

1923.

VICTORIA.

R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

TOLMIE DISTRICT CONNECTING RAILWAY
(MANSFIELD, TATONG, AND MOYHU EXTENSIONS);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 23rd November, 1923.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 6.—[6D.]—17838.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

SATURDAY, 17TH DECEMBER, 1921.

43. **TOLMIE DISTRICT CONNECTING RAILWAY.**—Motion made and question—That the question of connecting the Tolmie district, including the lands in or near the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North, with the existing railway system by means of a railway 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.

(*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.

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the Tolmie district, including the lands in or near the parishes of Toombullup, Cambatong, Dueran, Dueran East, Whitfield, Whitfield South, and Toombullup North, with the existing railway system by means of a railway, has the honour to report as follows:—

DESCRIPTION OF TOLMIE DISTRICT.

1. The Tolmie District forms part of the Wombat Ranges, lying at an altitude of from 2,000 to 3,000 feet above sea-level, between the head waters of Broken and King rivers in a triangle formed by Mansfield railway station in the south, Tatong station in the north-west, and Whitfield station in the north-east. The railways branching off the North-East main line at Tallarook and Benalla to Mansfield and Tatong respectively are broad gauge, while the one extending from Wangaratta south to Whitfield is narrow gauge. The Tolmie country is heavily timbered and broken with steep descents from the tablelands into the creeks, which are tributaries of the rivers mentioned. These steep slopes, even if cleared, could not be cultivated. Between these minor streams are broad timbered ridges, which are locally called the tablelands, and are capped with patches of rich basaltic soil resting on a sandstone formation, which appears on the surface of the descending slopes, and which in turn gives way in some portions of the area to coarse granite. The average annual rainfall of the district is 40 inches. During the winter months there are occasional falls of snow, which sometimes remain on the ground for a few days.

2. Some 33 years ago the Lands Department made the Tolmie District available for settlement, and these Crown lands were readily applied for, because of the fertility of the country and the good, regular rainfall giving an assurance against drought. Many of the settlers came from the northern part of the State, where they had experienced dry seasons, with consequent poor crops. As the rugged Wombat Ranges had been the hiding-place of notorious bushrangers and other outlaws, it was decided by the authorities that this new district should be peopled by respectable farmers who had no sympathy with lawless gangs. Each applicant for land had his application reported on by the police before it was granted by the Lands Department. There was soon a population of 700—mostly adults—settled in the Tolmie District. The settlers cleared small portions of their allotments, which ranged from 200 to 350 acres, potatoes being grown in the volcanic soils, and oats and rye on the second-class lands abutting on those richer cappings. The granitic and lower country on the hillsides was classified as third-class. Yields of from 5 to 6 tons per acre of potatoes and occasionally up to 8 and 10 tons were harvested from these fertile soils without the aid of artificial manures, and oats gave up to 60 bushels to the acre. In 1896—the year of the largest production in the Tolmie country—up to 1,300 tons of potatoes were grown in this district, and 16,000 bags of oats. But while these yields were satisfactory to the settlers, many of the farmers were unable to make a living from the land, owing to the bad roads to Mansfield, the nearest railway station, which was from 13 to 20 miles distant from the settled area, while Benalla and Wangaratta were about 40 miles away, over almost impassable roads. Most of the settlers consequently left the district. Those who remained were buoyed up with the hope that before long their roads would be improved and a railway constructed to Tolmie, as the railway engineers had been through the district and had surveyed a line from Mansfield over the Wombat Ranges down into the King River valley, where it linked up with surveys made from Wangaratta on one side and Benalla on the other. It has been asserted that a definite promise was made by the Government 30 years ago that a railway would be made to Tolmie; but on the matter being inquired into in 1913–14 by the Railways Standing Committee it was unable to find any official record of such a promise. The fact that a railway route had been surveyed no doubt led the settlers to believe they were to be favoured by the Government and have railway facilities provided.

PRESENT CONDITIONS OF THE DISTRICT.

