverses country having easy grades as far south as Cope Cope, on the Melbourne side of Donald) at some point near Donald, Watchem, or Birchip on to either the Charlton-Bendigo line or the Hopetoun Murtoa line, and thus lessen the haulage charges to the sea-board by transferring the traffic on to lines having easier grades. It was this desire to alter the routing of the traffic that gave rise to so many proposed connexions, as it was generally recognised that the local traffic which any of those connexions would secure would in itself be insufficient to make the connecting link a payable undertaking, and therefore the heavy through wheat traffic would have to be diverted on to it to make the new line a profitable one. Until within the last year or so the maximum trainload on the Cope Cope-Maryborough-Castlemaine route was 270 tons, whilst on the Charlton-Bendigo line it was 385 tons. Recently, however, the former route has been laid with heavier rails between Cope Cope and Maryborough, and this is being continued on to Castlemaine. This has enabled more powerful locomotives of the "A2" class to be used thereon, increasing the trainload to 351 tons. The slight advantage in tonnage load which the Charlton route now has over the Maryborough line is, as is shown in the tables given later on, more than counterbalanced by the shorter mileage (187½) from Watchem *via* Donald, Maryborough, and Ballarat to Geelong, as compared with 204½ from Watchem by way of Corack, Charlton, and Bendigo to Williamstown, and the country from Watchem through Corack to Charlton being more undulating, limiting the train load to 385 tons as against 780 tons which can be hauled over the comparatively level stretch from Watchem to Cope Cope. The cost of hauling 200,000 tons of wheat from Watchem to Geelong *via* Maryborough and Ballarat was calculated by the Railway Department to be £38,262, as compared with £39,440 for transporting the same tonnage from Watchem by way of Corack, Charlton, and Bendigo to Williamstown. The grades from Watchem through Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Ararat, and the Western Plains line *via* Cressy to Geelong are much more favorable, as much as 975 tons being drawn over the section from Murtoa to Glenorchy. The minimum load is between Glenorchy and Stawell, but even on that section it reaches 520 tons. Although the mileage by this route is much longer (237¾), the larger loads hauled reduce the cost of transporting 200,000 tons to £31,244, or a saving of over £7,000 compared with the haulage charges on the other two lines.

22. Some years ago locomotives of the "V" class were employed on the Charlton-Bendigo line, and their load was as high as 493 tons. But while hauling larger loads they were, because of their construction, slow locomotives, and were, consequently, unsuited for mixed trains, which had to make connexions with main lines. They were therefore transferred to other districts.

COST OF HAULAGE BY DIFFERENT ROUTES.

23. The Committee ascertained from the manager of the Victorian Wheat Commission that during 1916-17 there were 228,000 tons of wheat received at stations Donald to Mildura and Tiega to Pamitya (Ouyen-Murrayville line) inclusive, and that in 1917-18 the quantity received at those stations was 122,600 tons, making a total of 350,600 tons, or an average of 175,300 tons for each season. He added that the bulk of this wheat was railed to Geelong, but the Railway Department put the quantity at a little less than half. Allowing for future development of that portion of the Mallee, the Committee asked the Railway Department to inform it what would be the expense of hauling 200,000 tons of wheat from Watchem, which was taken as a common point, to Geelong by the existing route *via* Maryborough and Ballarat, and also by the proposed route *via* Warracknabeal, Murtoa, and the Western Plains line. It also asked to be furnished with the cost of hauling a similar tonnage from Watchem through Corack, Charlton, and Bendigo to Williamstown, and from Watchem *via* Warracknabeal, Murtoa, Western Plains line, and North Geelong to Williamstown. The following tables were furnished showing the costs:—

Section.	Route Mileage.	Schedule Load.	Number of Trains required.	Total Train Mileage, One Way.	Approximate Cost of hauling 200,000 Tons of Wheat.
		Tons.			£
WATCHEM TO GEELONG <i>via</i> MARYBOROUGH AND BALLARAT.					
Watchem to Cope Cope	27½	780	401	11,028	
Cope Cope to Maryborough	63	351	910	57,330	
Maryborough to Ballarat	42½	351	910	38,675	
Ballarat to Warrenheip	4	351	910	3,640	
Warrenheip to Geelong	50½	936	334	16,867	
Total	187½	127,540	38,262

