

1923.

VICTORIA.

---

## PROGRESS REPORT

FROM

### THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

### BORDER RAILWAYS TO OAKLANDS, NEW SOUTH WALES

(WAHGUNYAH-COROWA AND YARRAWONGA EXTENSIONS).

---

By Authority:

ALBERT J. MULLETT, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.

C.—No. 6.—[ ]—16404.

EXTRACTED FROM THE "BORDER RAILWAYS ACT 1922."

FIRST SCHEDULE.  
THE AGREEMENT.

- \* \* \* \* \*
48. The questions of connecting the Corowa and Wahgunyah railways, and extending the Yarrawonga railway or the Wahgunyah railway to or towards Oaklands to develop that country, including its coal deposits, shall be inquired into by the Government of Victoria, and the Government of New South Wales will provide facilities for making such inquiries. The Government of Victoria shall arrange for these inquiries to be made by the Victorian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways at early convenience. Should the said committee recommend the construction of either or any such railway between the said coal-fields and the Victorian railway system, or any other connexion provided for in this clause, the Victorian Government shall have the right to construct such railway or railways on the same terms and conditions, and shall work such railway or railways under the same conditions as are applicable to other railways to be constructed under this Agreement. Any bridge or bridges built in connexion with the said railway or railways shall form part of the capital cost of the said railway or railways, and shall be constructed at the cost of the Victorian Government.
- \* \* \* \* \*

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Fourteenth Committee.*)

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

The Hon. A. Bell, M.L.C.\*  
The Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A.,  
A. F. Cameron, Esq., M.L.A.,  
The Hon. G. L. Goudie, M.L.C.,†

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

\* The Hon. A. Bell was appointed on the 25th September, 1923.  
† The Hon. G. L. Goudie resigned on the 7th September, 1923.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

Printing ( copies) .. .. . £ s. d.

# PROGRESS REPORT.

---

THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Parliaments of New South Wales and Victoria, under the provisions of paragraph 48 of the Agreement ratified by the *Border Railways Act 1922*, referred the questions of connecting the Victorian railway system with Corowa, New South Wales, and either continuing that railway on to Oaklands or constructing a railway on the Victorian gauge from Yarrawonga across the Murray River to Oaklands, has the honour to report as follows :—

1. The Victorian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways has, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 48 of the *Border Railways Act*, passed by the Parliaments of New South Wales and Victoria in 1922, inspected the agricultural country proposed to be served by the railways mentioned in that paragraph, and has also inquired into the question of the effect these railways are likely to have in developing that country, including the coal deposits near Coorabin, a few miles north of Oaklands, over which the Riverina Collieries Limited has secured a lease from the New South Wales Mines Department.

2. Evidence concerning the proposed railways and the coal deposits was heard by the Committee at Benalla, Yarrawonga, Savernake, Oaklands, Corowa, Rutherglen, Albury, Wangaratta, Shepparton, and Melbourne.

3. The Committee expected it would have by this time completed its investigation, but several matters having an important bearing on the proposed railways have recently arisen, and until they are further advanced or finalized the Committee is not in a position to come to a conclusion as to the route or routes of the proposed railway or railways. In view, however, of the importance of the subject, the Committee thought it should give Parliament an indication of the result of its inquiries, so that those directly concerned may be acquainted with the present position of affairs.

## AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

4. The Committee is satisfied from the evidence and its inspection of the country around Mulwala, Savernake, Oaklands, Coreen, and Ringwood that the district has large agricultural possibilities, the soil being a good loamy one, suitable for the production of cereals, and there is a fair annual rainfall, sufficient for growing wheat and oats. The development of the country is, however, being retarded through the absence of railway facilities. Apart from any prospect of coal traffic being obtained from the Coorabin field, a railway to serve this district is fully warranted; and the Committee will make a recommendation to that effect in its next Report.

## COAL DEPOSITS.

5. Owing to several matters which are still pending the Committee is unable at this stage to recommend the route or routes of the proposed railway or railways. Should the coal deposits at Coorabin come up to expectations, and the working costs be as anticipated, there is likely to be a large tonnage of that fuel transported yearly over the proposed railway to towns in the North-Eastern District of Victoria for power and household purposes. The Riverina Collieries Limited advised the Committee that the directors recently determined to sink a second shaft to the coal seam. When it has been sunk and the mine is sufficiently opened up, coal experts, representing the Victorian Government, will make an inspection of the coal seam and workings to estimate the traffic likely to be despatched from the colliery over the proposed railway. The evidence of Mr. L. J. Jones, Geological Surveyor, Department of Mines, New South Wales, showed that bores had been put down on the Coorabin coal-field, and had passed through a seam averaging 20 feet in thickness, extending over an area of 4 square miles. The coal was reached at a depth of about 200 feet. Analyses of the coal showed that the moisture content was from 12 to 14 per cent., whereas in the bituminous coals in the Illawarra and Western Districts of New South Wales the moisture content is from 1 to 3 per cent. The moisture content of the brown coals of Victoria ranges up to 50 per cent. The samples obtained indicated that the Coorabin coal is dull black in

appearance, and is regarded as intermediate in character between the lignite and sub-bituminous groups, with features of the latter predominating. Until the inspection of the Riverina Collieries Limited Mine has been made by the Victorian officers and the prospective traffic in coal over the proposed railway estimated, the Committee is unable to determine the route of the railway to develop that coal-field from the stand-point of the demand in Victoria for that fuel.