3. The conditions in the Tolmie District to-day are not encouraging. The population has dwindled, only a few dozen of the original selectors remaining on the land—the present population numbering about 200. They are gaining a livelihood from dairying and grazing principally, and by growing potatoes—last season's crop totalling 300 tons—and oats, of which there were some 900 bags produced. Some oaten hay is cut in the district and chaffed, being either consumed on the farm or sold to the sawmiller who is operating in the forest to the west of Toombullup and carting the sawn hardwood over a wooden tramway to Tatong station. Deserted holdings with dwellings and fencing fallen into decay or partly destroyed by bush fires are frequently met with in travelling through the district. What was once cleared, cultivated ground has become overgrown with dense bracken, thistles, and wattles. A good deal of the land some years ago fell into the hands of the mortgagees. Some of it reverted to the Crown, being forfeited for non-payment of rent or for non-compliance with other conditions of the lease. Several of the better-timbered areas of the latter were handed over to the Forests Commission, being incorporated in the adjacent timber reserves. The one bright feature in this scene of neglect and desolation is the recent work of the Country Roads Board, which is constructing graded roads to open up and develop the Tolmie country and give the settlers better access and consequently cheaper cartage than the 25s. a ton charged now to Mansfield station in the south. The Board is also making a road to Whitfield station in the north-east, which is 18 or 20 miles distant by the new road. While the settlers appreciate the prospect of having good roads in the near future, they consider that railway facilities to Tolmie or Mahaikah are required to market their agricultural produce profitably. Having an abundant rainfall, a good climate, and fertile soil on the tablelands, they believed a railway into the district would cause it to develop very fast, as population would be again attracted to Tolmie, and several of the land-holders would return and cultivate their abandoned properties, while others would be able to sell their holdings to newcomers.

4. About 70,000 acres would be benefited by a railway to Tolmie or to Mahaikah, which is a township site at the head of Fifteen Mile Creek, about 3 miles north-east of Tolmie, on the road to Whitfield. Of this area some 15,000 acres are exceptionally good soil, 31,000 acres being very fair land suitable for cereals, and the remainder mostly inferior and of little use except for grazing. About 30,000 acres are held privately, and a similar area is in possession of the Lands Department, the balance being portions of adjoining timber reserves. Of the lands in the hands of the Lands Department 3,000 acres contain good soil, while 13,000 acres are fair land, and the remainder inferior.

CLOSER SETTLEMENT SCHEME.

5. In 1922 the Closer Settlement Board had the lands in the Tolmie District inspected by two of its officers, Mr. R. J. Gray and Mr. E. V. Kent. They reported that the Crown lands suitable for settlement in the parishes of Whitfield, Whitfield South, Dueran East, and in the east part of Toombullup comprised 6,894 acres, of which 1,390 were adapted for cultivation. On this area they considered 23 men could be settled. They added—"The balance of the areas held by the Crown in the above-mentioned parishes consists of land of poor quality, being of a steep, rough, and stony nature, and of no value whatever for closer settlement purposes. Most of the best land that exists in this district is held by absentee owners; and if these holdings, which we consider suitable for settlement, could be acquired at a fair price we would strongly recommend that they be purchased. These properties would work in, in most cases, with the adjoining Crown lands in any scheme of subdivision and settlement. On most of these holdings a considerable amount of work was done in past years in clearing, fencing, and erecting buildings. But the cleared land has through neglect been allowed to revert practically to its unimproved state, while bush fires have demolished the fencing and other improvements. We estimate that at least 24 settlers could be placed on the areas which we consider suitable and now held by absentee owners. These areas total 6,878 acres, of which 2,590 is agricultural land of good quality. Oats, peas, hops, most varieties of fruits, English grasses, and also root crops have been successfully grown on these good lands. The grazing land is adapted for either sheep or cattle. We consider that 80 to 100 acres of first class land, with an additional area of 150 acres of second class land, would constitute a good living area for each settler. The main reason so many failed in this district was the difficulty in carting their produce over bad roads to the rail-head. A first class road has been made from Mansfield to Tolmie, which also extends for about 6 miles on to the Toombullup plateau and thence down Ryan's Creek. But as this road is unmetalled it will be impossible to use it for heavy cartage during the winter months. This road should be metalled at the earliest possible date. About five small feeders will be required to give the settlers a good access to the main road. . . . As there appears to be little chance of a railway being constructed into this district for some considerable time, a motor or steam-tractor service (subsidized by the Government, if necessary)

should be installed to run between Mansfield and Tolmie Township. This service would act as a feeder to the Mansfield railway, and if the freights charged were kept as low as possible it would be a great factor in the successful settlement of this district." In a subsequent report these officers stated that the whole of the Crown lands in the Parish of Toombullup North—with the exception of about 300 acres adjoining the absentee holdings—is of very poor quality, being steep, stony, country, and timbered with some very fine bluegum, messmate, and stringybark. If cleared, they said, this country would only be very poor grazing land. They could not recommend any of it for settlement. There were, they added, five allotments in the west part of the Parish of Toombullup, aggregating 902 acres, held by absentees. These allotments had at one time been worked, but most of the land had been allowed to go back to its natural state, the improvements having been destroyed by bush fire. The soil on these holdings is a rich basaltic. This land would with some adjoining Crown lands be suitable for settling about eight families if the new road from Mansfield through Toombullup—were extended northward on the west side of Ryan's Creek and thence westward to Holland's Creek, where it would join the graded road leading down to Tatong railway station. They concluded by saying that the forest areas in the parishes of Whitfield and Whitfield South are rough, steep, stony, country quite unsuitable for settlement.