COST OF HAULAGE BY DIFFERENT ROUTES—*continued.*

Section.	Route Mileage.	Schedule Load.	Number of Trains required.	Total Train Mileage. One Way.	Approximate Cost of hauling 200,000 Tons of Wheat.
		Tons.			£
WATCHEM TO GEELONG <i>via</i> MURTOA AND CRESSY.					
Watchem to Warracknabeal	29	750	418	12,122	
Warracknabeal to Murtoa	31½	750	418	13,063	
Murtoa to Glenorchy	22¾	975	320	7,280	
Glenorchy to Stawell	12½	520	607	7,588	
Stawell to Ararat	19	592	532	10,108	
Ararat to Geelong	123¼	715	438	53,874	
Total	237½	104,935	31,244
WATCHEM TO WILLIAMSTOWN <i>via</i> CHARLTON AND BENDIGO.					
Watchem to Charlton	30½	385	827	25,223	
Charlton to Bendigo	73	385	827	60,371	
Bendigo to Malmesbury	37½	351	910	33,898	
Malmesbury to Woodend	15	520	607	9,105	
Woodend to Sunshine	40¾	865	
Sunshine to Newport	5	845	370	1,850	
Newport to Williamstown	3¾	845	370	1,018	
Total	204½	131,465	39,440
WATCHEM TO WILLIAMSTOWN <i>via</i> MURTOA, CRESSY, AND GEELONG.					
Watchem to Warracknabeal	29	750	418	12,122	
Warracknabeal to Murtoa	31½	750	418	13,063	
Murtoa to Glenorchy	22¾	975	320	7,280	
Glenorchy to Stawell	12½	520	607	7,588	
Stawell to Ararat	19	592	532	10,108	
Ararat to North Geelong	121¾	715	428	53,352	
North Geelong to Williamstown	39¾	845	370	14,708	
Total	276	118,221	35,466

24. It was explained by the Department that it had not in the third table charged for any trains or train mileage in connexion with the haulage of wheat from Woodend to Sunshine, because this 40¾ miles had a falling grade all the way, and goods trains or locomotives running "light" from Bendigo to Melbourne could pick up the extra wheat loading at Woodend and take it to Sunshine at little extra expense.

DECENTRALIZATION POLICY.

25. The foregoing tables show it would be cheaper to haul the Mildura and Murrayville lines wheat from Watchem to Geelong either by the existing and shortest route, *via* Maryborough and Ballarat, or by the proposed longer route, by way of Murtoa, Ararat, and the Western Plains line, and even by the latter line to North Geelong and thence through Werribee to Williamstown, than it would be to take it over the suggested connexion *via* Corack to Charlton and thence through Bendigo, Woodend, Sunshine, Brooklyn, and Newport to Williamstown. A further table furnished by the Railway Department indicated that if the wheat were hauled from Watchem by way of St. Arnaud to Maryborough and thence through Castlemaine to Williamstown the expense of transporting 200,000 tons by that existing route would be £40,268, and when the strengthening of the line between Maryborough and Castlemaine, which is in hand, is completed—allowing "A2" locomotives to be used, and thus take larger loads—the charge would be £3,000 less, or £37,268, as compared with £39,440 from Watchem by way of Charlton and Bendigo to Williamstown.

26. Apart, however, from this lesser cost of railway haulage to Geelong, the decentralization policy adopted a few years ago with the concurrence of Parliament must continue to attract to that port wheat from stations on the Mildura and Murrayville lines intended for export. In pursuance of this policy the Railway Department allows a rebate in the freight rate on such wheat to Geelong, so that it will be at least 1s. 3d. per ton less than the railage charge to Williamstown. This is done to encourage the shipment of wheat at the outer ports, instead of concentrating the export

trade of the State in Melbourne. The principal production in the Mallee is wheat, and because of the limited rainfall in that part of Victoria it must always be the chief crop, wheat doing better than other cereals on a small rainfall. To divert the Mildura and Murrayville wheat traffic to Melbourne or Williamstown would be not only to increase the expense of transport but also to oppose the decentralization policy of the State. Therefore, on both these grounds the Committee set aside the proposal to link up the Donald-Ouyen (Mildura) and Charlton-Kulwin (Sea Lake) railways, as the main through traffic from that part of the State would not be diverted to that connexion.

MAINTENANCE OF SERVICE ON MARYBOROUGH LINE.

27. It was ascertained from the Railway Department that the general loading offering on the Maryborough-Mildura line is, under normal conditions, more than sufficient to provide full loads for the mixed train service on that line throughout the year, and that diverting the wheat traffic would not lessen the regular passenger train service on that line.