#### ELECTRIC POWER.

6. Another matter that has recently arisen is the proposal under the consideration of the River Murray Commission to double the capacity of the Hume Reservoir on the Upper Murray River above Albury. It is being urged that if this storage is enlarged it will enable electric power and heat to be generated the whole year round by the waters flowing from the reservoir. If effect be given to this suggestion the supply of electric power and heat from the Hume hydro-electric scheme must have some effect upon the demand for Coorabin coal in the North-Eastern District of Victoria. The River Murray Commission is expected to come to a decision at an early date regarding this proposal, and when its determination is known the Committee will have guidance in that direction.

#### IRRIGATION SETTLEMENT.

7. Dr. Elwood Mead, who was recently commissioned by the New South Wales Government to report upon the allocation of the Murray waters for irrigation, has submitted his report thereon to the New South Wales authorities. In dealing with the irrigation of lands in the Upper Murray districts of New South Wales he states that, after providing water for the Lower Murray territory, there will be a surplus left sufficient to water 70,000 acres in the Upper Murray districts. He said :—

“ While far more land can be supplied by gravity than can be irrigated, not all is suitable. On the contrary, the sub-soil over a large part is too close in texture to give good results. A careful soil study of the area which can be commanded by gravity or by a low pumping lift between Albury and Barham should therefore be made. It is believed that areas of 5,000 to 10,000 acres can be found suited to intense culture, and it is possible that much larger ones exist. . . . The first step in the investigation should be a conference of engineers and agricultural experts of the State Government. They know the approximate locations of the good land. The approved areas should then be thoroughly investigated by a soil expert, the chief feature of his work being frequent borings to a depth of 4 to 6 feet to determine the character of the sub-soil, this being an important factor in the penetration of water and of the roots of plants.”

8. The Committee when inspecting the country observed some good loamy lands around Coreen, Ringwood, and Savernake, which it thinks may be found to be suitable for irrigation. It hopes that the suggestion of Dr. Elwood Mead to have these lands tested to determine their irrigable value will be carried out by the New South Wales authorities at an early date, as the location of an important irrigation settlement will have a bearing on the determination of the route of the proposed railway to Oaklands.

#### THIRD RAIL PROPOSAL.

9. The estimated cost of bridging the Murray River at Corowa to carry the Victorian railway system into New South Wales is greater than the cost of a railway bridge from Yarrawonga across that stream to Mulwala. On this being pointed out to the advocates of the Corowa connexion they suggested, as a set-off against this additional expense, that extra traffic could be obtained from the Corowa-Culcairn railway to compensate for the larger outlay if a third rail were laid from Corowa to or towards Culcairn to enable Victorian trains to carry traffic to and from stations on that line. It was urged that an equitable basis could be arrived at between the Governments of the two States regarding the Victorian cost of laying the third rail and providing new sleepers required to carry that rail, as those in use on the Corowa-Culcairn line are only 8 feet in length, while 8 ft. 6 in. or 9-ft. sleepers would be necessary to support a third rail.

10. The Committee is aware that the third rail proposal has been rejected by the New South Wales and Victorian railway authorities as a solution of the break-of-gauge problem, because of the difficulty in operating the railway points at a busy country station or at such terminals as Sydney and Melbourne. While the proposition cannot because of this difficulty be accepted as a substitute for a uniform railway gauge for Australia, the Committee is of opinion that steps should be taken to prove whether the third rail is a workable method on Border branch lines where there are only two or three trains daily, and where no trouble would be experienced in operating the points at station approaches, inasmuch as on nearing a station a slight detour

would be made by a line of the Victorian gauge. This would obviate any interference with the operation of the branch railway by the New South Wales rolling-stock, and at the same time, if separate loading platforms or sidings were provided at the stations for Victorian freight and live stock, there would be no confusion of traffic. Running rights over the section laid with the third rail could be granted by the New South Wales authorities for a few years on terms to be arranged on either a rental or a tonnage or train-mileage basis so that the experiment might be given a fair trial under ordinary working conditions.

11. It is suggested by the Committee that as a third rail has already been laid at Tocumwal station, negotiations should be opened up between the Victorian and New South Wales Governments to allow the third rail to be extended to, say, Finley, the first station, or to Berrigan, the second. This short section would be a sufficient length over which to make the trial, and less expenditure would be involved on the Tocumwal-Berrigan line than on the Corowa-Culcairn railway. If the trial were a success the question of extending the third rail proposition to the latter line could then be considered. It is urged by the Committee, in view of the desirableness of an early conclusion being reached regarding the third rail proposal, that this matter be dealt with by the two Governments as soon as possible.

R. F. TOUTCHER,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
Melbourne, 23rd October, 1923.