FORESTS AND TIMBER RESERVES.

6. Mr. H. R. Mackay, Forests Commissioner, informed the Committee that the best timbered area in the Tolmie District had been in the Parish of Toombullup, where the most fertile land is. But that country was thrown open for selection over 30 years ago, and the settlers had destroyed most of the good timber by ringbarking the trees. There was an area, however, of about 5,000 acres on the southern slope of this parish falling into the watershed of Holland's Creek. This timber is still in a state of nature, and on the whole it is the best timber in the Tolmie district to-day, with the exception of several small areas on the tableland to the northward and close to Mr. McCashneys saw-mill at the head of Ryan's Creek. A wooden tramway 14 miles in length runs from that mill northwards to Tatong railway station. The natural outlet for the timber growing on the area he had referred to in the watershed of Holland's Creek was by a tramway which would follow down that stream to Dodd's Crossing and on to Tatong station. It would be a mistake, he said, to send any of the timber cut in the Tolmie district to the Mansfield railway, as the markets for such hardwoods were in the North-East and Albury districts, and it would be too circuitous a route through Tallarook, the railway charges that way being too high to insure a profitable market for the timber. The Mansfield district had a small population, so there was only a very limited demand for sawn hardwood there. As to the forest areas in Toombullup North falling into the valley of Fifteen Mile and other creeks, there was a large quantity of young timber there which would not be matured for 20 or 25 years. The Forests Commission would not allow a sawmiller to enter those reserves, as it wished to preserve that young forest for future requirements. Further back on the Toombullup tableland there is room for two mills, each cutting about a million superficial feet a year, but the outlet for that timber would be to Tatong by linking up with Mr. McCashney's tramway. Mr. Mackay added that the most extensive forest area in the Tolmie district was on Cambatong Range, a few miles to the south-east of Tolmie Township. It contained over 5,000 acres, which would yield from 10,000 to 12,000 superficial feet to the acre fit for the saw. The greater part of this timber could be got out by a tramway down Evan's Creek and the eastern branch of the King River to Whitfield station. He pointed out that the recent construction of a railway from Wagga to Tumbarumba, New South Wales, had opened up large supplies of timber of good quality and "had reduced the output from some of the Victorian mills to north-eastern Riverina, especially the country around Wagga." In answering a question put by the Committee he said that, had a broad-gauge railway been made in the first instance from Benalla through Molyullah and Kelfeera, at the foot of the hills to the King River valley, it would have tapped all the Toombullup tablelands, enabling the timber and produce to be brought down the valleys of Ryan's, Middle, Fifteen Mile, and Boggy creeks to this line. But as railways had been constructed from Wangaratta to Whitfield on the east side, and from Benalla to Tatong on the west, he considered, looking at the country to be served and the character of the settlement, that there was no justification at present for building an additional expensive railway in that district. There was not much room, in his opinion, for agricultural expansion on the Toombullup tablelands, as there were only a few thousand acres of volcanic soil, the remainder of the land being a granitic drift.

LENGTHS AND COSTS OF PROPOSED RAILWAYS.

7. There would be a climb of about 1,500 feet from any of the existing railway lines to the Tolmie tablelands, and as broken country would have to be traversed towards the end of any of the suggested routes to reach the plateau the cost of railway construction to the Tolmie District would be high, owing to the large quantity of earthworks required in the last few miles. Mr. C.

H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, in the early part of 1923 furnished the Committee with the following estimates of cost, based on the then rates of wages and prices of rails and other materials :—

