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VICTORIA.

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R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

KINGLAKE DISTRICT CONNECTING RAILWAY  
(HURSTBRIDGE AND WHITTLESEA EXTENSIONS);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 5.—[9D].—16038.



# R E P O R T.

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

## DESCRIPTION OF KINGLAKE DISTRICT.

1. The Kinglake district is on the Dividing Range from 30 to 40 miles north-east of Melbourne. It has an altitude of about 1,800 feet. The foothills are some 700 or 800 feet above sea level. From the southern side the hills ascend rapidly, though not abruptly, the 1,000 feet rise to the Kinglake tableland being reached in a climb of 3 miles or so. There is a plateau extending from Kinglake West to Kinglake East—a distance of about 10 miles. It has a width of some 5 miles, making a tableland of approximately 50 square miles, or 30,000 acres. The fall on the northern slope of the Dividing Range is more gradual than that on the south. In the northern descent the country falls off in quality, being mostly light or grazing land, though there are some narrow, fertile flats along the valleys of King Parrot Creek on the west side towards Flowerdale, and somewhat wider ones adjoining the banks of the Yea River on the east in the vicinity of Glenburn. The soil on the Kinglake tableland is of a reddish chocolate colour, and of good quality. It is not, however, volcanic land, though some local residents speak of it as such. The geological map of Victoria indicates that while the rocks at Mount Disappointment—the highest part of the Dividing Range near Kinglake—are of granite, the soil on the Kinglake tableland and hill slopes is silurian. That on the declivities is grey in colour, and is not so fertile. The land on the foothills is well suited for the growth of apples, pears, and vines; and, being fairly well sheltered from the strong winds, the former fruits hang on the trees till ripe. The whole of the Dividing Range is thickly timbered, except where trees suitable for milling have been cut out, or where patches of land have been cleared for orchards or the production of root crops, vegetables, and nursery stocks. On the rises the inferior classes of timber, such as stringybark, peppermint, and apple box, predominated, but on the tableland the better commercial varieties, namely, messmate, bluegum, and mountain ash or blackbutt, are mostly met with, the first-mentioned being in the largest number. For the past fifteen years sawmillers have been operating in the Kinglake district—the timber cut in the western part being either carted or hauled over a wooden tramway from 12 to 16 miles to Whittlesea station, while that milled in the eastern portion was carted to Yarra Glen or Hurstbridge, about a similar distance. This long transport of sawn timber by road could not have been successfully carried on were it not that the railway rates from the stations named to Melbourne are low, because of the short distances to the metropolitan market, compared with the charges from other saw-milling districts. Moreover, the messmate on the Kinglake tableland, being of slow growth, is not so sappy, and is closer in the grain and harder or more durable than timber growing at about the same altitude in other parts of this State. It has been largely in demand for railway works and bridges, and also for the framework of dwellings.

2. Kinglake has attractions both from hygienic and scenic aspects. It has, because of its altitude, a cool climate in summer and a bracing atmosphere in winter. Occasionally during the winter there are falls of snow, but it does not remain on the ground for more than a few hours. The approach to Kinglake from the western or Whittlesea side is an attractive one, the new road winding round the hillsides overlooking the prettily-timbered valley of Scrubby Creek—with its occasional fern gullies and patches of golden wattles intermingled with red and white heaths in bloom in the early spring—making this approach a picturesque one. The valley of King Parrot Creek is also an alluring place, and is frequented by many anglers in the fishing season. Along the main road traversing the tableland from Kinglake West to Kinglake East there are here and there avenues of tall gum trees, broken every now and then by a clearing, on which fruit trees, raspberries, gooseberries, potatoes, beans, turnips, or peas are growing around well-kept dwellings. From the summit of the Sugarloaf and the southern edge of the Kinglake tableland an extensive view is obtained overlooking the cultivated valleys of Arthur's Creek and the Plenty River, with the shining waters of Yan Yean reservoir in mid-distance, and the domes and towers of Melbourne beyond, with a glimpse of Port Phillip Bay on clear days. It is believed by the residents of Kinglake that if they had railway facilities to that district it would rapidly become a popular tourists' resort, being so close to Melbourne. Hitherto the bad roads—which are practically impassable in the winter—have kept the place back, both as regards production and visitors.