VIEWS OF THE RAILWAYS COMMISSIONERS.

28. In answering questions put to them by the Committee the Railways Commissioners stated through Mr. J. Conlan, Superintendent of Goods Train Service, that they favoured none of the proposed connexions. They were agreeable to any net sum left out of the £7,000 saved yearly by hauling the Mildura and Murrayville lines wheat to Geelong over the proposed easier route *viâ* the Hopetoun-Murtoa and Western Plains lines being used to meet the annual interest charge and maintenance expenses of the new connecting railway. But when all the necessary contingent charges were placed against that saving there would, they said, be little or nothing left to assist the new line. In the first place, in changing the route of this wheat traffic to Geelong it would be necessary to provide additional station-yard accommodation at Watchem and Warracknabeal, or wherever the junctioning stations were, and also at Murtoa. This would involve a total approximate capital outlay of £15,000, on which the interest charge would come to £800 or £900. Then it would be necessary, in order to facilitate the running of these wheat trains over the Western Plains line, and thus avoid standing time at roadside stations, to equip three stations, namely, Mininera, Vite Vite, and Doroq, with signals and train-crossing facilities and employ stationmasters at those places during the grain traffic season in lieu of the present caretakers. The capital expenditure on the signals, &c., and crossing lines would be, roughly, £9,000, on which the interest charge would be £540 per annum. The cost of the station staff would be £1,000, and to that would have to be added £1,000, representing the extra cost of maintenance of the truck stock, due to each train running by this route 50 miles more than by the existing line *viâ* Maryborough and Ballarat to Geelong. These expenses, with the interest charges, represented about £3,400 yearly to be deducted from the £7,000 saving. To that would have to be added the loss on operating the new line, as it would probably require a tri-weekly service if it were to accommodate the public, and this would mean a separate train and crew. The capital cost of that train would be approximately £22,000, and the interest charge thereon £1,300. Then the Department pointed out it would suffer some loss through passengers, goods, and live stock, which now passed over the existing route *viâ* Maryborough and Ararat, being carried over the shorter proposed route and lessening the travelling distance by some 130 or 140 miles. When all these items "and other non-assessable adverse factors in operating were taken into account," the Commissioners added, "it is reasonable to assume that the contemplated saving of £7,000 would be very considerably reduced, if not altogether absorbed."

29. Finally it was stated by them— "That if 200,000 tons of traffic were diverted from the Mildura railway in the grain season, plus the amount of traffic there will be from the Wimmera line (from Horsham and stations beyond) the question of having to duplicate the section of the main line between Glenorchy and Ararat, a distance of 32 miles, will have to be considered. That is another reason why the Commissioners would not like the diversion of such a large volume of traffic."

EXPORTING WHEAT AT PORTLAND.

30. A recommendation made by a Committee of the Cabinet to encourage the export of Wimmera-grown wheat at Portland was announced some months ago. It proposed that wheat railed at Horsham and stations west thereof should be transported over the railways to Portland at 2s. 6d. per ton less than to Williamstown, and 1s. 3d. below the rate to Geelong to encourage shipments at the western outer port. If this recommendation is given effect to and it causes Wimmera wheat to be exported in large quantities each season at Portland instead of Geelong or Williamstown there will be no need to duplicate the main line between Glenorchy and Ararat or to staff three extra stations on the Western Plains line, as suggested by the Railways Commissioners, to cope with the additional grain traffic. Indeed, the diversion of the Mildura line wheat to the Western Plains line ought in that case to be welcomed by them to keep the latter heavily-constructed and fairly well-equipped line occupied with traffic.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

31. The Committee is of opinion that the interest charge of £800 or £900 on the capital outlay in enlarging the accommodation at stations on the Mildura and Hopetoun lines at which the proposed connecting railway might junction, and also the charge of £1,000 for the increased expense of maintenance of truck stock due to the longer haulage by the new route to Geelong, would be proper debits against the saving of £7,000 arising from the easier grades and larger train loads over the Murtoa and Western Plains lines. It does not, however, consider the loss of railway revenue by carrying passengers, goods, and live stock over the proposed shorter route between Murtoa and the Mildura line as compared with the existing one *via* Ararat and Maryborough should be charged against the suggested connexion. To do so would be tantamount to a denial to any progressive policy in the railways of the State.