Route.	Gauge.	Length— Miles.	Sharpest Curve— Chains.	Rolling Grade.	Rate per Mile.	Total.
					£	£
Mansfield to Bridge Creek	5 ft. 3 in.	8½	10	1 in 33	7,100	60,400
Mansfield to Barwite	5 ft. 3 in.	6½	5	1 in 40	7,100	44,400
Barwite to Tolmie	5 ft. 3 in.	8	5	1 in 30	19,000	152,000
Tatong to Moorngag	5 ft. 3 in.	5½	15	1 in 40	18,500	120,000
Moorngag to Tolmie	5 ft. 3 in.	13½	5	1 in 30	17,000	229,500
Moyhu to Mahaikah	5 ft. 3 in.	29	8	1 in 33	12,000	348,000
Moyhu towards Mahaikah (Fifteen Mile Creek) ..	5 ft. 3 in.	20	10	1 in 40	9,000	180,000
Moyhu to Myrree (Boggy Creek)	2 ft. 6 in.	13	8	1 in 40	7,000	91,000
Moyhu towards Mahaikah (Fifteen Mile Creek) ..	2 ft. 6 in.	20	8	1 in 40	7,000	140,000
Moyhu to Mahaikah (Fifteen Mile Creek) ..	2 ft. 6 in.	30	3	1 in 30	9,500	285,000
Whitfield to Mahaikah	2 ft. 6 in.	20	2½	1 in 30	12,020	240,400

8. It was added by Mr. Perrin that possibly a re-survey from Tatong to Moorngag with 1 in 30 grades and 8 chains curves might show a reduction of cost of 20 or 25 per cent. The surveyed extensions from Moorngag up the valley of Holland's Creek to Tolmie and from Barwite to Tolmie included curves of 5 chains radius; and, consequently, would require the use of special locomotives and a restriction in the class of rolling-stock which could be used. To obtain a line with 8 chains curves, which were the sharpest used on Victorian broad-gauge railways, would increase the cost by 20 or 30 per cent.

CONVERSION OF NARROW-GAUGE LINE.

9. Mr. Perrin informed the Committee that the conversion of the existing 2 ft. 6 in. railway from Wangaratta to Moyhu to 5 ft. 3 in., which is the Victorian broad gauge, would cost approximately £67,000, or say, £4,000 a mile to bring it up to the standard of an ordinary branch line. If the existing 60-lb. iron rails were retained, with steel rails on sharp curves only, and the present equipment allowed to remain unaltered except where absolutely necessary, a skeleton line suitable for "Dd" or lighter locomotives at a speed of 20 miles an hour could be obtained for about £33,000, or £2,000 a mile.

OTHER SUGGESTED ROUTES.

10. During the hearing of evidence at Benalla it was suggested by several witnesses that the broad-gauge line from Benalla to Tatong should be extended by being curved sharply to the north-east to Molyullah and thence east, passing near Kelfeera to Fifteen Mile Creek and south up the valley of that stream to Mahaikah, or alternatively this line should branch off the Tatong railway nearer Benalla, say at Karn, and go directly eastwards to Kelfeera, and thence ascend the valley of Fifteen Mile Creek. It was urged in support of this proposal that the same train and crew as operated the Tatong railway could work this new line, and thus lessen the operating expenses; that such an extension would serve the valleys of Sam's, Watchbox, Ryan's, and Middle creeks; and also suit the farmers around Greta and Moyhu, who would send their live stock over this broad-gauge line instead of driving them, as now, to Glenrowan to be trucked. These farmers do not use the narrow-gauge line at Moyhu for that purpose, owing to the expense and delay of re-trucking live stock at Wangaratta.

11. An additional route was suggested by a witness at Mansfield. It was to extend the Mansfield broad-gauge line eastwards passing close to Mount Battery, and thence up the valley of the Upper Broken River to Cambatong, to serve the State forest of 20,000 acres there, and then curve the line north-west along the lower portion of Wattle Range to Mahaikah. The objections to this proposal were the cost of such a line and the carrying of the timber traffic over the Mansfield railway to Tallarook, when, according to the evidence of Mr. H. R. Mackay, Forests Commissioner, the market for it should be in the North-East and Riverina districts. Some of the witnesses at Tolmie pointed out that the proposed extension from Mansfield to Bridge Creek would be of some assistance to them by reducing their cartage distance into that town by one-half from Tolmie, but they urged that this line to be of any great service to them should be carried 2 or 3 miles further up Bridge Creek valley to Powell's, a holding on the graded road recently constructed by the

Country Roads Board. It was stated, however, that even if this were done the railway would not benefit the settlers on the Barwite-road, who would not cart their produce up hill to Tolmie and thence down hill to Powell's, preferring to continue carting down hill to Mansfield, even though it were over a bad road, except in the summer months.