But this is being gradually remedied by the Country Roads Board, which has improved the grades of the roads and let contracts for metalling the worst portions. When the roads are completed, making Kinglake approachable at any time of the year, instead of in the summer months only, as now, the district should make steady headway if the necessary accommodation for week-end visitors and tourists be provided. Numerous motor cars and occasional charabancs visit the Kinglake tableland in the summer, when the roads are in good order; but hitherto with the first rains in autumn the place has been almost isolated till late in the spring, owing to the bad condition of the roads. It is expected, however, that within the next two or three years the work of the Country Roads Board will have so progressed that motorists will be enabled to visit Kinglake at any season.

3. Evidence was given before the Committee that, while good roads will be a great advantage to Kinglake, a railway is required to develop the production of the district. In the first place, a railway, it was said, would enable the land-owners to clear their holdings of the timber. Such trees as were unsuitable for milling purposes could be split into fencing posts—for which there is a good demand— or cut into firewood and sent to the metropolis for sale. Messmate and stringybark do not make such good fuel as grey box. Nevertheless, owing to the nearness of the Kinglake district to the metropolis, and the consequent lesser railway rate for the carriage of this somewhat inferior firewood to the Melbourne market, it could be retailed, it was asserted, at a cheaper price, which would attract buyers. Once the better land is cleared of timber it could be used in holdings of 50 or 100 acres for growing small fruits, such as raspberries, currants, gooseberries, and also vegetables and cut flowers. Potatoes, peas, beans, turnips, &c., do remarkably well in this district, the average annual rainfall being about 40 inches. These downpours occur fairly regularly throughout the twelve months, so that no part of the year is particularly dry, necessitating a reliance on irrigation to maintain the growth of these crops. It is necessary to spread artificial manures on the land each year if the small fruits and root crops are to give good yields. The charge for carting these fertilizers 12 or 16 miles from existing railway stations up the hills to the Kinglake tableland adds considerably to the cost of the manures, and this is one of the reasons given for the present backwardness of production, which would be remedied if nearer railway facilities were provided. It has been found that on the high-lying tableland some of the larger fruits, such as peaches, plums, and several varieties of apples, do not give good yields, the frost and drizzling rains in the spring during the blossoming period affecting the setting of these fruits. These trees give much better returns in the lower altitudes and sheltered valleys of Arthur's, Diamond, and Scrubby creeks. Witnesses stated that rape, millet, clover, and English grasses, when assisted by fertilizers, do well at Kinglake, and that the climate is not too cold for dairying, the milking season extending well into the autumn; the district being a late one, the fodder crops and grasses remain green right through the summer months.

4. Statistics submitted to the Committee by the Kinglake Railway League showed that there were in that district, including the areas of lighter lands northwards towards Flowerdale and Glenburn and the better country near Castella, about 50,000 acres only partly developed, because of the absence of railway and road facilities. Of this area 20,233 acres were occupied. The dry timber on private holdings comprised 3,295 acres, and the green 13,953, some of the latter being suitable for milling purposes. The population was set down at 535 persons, representing 132 families. The average area of cleared land per family was 20 acres. Over 1,000 acres were in orchards, and an additional 1,500 under cultivation. Raspberries gave an average yield of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tons to the acre. Potatoes averaged 5 tons, though in good seasons some of the fields gave up to 9 or 10 tons. There were close on 30,000 acres of Crown lands in the district. Most of this land is temporarily withheld from selection at the instance of the Forests Commission because it has some good saw-milling timber growing on it which the Commission considers should be cut out by sawmillers before the land is handed over to settlers. These areas are expected to yield at least 10,000 superficial feet, or close on 30 tons, of sawn timber per acre. Such timber, it was claimed, as was not suitable for milling could be used for fencing posts and firewood. The local opinion was that if the green timbered country had to be cleared in a face for cultivation it would cost from £20 to £30 per acre. The cost of carting farm produce from the Kinglake tableland to Hurstbridge or Whittlesea station was 20s. a ton when the roads were fairly good in the summer and early in autumn. Hitherto the whole of the cleared land was not cultivated as it should be, because the produce that could be grown could not be carted away before the roads became impassable with the first winter rains. But with a railway cultivation would largely expand.

