

1921.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE

LAANECOOBIE DISTRICT CONNECTING
RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 26th October, 1921.

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EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 1921.

3. LINES OF RAILWAY REFERRED TO STANDING COMMITTEE.—Motion made and question—That the following questions be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report:—

* * * * * * * * *

3. The question of connecting the district of Laanecoorie with the existing railway system by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway.

* * * * * * * * *

—(Mr. Barnes)—put and, after debate, agreed to.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Fourteenth Committee.)

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

The Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A.,
A. F. Cameron, Esq., M.L.A.,
The Hon. W. Kendell, M.L.C.,

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

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the district of Laanecoorie with the existing railway system by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway, has the honour to report as follows :—

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT.

1. The Laanecoorie district is a flat stretch of fertile country in the Loddon Valley between Shelbourne, the terminus of the Castlemaine-Maldon branch railway, and the line from Dunolly to Inglewood, which runs northward and parallel with the Loddon River a few miles west of that stream. It is an old settled district, and the land is chiefly used for growing wheat, oats, and hay, and grazing sheep and cattle. The average annual rainfall is 20 inches. It is sound sheep country, and, it was stated, lambs do well, but they lost their bloom and depreciated in value when they had to be driven 8 or 10 miles to the railway trucking yards. The general yield of wheat is 20 bushels per acre; though last season up to 25 bushels were harvested in some instances, and oaten hay up to 2½ tons per acre. Witnesses stated that there were no large estates in the district, one holding of about 1,300 acres being the largest. The distance to cart to a railway station, 10 or 11 miles, had caused land to go out of cultivation. They added there was an area of about 28,000 acres of good agricultural land, extending from Eddington northward 9 miles along the Loddon Valley to Newbridge by a width of 5 miles, which would be benefited by the proposed extension from Shelbourne to Laanecoorie. The northern portion of this area would be within 3 or 4 miles of Llanelly railway station on the Dunolly Inglewood line, but it was uphill carting from Newbridge to that station. Moreover, Llanelly is 138½ miles by rail from Melbourne, as compared with 106 miles from Laanecoorie—if the Shelbourne line were extended to there. This difference in mileage, causing the rate of carriage of goods and live stock to the metropolis to be less, would, with the more level road, induce traffic to and from Laanecoorie in preference to Llanelly. It was represented that the railway in terminating at Shelbourne stopped at the edge of the cultivable country, and if it were extended 6½ miles to Cousen's Corner at Laanecoorie it would cause some 7,000 acres additional to be cropped annually, bringing the area under cultivation each year up to 19,000 acres. The remainder of the 28,000 acres would be rested in rotation each year, being allowed to go into grass for grazing. In support of this extension it was pointed out that it was a slightly hilly road to the present railway terminus at Shelbourne, and this somewhat limited the loads of the teams and added to the cartage charge. It costs 10s. or 11s. a ton to cart wheat and chaff from Laanecoorie and Eddington to Shelbourne station, and it was sometimes difficult to get carters at those rates. The earthworks, culverts, and bridges of the railway from Shelbourne towards Laanecoorie were partly constructed some 28 years ago for a distance of nearly 2 miles from the former place, but had never been completed. It was urged that the money expended on these works should be converted from a useless to a productive asset by finishing this section of the proposed railway and carrying it on to Laanecoorie. By affording facilities for getting cream away the extension would cause the rich river flats to be sown with lucerne and lead to closer settlement, as the smaller land-holders could then engage in dairying and pig-raising. It would also induce tourists' and week-end traffic over the railways to Laanecoorie Weir, where there was good fishing. A live-stock market was held fortnightly at Laanecoorie, and this would cause railway traffic in carrying cattle and sheep.

2. Scattered throughout the district is a quantity of box timber which, if the railway were extended to Laanecoorie would, it was said, be cleared off the lands suitable for agriculture and be despatched over the line for firewood and fencing purposes. There is also a large tonnage of redgum growing on the banks of the Loddon River and swampy places which would likewise be cut and used for railway sleepers, bridges, culverts, &c., or sent to market for building purposes. Across that river on the west side is a State Forest, from which additional supplies of box firewood, posts, &c., would be carted to the railway station at Laanecoorie, as a concrete bridge spanned the Loddon River close to that town. It was too far to cart firewood, &c., from the east side of this timber reserve to Tarnagulla railway station—some 6 miles or so—and, moreover, it would be

uphill carting over a bad road to that station. There was a good demand for this class of fuel at both Maldon and Castlemaine, particularly the latter town, where the large engineering workshops, woollen mills, brewery, and many householders required firewood for steaming and heating purposes. The firewood supplies obtainable in the Castlemaine district are rapidly becoming exhausted, and some of the fuel required is being brought by rail from Bealiba, 60 miles. It would not be more than 30 miles from Laanecoorie, and the difference in freight rate would be 3s. a ton. Gravel [suitable for ballast and road-making could] be obtained close to Laanecoorie.

LENGTH AND COST OF PROPOSED RAILWAY.