32. Should the bulk of the Wimmera wheat not be railed to Portland, and continue to be consigned to Geelong for export, it would be financially unsound in that case to divert the greater part of the Mildura-Murrayville lines grain to the Murtoa route, with the risk of having before long to duplicate the main line between Glenorchy and Ararat, at a cost of about £200,000, or £100,000 for a section of it, causing an interest charge of £11,000 or £5,500 a year, to effect a saving of probably £5,000 by transferring that grain traffic from the Mildura-Maryborough-Ballararat line to the Murtoa-Ararat-Cressy route.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE.

33. As it would be more expensive to haul the Mildura-Murrayville lines wheat *via* the Kulwin and Charlton railway to Williamstown for shipment than by the shorter existing railway by way of Maryborough and Ballarat to Geelong, or by the proposed longer route through Murtoa, Ararat, and Cressy, and would, moreover, be opposing the decentralization policy of exporting grain at an outer port, the Committee considers it inexpedient to link up the Donald-Ouyen railway with the Charlton-Kulwin (Sea Lake) line. The main traffic from the north-west part of the State would not be diverted over such a connexion, and consequently it would not be a paying line.

34. The distance between Ouyen and Kulwin is 18 miles, so that very few of the present or intending settlers in the parishes of Boorongie and Wagant should have more than 10 miles to cart their produce to a railway station. Whatever Mallee country there may be north of these parishes worth settling could be served by an extension northwards of the Kulwin line. The request to link up the Ouyen and Kulwin railways arose largely from the present difficulty of carting over the sandhills to either station. This drawback will before long be remedied by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission scraping the sand off the roads in the worst places and laying down limestone metal, allowing larger loads to be hauled, and so lessening the cartage period. The parish of Wagant has been surveyed into allotments, and this land will be thrown open for application as soon as there is a likelihood of water channels being extended into it.

35. With respect to the question of railway connexion with the district around Corack, the offer of the local farmers to either pay 6s. a ton extra railway rate for the carriage of their produce over the line, or, alternatively, to have their lands specially taxed to supplement the railway income to the extent of about £4,000 per annum for ten years is a generous one. It cannot be overlooked, however, that when either of these imposts ceased at the end of the stipulated period the railway would become an unprofitable one. Having regard to the cost of the line and rolling-stock, the gathering ground for traffic is not sufficiently large, and the production being mostly dry farming, will not be capable of large expansion, as in the case of an irrigable area, yielding enough tonnage to make the railway self-supporting after the withdrawal of either of these self-imposed rates. The Railways Commissioners informed the Committee that while the train and crew which would operate the proposed branch line to Corack East might be run for special services during the grain season over the Korong Vale-Wycheproof railway, "it would be found that for a considerable portion of the year they could not be fully employed daily." For these reasons the Committee is of opinion it is inexpedient to connect the Corack district by means of a railway with the existing railway system.

36. The evidence showed that the linking up of the Murtoa and Mildura lines would reduce the journey by rail between stations on those lines by about 140 miles, and therefore would be a great public convenience. The Committee is inclined to take a more hopeful view than the Railways Commissioners of the value of the proposed connecting railway between the Mildura and Murtoa lines. It considers such a connexion will in time develop traffic by affording facilities to the public to travel at less expense than at present, and also by providing means for an interchange of trade and transfer of live stock which are not now available.

37. Before arriving at a decision on a railway connexion between the Mildura and Murtoa lines the Committee desires to obtain from the Railways Commissioners their detailed estimates of revenue and working expenses for each of the following proposals :—Donald to Minyip, passing about 3 miles north of Laen Hall ; Watchem to Warracknabeal, passing within about a mile on the north side of Bangerang Hall, and thence along the 3-chain road to Warracknabeal ; and Lascelles to Hopetoun. In each case the estimates are to be for connexions leaving Donald, Watchem, and Lascelles stations on the south side, so that 'up' wheat and live-stock trains can be run through from one line to the other without the locomotive having to change ends. These estimates are now being prepared, and when they come to hand the Committee will make its recommendation to Parliament.

38. The Committee has forwarded for the consideration of the Honorable the Minister of Railways a copy of the evidence received concerning the need for railway connexion with the Patchewollock and Pine Plains country, as the reference to the Committee was the question of a cross-country line between the Hopetoun and Mildura railways, and it therefore had no authority under such reference to make a recommendation regarding a railway to the outlying country mentioned.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 21st September, 1920.

JAMES MENZIES,
Chairman.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]