#### STRATHEWEN DISTRICT.

5. The Strathewen district is in the upper portion of Arthur's Creek valley, lying on the east side of the Sugarloaf and at the foot of the southern slope of the Dividing Range about 900 feet below Kinglake West. It is a fruit-growing centre, apples, peaches, &c., yielding well in this

sheltered position. The fruit is carted either to Yan Yean station, on the Whittlesea railway, or to Hurstbridge, where some of it is put into cool stores, and the remainder railed to Melbourne. A fair portion of the fruit grown around Strathewen is, however, carted direct into Victoria Market, Melbourne. The reasons for this is that once the waggons reach the good roads at Hurstbridge they might just as well go straight on to the metropolis, thus saving the railway charges; the deterioration of the fruit by frequent handling (having to be placed in the railway trucks and then unloaded at Spencer-street Railway Yard and carted from there to Victoria Market); and the certainty of the fruit-grower getting his empty cases back. It was stated that if the railway were extended to Strathewen or to Mitton's Bridge—which is about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Strathewen, and to which a graded road could be easily made—the cartage of fruit from Upper Arthur's Creek valley to Melbourne would cease, as in that case it would pay the growers to send their fruit by rail. Statistics submitted to the Committee concerning Strathewen district were as follow:—Population, 105; area held, 6,000 acres; area of dry timber, 2,000 acres; area of green timber, 2,900 acres; area cultivated, 1,100 acres. The average annual rainfall in the Strathewen district is from 25 to 30 inches. There is no irrigation practised in this district, as in the northern fruit-growing settlements. Those adjoining Arthur's Creek could occasionally pump or divert water from it if required, and sites for small hillside dams are available should it be thought necessary to have some reserve of water available in an exceptionally dry season to irrigate the land once or twice.

#### CASTELLA-TOOLANGI DISTRICT.

6. To the east of the Kinglake district is the Castella Toolangi district, which also lies on the Dividing Range, but at a lower altitude than Kinglake East, which is some 5 or 6 miles distant. It was urged that a broad-gauge railway should be made from Yarra Glen northwards up Dixon's Creek valley on to The Gap in the Dividing Range at Castella. It was said that the settlers at Kinglake East could easily reach this railway terminus, as they would all be within from 5 to 10 miles of it by roads with an easy down grade, Castella being about 500 feet below the Kinglake East tableland. Or, alternatively, the railway could be carried westward to Kinglake East. Such a line would serve the tourist resort at Toolangi, which is 3 or 4 miles east of Castella, and likewise the dairy farmers and graziers on the Yea River to the north at Glenburn, besides securing all the sawn timber freight from the western part of the Victoria State Forest, which is now carted in waggons hauled by horses and bullocks to Yarra Glen station. This timber carting not only cuts up the road badly from Castella down View Hill to Yarra Glen, but the cost of carting is expensive, being from 3s. to 5s. per 100 superficial feet. The soil in the Castella district is a reddish brown, and of good quality. That at Toolangi is more reddish, and appeared to be slightly better. The rainfall in this district averages about 35 inches. It is heavily-timbered country, and the bulk of it will remain so, being permanently reserved for forestry purposes. Statistics submitted to the Committee by the local railway league showed that 121,000 acres, including Crown lands and forest reserves, would be served by a railway from Yarra Glen to Kinglake East and Toolangi. Of this area 25,000 acres were said to be suitable for growing root crops, 44,800 for raising cereal crops, being second-class land, while 51,000 acres were adapted for grazing only, being steep and third-class land. There were on the north and south slopes of the Dividing Range 14,424 acres of privately-owned lands, of which 4,899 acres had been grubbed ready for cultivation, 3,350 acres had been ringbarked, the remainder being green timber. The cost of clearing land for cropping was from £12 to £20 an acre. There were last season 230 acres under potatoes, which yielded 4 tons per acre; 485 acres under hay, which gave a return of 2 tons per acre, the crop being consumed locally; and 190 acres under fruit, which gave an average return of two cases per tree, or 38,000 cases, equalling 950 tons. The number of milch cows was 230, yielding 18 tons of butter during the year. Store stock numbered 350, and horses 250. In 1922 there were 169 tons of fertilizers brought into the district, and 150 tons of stores and sundries. Horse feed and necessities for the sawmills totalled 900 tons. The cartage charge from Toolangi to Yarra Glen for farm and orchard produce was from 20s. to 30s. per ton, and for general merchandise from Yarra Glen up hill to Toolangi it was 30s. in summer and 40s. to 60s. in winter.