3. Mr. M. E. Kernot, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, informed the Committee that a railway from Shelbourne westwards to Cousen's Corner, Laanecoorie, would be $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length, of which 1 mile 69 chains is partly constructed, and that it would cost £41,300 to complete that section and extend the railway on to Cousen's Corner, Laanecoorie. This would be at the rate of £6,354 per mile, exclusive of rolling-stock. An inspection of the portion of the line partly constructed showed that the bridge over Bradford Creek, which was erected nearly 30 years ago, would have to be pulled down and re-built. The principal items of expenditure on the proposed extension were:—New 60-lb. rails for 7 miles, including sidings, £12,627; sleepers, 15,000, at 4s. 6d., £3,375; ballast, £5,798; earthworks, £2,991; restoration of existing works on partly-constructed line, £2,400; fencing, cattle guards, gates, £1,593; two residences for railway employees, £910; terminal station, £1,010; improved conditions for workmen engaged in constructing line, £1,780; engineering supervision and general expenses, £2,744; and provision for unforeseen contingencies, £1,967. These figures were for a railway with a ruling gradient of 1 in 50 against "up" traffic, and 1 in 70 against "down" traffic, and were based on a wage rate of 13s. 9d. per day for labourers and present cost of materials. To extend the railway from Shelbourne *via* Laanecoorie to the east side of the Loddon River opposite the township of Newbridge would cost £77,760 for a length of $13\frac{1}{4}$ miles.

4. The Committee considered that the existing useless works should be completed and utilized if this could be done at a reasonable cost. It would, however, be of little advantage to allow the line to terminate where the work ceased in a shallow cutting on a slight rise 2 miles from Shelbourne. The Committee therefore asked Mr. Kernot to supply it with an estimate of putting these works in order and laying the permanent way—sleepers, rails, and ballast—on that section and extending the railway about a mile further westward to Johnston's Corner on the main Dunolly-Bendigo road. He stated that this extension of 3 miles would cost £25,000, including provision for a terminal station. The Committee raised the question of extending the railway from Johnston's Corner northwards into the Parish of Woodstock instead of swinging it westwards to Laanecoorie. This route, however, found little local support, as such an extension would be of no service to the farmers around Eddington. It was stated that the farmers in the Parish of Woodstock mostly carted their grain, hay, &c., into Bendigo, and also drove their surplus live stock to that market.

A SECTION OF A MAIN LINE.

5. Several witnesses urged that the proposed railway extension from Shelbourne to Laanecoorie should be regarded as a section of a main line which would eventually be carried on to Newbridge and link up with the Dunolly Inglewood railway at either Llanelly or Arnold, thus affording a more direct route from the Korong Vale and the Eastern Mallee districts to Melbourne than by the existing route *via* Bendigo. When this matter, however, was brought under the notice of the Railways Commissioners they pointed out that the distance from Inglewood through Arnold and Laanecoorie to Castlemaine would be 47 miles, as compared with 53 miles over the existing route by way of Bendigo, but while the former was a few miles shorter, that advantage was more than counterbalanced by the steeper grade 1 in 40 as against 1 in 50—on the Laanecoorie-Shelbourne-Maldon route, and consequently it would be more expensive to divert any of the through tonnage from the Eastern Mallee to the proposed line, as the steeper grades would lessen the loads that could be hauled. The through tonnage would therefore still be taken by way of Bendigo, as at present.

RECOMMENDATION OF COMMITTEE.

6. It was stated by those who gave evidence that no farmer in the Laanecoorie district was more than 10 miles from an existing railway station. The distances which the witnesses were from a station were as follow:— $5\frac{1}{2}$, 8, 9, 10, $8\frac{1}{2}$, 5, and $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Some of these farmers were nearer to the Dunolly-Inglewood line than to Shelbourne station, and their grievance was that they had to pay a higher railway rate for the carriage of their agricultural produce and live stock from their station on that line to Melbourne than they would have to do from a railway

station at Laanecoorie. But this difference—1s. 2d. per ton more, the rate being 12s. 6d., as against 11s. 4d. on wheat, oats, &c., is not much, being less than $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per bushel, while the difference in the live-stock rate would be under 10s. a truck, or about 1s. per head on cattle and 1d. on sheep or lambs. Higher rates than these have to be paid on most of the wheat, sheep, and lambs railed in Victoria to the metropolis or the seaboard. The Committee would like to have recommended the completion of the partly-constructed railway works for nearly 2 miles beyond Shelbourne, so as to make them of value, and the extension of that section of the line a mile further to Johnston's Corner on the Dunolly-Bendigo main road, but the estimated cost of £25,000 was regarded as prohibitive. As the farmers in the Laanecoorie district are not too far from an existing railway station, and the roads are fairly good or could be made so, there being ample supplies of gravel available within reasonable cartage distance, and as supplies of firewood are still obtainable along the Castlemaine-Shelbourne line, the Committee is of opinion that it is inexpedient to construct a broad-gauge railway to Laanecoorie at an estimated outlay of £41,300.

R. F. TOUTCHER,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 25th October, 1921.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]