12. Those who advocated the extension of the Whitfield narrow-gauge railway to Mahaikah and Tolmie said that when that line was built over 20 years ago it was purposely made the 2 ft. 6 in. gauge, as it was intended this railway should ultimately ascend the hills to the fertile Tolmie tablelands, the narrow gauge allowing sharp curves of $2\frac{1}{2}$ chains radius to be used, so that the contour of the country could be followed and constructional costs thus kept down by reducing the earthworks to the minimum. Moreover, the Railways Standing Committee had on former occasions recommended this route at a then estimated cost of £65,520, or £3,426 per mile, but the Bill authorizing the construction of the railway, after passing the Legislative Assembly in 1901, had failed to be sanctioned by the Legislative Council. They urged an alteration in the route, asking that the permanent survey of the railway up the valley of the King River through Cheshunt to Glenmore, and thence up the steep hillside to Mahaikah, should be abandoned, because the line would badly sever a number of small holdings in that valley, and seriously interfere with their profitable working. They suggested that the railway on leaving Whitfield should immediately start climbing the hills to Hannan's Gap, as this route would serve a larger area of the tablelands.

FIFTEEN MILE CREEK ROUTE.

13. In advocating the construction of a broad-gauge railway from Moyhu up the valley of Boggy Creek to near Myrree, and thence over a low spur into the valley of Fifteen Mile Creek, it was stated by the landholders along those streams that the country was favorable to broad-gauge construction to the head of the latter valley, within 2 or 3 miles of Mahaikah, where the line would have to make a sharp ascent to that township site on the tableland. The inspection made by the engineers of the Railway Construction Branch supported this view. They reported there were no engineering difficulties for 21 miles from Moyhu, "the line being an easy broad-gauge proposition for that length," but from that point on to Mahaikah the country would be rough, with rising grades, steeper cross slopes, and gullies to cross, which "would make the work much more expensive." They pointed out that on this section rock would be met with in the cuttings deeper than 5 or 6 feet, porphyry or granite on the lower parts, and older basaltic higher up the hill. It was added by Mr. M. F. Egan, Superintending Surveyor—"On the whole, an extension from Moyhu for 20 miles appears to be more promising than any proposal previously investigated for serving the tableland."

14. Statistics submitted by the local railway league showed that the lands in the parishes of Myrree, Whitfield, Toombullup North, and Toombullup which would be served by a railway (broad or narrow gauge) from Moyhu up Boggy and Fifteen Mile creeks to Mahaikah totalled 52,927 acres, of which 9,268 were first class land, about a fourth of the latter being rich alluvial flats. There were 708 acres of second class land, and 42,951 acres of timbered and pastoral country. The league preferred a broad-gauge line, but if it were not favoured by the Committee a narrow-gauge railway, it was said, would be acceptable to the residents.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

15. The Committee is of opinion that any railway to the Tolmie district to have any hope of financial success would have to secure a large timber traffic to earn the necessary revenue. From the evidence of Mr. H. R. Mackay, Forests Commissioner, there is no prospect of this being obtained for many years. This view is borne out by the fact that the broad-gauge railway from Benalla to Tatong, which is 18 miles in length, and cost only £50,811, or £2,823 a mile, has not paid its way since it was opened for traffic in 1914, although two large sawmills—Mr. McCashney's and Mr. McClelland's—are delivering sawn timber at Tatong station for transport over the line. The loss on the Tatong railway was £1,420 in 1920; £1,163 in 1921; £2,375 in 1922; and £1,626 in 1923. The cost of any of the proposed railways to Tolmie or Mahaikah would be over £200,000, and if that outlay be contrasted with the capital expenditure on the Tatong line (£50,000) the hopelessness of the financial outlook of a railway to the Tolmie district must be apparent. There is some rich volcanic land on the Tolmie tablelands, but the total acreage of these basaltic cappings is not large, while the alluvial flats along the creeks are fertile, but they, too, are very limited in extent. Consequently, the agricultural production which would come out of the district for transport over the railway would be a few thousand tons only. At the present high costs of railway construction this district must look for its development to the graded metalled roads which the Country Roads Board is constructing. This inquiry has disclosed that the Tolmie country, though at a high altitude, is more suitable for dairying and pig-raising than

the Lands Purchase and Management Board reported in 1914, and that, provided private unoccupied lands held by absentees can be purchased at a reasonable price and merged with the few thousand acres of suitable adjoining Crown lands, a group settlement of some 60 families may be established in the district with some prospect of success if the main roads are metalled to give access in all weathers to Mansfield, Whitfield, and Tatong railway stations. The evidence also showed that when the timber in the forest reserves falling into Fifteen Mile and neighbouring creeks becomes matured and fit for milling some years hence the question of extending the narrow-gauge railway from Moyhu through Myrrhee to the valley of that stream should then be considered.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

16. The Committee is of opinion it is not expedient to connect the Tolmie district with the existing railway system by means of a railway.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 21st November, 1923.

R. F. TOUTCHER,
Chairman.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]