7. It was stated there are 64,000 acres in the Glenburn district, of which 38,000 are fit for cultivation, 350 acres being cropped annually—the produce being for local consumption. There are 2,985 acres of river and creek flats which are irrigable. The hill slopes gave  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tons of hay per acre, and the flats up to 3 tons. Potatoes yielded from 4 to 8 tons. The grazing capacity of the land was from one to three sheep per acre. The average annual rainfall was close on 30 inches. There were 50,000 sheep in the district, clipping 156 tons of wool, 4,000 head of store stock, and 700 horses. Also 20 acres of orchard, producing 50 tons of fruit. The population of the Castella, Toolangi, and Glenburn districts totalled 1,100. From 1,000 to 1,500 people visited these districts annually, and with railway facilities the number would largely increase. The gathering ground for these statistics was from 5 miles north of Yarra Glen; 5 miles on each

side of the proposed line: and 16 miles north of the suggested terminus at Campbell's Creek, Castella. It was claimed by the advocates of this line that it would tap 600,000 tons of firewood and "many millions of superficial feet of sawn timber" from Victoria State Forest and private lands. There are two roads to Toolangi—one from Healesville, which is being constructed by the Country Roads Board, and another from Yarra Glen. The latter is unmetalled for the greater part, and is very steep ascending View Hill. It was also in need of repair when the Committee travelled over it a few months ago.

#### KANGAROO GROUND AND CHRISTMAS HILLS DISTRICT.

8. In urging that the railway from Eltham to Kinglake should pass through Kangaroo Ground and along Watson's Creek to Christmas Hills, where it would turn north, ascending Mount Misery, Mount Beggary, and Cookson's Hill to Kinglake East, it was pointed out that this line would traverse a district rich in beauty spots, and serve 2,000 acres of fertile black volcanic land at Kangaroo Ground and some good alluvial flats along Watson's Creek valley. It was claimed that Christmas Hills district is one of the healthiest places in Victoria, and that the extensive views from the soldiers' memorial on Garden Hill, Kangaroo Ground, and from eminences at Christmas Hills overlooking the Yarra flats, with the high hills beyond Healesville as a background, were unsurpassed in the State. The advocates of this route stated the railway would not have to compete with motor traffic, as on the Queenstown one; that with railway facilities near at hand the rich lands at Kangaroo Ground would become closely settled, being used for market gardens instead of cereal-growing as now; and that a new tourists' route would be opened up within such a short distance of Melbourne that the cheap fares would attract a constant large passenger traffic. There was sufficient firewood in the district to last for the next fifteen years at least, and as the land became cleared it would be put under cultivation and used for dairying or hay and fruit-growing. Whilst it was admitted that Christmas Hills Post Office is within 5 miles of Yarra Glen railway station, a witness said:—"The effective distance is much greater, for to get to Yarra Glen we have to climb nearly 500 feet to the top of the big hill, and then descend 750 feet into the Glen."

#### COST OF RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION.

9. The great obstacle to the extension of a railway to the Kinglake district is the high cost of construction, which ranges from £18,230 to £23,500 per mile for a broad-gauge line, according to the route. On all the routes the large quantity of earthworks is due to the roughness of the country and steepness of the hillsides encountered in climbing up to the Kinglake tableland necessitating deep cuttings, high embankments, and bridges, even when a ruling grade of 1 in 30 and curves of 8 chains radius, the steepest and sharpest permissible, have been adopted, as in the case of all these routes. The estimates for the first or lower portions of the distances are based on trial surveys made some years ago, but the remainder of the lengths on to the tableland are the result of inspections only made by engineers of the Construction Branch with the assistance of the aneroid. They reported that as the height to be attained in the lengths or mileages stated was so "close"—leaving so little to come and go upon—it would be desirable if any route were chosen for recommendation by the Committee, a flying or trial survey should first be made to prove that the line is practicable at about the cost estimated. The following are the estimates of length and cost of the several proposals furnished by Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, based on the reports of his officers:—

Route.	Length.		Ruling Grade.	Sharpest Curve.	Rate per Mile.	Estimated Cost.	Based on—
	Miles.	Feet.					
1. Eltham to Christmas Hills	12.17	1 in 40	15 c.r.	20,870	254,000	Trial survey	
2. Christmas Hills to Kinglake East, <i>via</i> Cookson's Hill	10.0	1 in 30	8 c.r.	22,100	221,000	Inspection	
3. Yarra Glen to Castella (Toolangi)	11.69	1 in 40	12 c.r.	24,770	293,800	Trial survey	
4. Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, <i>via</i> Queenstown, Strathewen, and Sugarloaf Creek valley	21.5	1 in 30	8 c.r.	18,230	392,000	Part trial survey, part inspection	
5. Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, <i>via</i> Queenstown, Strathewen, and Arthur's Creek valley	20.5	1 in 30	8 c.r.	21,950	450,000	Part trial survey, part inspection	
6. Hurstbridge to Kinglake West, <i>via</i> Arthur's Creek township and Sugarloaf valley	16.25	1 in 30	8 c.r.	20,000	325,000	Part trial survey, part inspection	
7. Hurstbridge to Kinglake East, <i>via</i> Queenstown, Yow Yow Creek, and Cookson's Hill	15.5	1 in 30	8 c.r.	20,400	316,000	Part trial survey, part inspection	
8. Whittlesea to Kinglake West, <i>via</i> Scrubby Creek	10.5	1 in 30	8 c.r.	23,520	247,000	Inspection	
9. Hurstbridge to Mitton's Bridge, <i>via</i> Queenstown	7.75	1 in 40	12 c.r.	13,000	100,800	Trial survey	
10. Hurstbridge to Strathewen, <i>via</i> Queenstown and Mitton's Bridge	10.5	1 in 30	8 c.r.	14,700	154,400	Part trial survey, part inspection	
11. Whittlesea to Scrubby Creek	3.0	1 in 75	15 c.r.	8,000	24,000	Inspection	

## CLOSER SETTLEMENT SCHEME FOR KINGLAKE DISTRICT.

9. Mr. W. McIver, Director of Land Settlement, when giving evidence before the Committee said that the areas of Crown lands in the Kinglake district were as follow :—At Queenstown township (St. Andrew's), 460 acres ; on the southern fall of the Dividing Range, between the headwaters of Sugarloaf and Diamond creeks, 4,200, and on the east side of the Queenstown-Kinglake East-road, towards Tarrawarra North, 7,000 acres ; in the parish of Kinglake, between its northern boundary and Yea River, 6,000 acres, mostly abutting on Island Creek ; in the parish of Billian, between its western boundary and Yea River, and south of the western alignment of Glenburn pre-emptive, 6,500 acres ; and in the parish of Flowerdale, bordering on King Parrot and Pheasant creeks, approximately 8,000 acres. He considered that if the Queenstown township sites were re-surveyed into larger allotments than the existing ones of 1 to 15 or 20 acres they would be readily applied for, with a railway to Queenstown, notwithstanding that the soil on some of these blocks is not very good. The remainder of the Crown lands at Kinglake, on which messmate and blackbutt are growing on the higher country, and stringybark, box, and peppermint on the lower hill slopes, had been withheld from selection at the instance of the Forests Commission pending the felling of the timber suitable for milling purposes. There are three sawmills operating on those Crown lands, including the Flowerdale Sawmilling Company on the Pheasant and King Parrot creeks side ; and it would be a few years before the whole of the area is cut out. The Crown lands on the Kinglake tableland had been formerly selected, some by speculators in Melbourne under the non-residence clause of the Land Act, and some by *bonâ fide* settlers, who had been compelled after a few years of struggle to abandon their holdings owing to the absence of good roads and the long distance to Whittlesea or Hurstbridge stations. In these cases the land had reverted to the Crown, the leases being forfeited for non-payment of rent or non-compliance with conditions. If the Kinglake tableland is to be developed, it was, he considered, necessary to deal with that country under a comprehensive land scheme, with a group settlement. As the best of the land was at Kinglake East and beyond towards Glenburn, he suggested that the Hurstbridge railway should be extended to Mitton's Bridge, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north of Queenstown, and 6 miles by the main road from Kinglake East Post Office. This was practically to the foot of the Dividing Range ; and the railway could be extended to there at a reasonable cost. Much of the land on the Kinglake plateau is, in his opinion, suitable for the production of small fruits and market-garden produce ; but the district, having an elevation of close on 2,000 feet, is not a good one for dairying. If some 5,000 or 6,000 acres of the privately-held lands which are not being properly worked were resumed under the compulsory provisions of the Land Act and they were merged with the available Crown lands into a compact area, which would be re-subdivided into holdings of 50 or 75 acres, and if the subsidiary roads were re-located so as to obtain easy grades, and they and the main roads were metalled, he thought some 250 or 300 settlers could be placed on the land at Kinglake under the Mountain Area Settlement conditions with good prospects of success, even though some of them might be 10 or 12 miles from Mitton's Bridge station. It would be all downhill carting over a good metalled road to that station. In carrying out this scheme there would have to be co-operation between the Closer Settlement Board, the Country Roads Board, and the Railway Construction Branch. It would also be necessary, Mr. McIver added, to have an amendment of the Land Act, because the owner under the compulsory resumption provisions had power to retain £6,000 worth of land where there is a homestead on it, and £2,500 where there is none. The retention of that law practically prohibited any compulsory land resumption in hilly districts like Kinglake.

## TRAFFIC AND FINANCIAL RESULTS, HURSTBRIDGE LINE.

10. Prior to the construction of the railway from Eltham to Hurstbridge the line from Heidelberg to Eltham was a non-paying one. But with the extension of the outer suburbs the open country between Heidelberg and Greensborough became more and more built upon, until it is now a well-populated residential area. This additional passenger traffic and the extra tonnage of goods carried over the Eltham railway as the result of the line being extended to Hurstbridge so improved the receipts of the former railway that it ceased to be non-paying. There are many residing in the Hurstbridge district who believe that if their line is extended towards Kinglake it too in a few years will become a profitable undertaking, as the land along the Hurstbridge railway is being rapidly built upon, and before long this rural district will also become an outer suburban residential area. Recently an additional station—Montmorency—was erected on that line to meet the increasing passenger requirements. A study of the following table shows that, while the passenger and goods traffic and the earnings over the Hurstbridge line have exceeded the estimates made before the railway was authorized, the working expenses have more than

correspondingly increased, causing the undertaking to have a worse financial result than was anticipated when this extension of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles was recommended for construction by the Committee some years ago :—

		Estimated, 1908.	Actual, 1913.	Actual, 1916.	Actual, 1921.	Actual, 1922.	Actual, 1923.
Capital cost of construction .. ..	£	43,000	41,693	43,856	45,044	45,660	45,685
Passengers, outwards .. ..	..	16,988	31,213	40,147	60,147	61,382	66,829
Goods, outwards .. ..	Tons	5,176	4,485	8,273	13,510	9,825	11,239
Goods, inwards .. ..	Tons	611	3,326	8,313	3,534	3,073	5,423
Revenue .. ..	£	2,520	2,391	3,287	5,496	5,625	5,710
Working expenses .. ..	£	1,172	2,775	3,324	6,950	8,840	10,490
Interest charge .. ..	£	1,770	1,742	1,804	2,357	2,501	2,675
Annual loss .. ..	£	422	2,126	1,841	3,811	5,719	7,455

11. While the capital cost of the line has been increased but slightly, the interest charge has advanced. This is mostly due to the growth in passenger traffic requiring more rolling-stock, on the cost of which interest has to be paid. The decline in the tonnage of outwards goods in 1922, as compared with 1921, arose chiefly from the large demand for firewood (irrespective of quality) in the latter year because of the then scarcity of coal. But when coal again came freely forward from New South Wales collieries in 1922 the demand for firewood from the Hurstbridge district fell away. A further reason is that much of the firewood within a reasonable carting distance of that station has been cut out.

#### VIEW OF THE COMMITTEE.

12. The Committee admits it was faced with difficulties in dealing with the question of railway connexion with Kinglake or of extending the Hurstbridge or Whittlesea lines towards that district. A railway to Kinglake from any direction would not pay for many years, if at all, because of the present high cost of construction, equalling about £5 per acre of the good country on the Kinglake tableland. Without the addition of the proposed group settlement at Kinglake the ultimate financial success of any railway extension to the foothills would also be doubtful, owing to the present uncertainty of the future of the fruit industry. It was thought by the apple-growers in the Hurstbridge and Arthur's Creek districts that as soon as the war was over their export of apples to Germany, which had formerly been a good market for their fruit, would be resumed. But under existing conditions there is little hope of that market being regained or becoming a profitable one for some years at least. Already some of the apple trees have been dug out in the valleys, where the soil can be kept moist in summer, and tomatoes planted in their place. It is desired to develop the agricultural areas on the Kinglake tableland and give better means of access to that district as a tourist resort. The proposed extension of the Hurstbridge line to Mitton's bridge, above Queenstown, will bring the greater part of the Kinglake plateau within 10 miles of a railway station. This extension should assist the sawmilling industry at Kinglake, as haulage of sawn timber by road or wooden tramway costs about 1s. per ton per mile, as compared with a railway charge of  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. or 2d. It will, however, not be of much service as regards marketing firewood from the Kinglake tableland. But, in view of the recent statement of the State Electricity Commission that briquettes will be available by next winter from the Yallourn brown coalfield "at a price below that now charged for firewood," it is very doubtful if there will be any demand for inferior firewoods once the briquettes are for sale in Melbourne and suburbs. In the first year or so of operation the Hurstbridge extension to Mitton's Bridge may be expected to show a loss of about £4,000 per annum. If the fruit industry recovers and there is an expansion in the orchards, including small fruits such as raspberries and gooseberries, for which the Kinglake district is especially well suited, and also a development of market-garden produce, as Mr. W. McIver, Director of Land Settlement, expects, and if the Railway Department handles the fruit entrusted to it with more care and quicker despatch by not only getting it to Spencer-street Railway Yard in two or three hours, but by facilitating its delivery there—or, better still, undertaking to promptly deliver the fruit by motor lorries from that yard to Victoria market so as to reach there before midnight—there will be less risk of competition from motor lorries in carrying fruit direct from the orchards to that market; and the extension will consequently give better financial results.

13. In dealing with the various proposals submitted to serve the Kinglake district the Committee set aside the route from Yarra Glen to Castella because there was no support for that project from the residents of Kinglake tableland, who would have to cart their produce 5 or 7 miles east to Castella, whereas their market, Melbourne, is in a south-west direction. On reaching

Castella there would be 42 miles railage to Melbourne, as compared with 31½ miles from Mitton's Bridge, which could be reached in about the same carting distance. As to the suggestion that the Yarra Glen-Castella line would form a section of the proposed connexion with Yea and thus give an alternative route to Melbourne, which would be but 65 miles, as compared with 80 by the existing route *viâ* Tallarook, it has to be pointed out that the grades on the Castella route would equal those on the Yea-Tallarook line. The grades on the Yarra Glen-Melbourne railway are, however, steeper than on the Tallarook-Melbourne main line, and consequently the Railway Department would still haul the goods and live-stock traffic in connexion with the Mansfield and Alexandra districts by the present railway route, especially as a fair portion of the sawn timber from there is consigned to stations in the northern areas of Victoria. Moreover, the Tallarook route will enable the live-stock traffic to reach the saleyards at Newmarket (or at Laverton if those yards are removed there) without having to be taken through the busy Flinders-street railway station and over Flinders-street viaduct, as would have to be done if the traffic were diverted *viâ* Yarra Glen. The suggested route from Healesville to Toolangi, as advocated by councillors of the Healesville Shire, was not entertained by the Committee, as it would be a still more roundabout way of reaching the metropolis. As a large portion of the area to be served by a railway terminating at Castella is permanently reserved for forestry purposes, and as the bulk of the outwards traffic from that district will always be sawn timber, the Committee suggests that the Forests Commission should consider the question of exercising its powers under section 16 of the *Forests Act 1918* to "construct and maintain a tramway for the transport of timber and merchantable articles, and purchase and use vehicles with the necessary motive power." The Commission is the largest land-holder in the district, and by providing better transport facilities would receive an increased sum in royalty fees from timber cut in the Victoria State Forest. Such a tramway could be made available for carrying any farm produce from Castella to Yarra Glen station.

14. The Eltham-Christmas Hills-Kinglake proposition was rejected because of the large estimated outlay of £475,000 required to reach the tableland. To terminate this line at Christmas Hills would have been of no service to those at Kinglake. There is undoubtedly rich volcanic land at Kangaroo Ground, but it is within easy carting distance of the Eltham-Hurstbridge railway. The scenic beauty of Kangaroo Ground and Christmas Hills is admitted. These attractive places could, however, be better reached by a cheap motor service from existing neighbouring railway stations than by an expensive railway, from which the tourists would have to walk to the eminences where expansive views are obtained.

15. There is no need to carry the railway on from Mitton's Bridge to Strathewen, as a road with a good grade can be made to enable those at the head of Arthur's Creek to reach Mitton's Bridge station in 3 or 4 miles. Those lower down that stream have the choice of Hurstbridge or Mernda and Yan Yean stations, on the Whittlesea railway. Should the proposed railway to Mitton's Bridge at the foothill of Kinglake East be a success, the producers at Kinglake West could be served by a short extension of the Whittlesea railway to near the end of the easy country approaching Scrubby Creek school at a cost of about £25,000. The evening train service from and to Melbourne could be extended to Scrubby Creek at but little additional expense.

#### RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

16. The Committee recommends the extension of the Hurstbridge railway by way of Queenstown to Mitton's Bridge, a distance of 7¾ miles, at an estimated cost of £100,000, conditionally on the Closer Settlement Board securing the necessary legislative power to resume suitable privately-held areas on the Kinglake tableland to form, in conjunction with the available Crown lands there, a group settlement of at least 200 or 250 holdings, and putting that law into operation, as outlined by Mr. W. McIver, Director of Land Settlement, in his evidence before the Committee. It is considered that the Kinglake district lends itself to this class of settlement, provided suitable metalled roads are made to cart the produce to the railway, because of its nearness to the metropolis, the fair quality of much of the soil—though the settlers must use fertilizers to get payable returns—the high annual rainfall, and the bracing climate. As soon as the necessary land has been obtained steps should be taken by the Board to make the best use of the timber growing on it in the shortest time possible, so that the holdings may be cleared and brought under cultivation by the time the railway is completed.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
Melbourne, 30th October, 1923.

R. F. TOUTCHER,  
Chairman.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]

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