

1923.

VICTORIA.

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R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

BOWSER TO PEECHELBA RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

BOOK OF REFERENCE AND PLAN.

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*Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 30th December, 1923.*

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 9.—[6D.]—18241.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

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WEDNESDAY, 28<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 1923.

4. PEECHELBA RAILWAY (BOWSER TO PEECHELBA).—Motion made, in accordance with the requirements of the Railways Standing Committee Acts, and question—That the construction of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway from Bowser to Peechelba be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for consideration and report (*Mr. Old*)—put and, after debate, agreed to.
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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. Gouldie, 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. Gouldie 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 constructing a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway from Bowser to Peechelba, has the honour to report as follows :—

## FORMER REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE.

1. The subject of railway connexion with the Peechelba district was referred to the Committee by the Legislative Assembly during October, 1921, as a general reference. On the 30th November, 1922, a Report from the Committee was presented to Parliament giving a description of the district; the average annual rainfall; suggested routes of proposed railways to serve the district and their lengths and estimated costs; the views of the Committee on the question of railway extension into the district and its reasons for recommending the construction of a broad-gauge railway, starting at Bowser station and proceeding 11 miles in a north-west direction, terminating on the east side of the Ovens River opposite Peechelba township site, so as to serve the Boorhaman country, and the soldiers settled on about 13,000 acres within a radius of 10 miles of Peechelba.

## COST OF PROPOSED RAILWAY.

2. The original estimate of the cost of this line, as furnished by Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, was £68,200, or £6,200 a mile without rolling-stock. But since then, owing to the recent advance in the rate of wages for labourers to 14s. 7d. per day, the estimated cost is now set down at £70,600. The principal items of expenditure will be: New 60-lb. steel rails, points and crossings and laying permanent way, £24,000; sleepers, £9,000; earthworks, £9,000; ballast, £8,500; station equipment, £3,700; clearing and grubbing, £250; fencing, cattle guards, and gates, £2,800; culverts, £2,800; signals and telegraph, £1,100; and engineering, supervision, and other expenses, including provision for unforeseen contingencies, £9,250. The ruling gradient will be 1 in 100, and the sharpest curve 40 chains radius, with 12 chains at Bowser junction.

## TRAFFIC OFFICER'S REPORT.

3. Mr. J. H. Olsson, Chief Special Traffic Officer, Railway Department, who visited the Peechelba District, reported that the proposed railway would serve an area of 95,482 acres, comprising 217 holdings, and supporting a population of 1,000 persons. The area under wheat last season was 12,910 acres; under hay, 3,962 acres; oats, 586; and vines and other crops, 764 acres, while there were 9,379 acres under fallow. The production of wheat was 54,247 bags, or an average yield of 4·2 bags per acre, and oats, 3,558 bags, or an average of 6·07 bags. The live stock carried in the district were as follows:—Horses, 1,714; cattle, 4,862; sheep and lambs, 27,109; and pigs, 1,078. The acreage under wheat last season was equal to 13½ per cent. of the total area to be served by the proposed railway. It was estimated by Mr. Olsson that with nearer railway facilities there would be an increase in the area under that crop, making the acreage equivalent to approximately 25 per cent. of the total area. In framing his estimates of traffic he had allowed for 24,000 acres being under wheat when this short branch line is opened, and for an average yield of 4 bags to the acre for transport over it after deducting the seed requirements. He considered that the greater portion of the oats and hay produced in the district will be consumed locally, but an allowance had been made for 300 tons being forwarded by rail. In dealing with the firewood and sawn-timber traffic he said—“In addition to the firewood available in the adjacent forest reserves, a fairly large proportion of the tributary area contains standing dry box timber, a percentage of which will no doubt be removed at an early date to permit of additional cultivation, and in view of this an allowance has been made for a total of 5,000 tons per annum, which it is expected will be maintained for a number of years. The experience at other stations in the district indicates that this firewood will be forwarded to Melbourne and suburbs. In the previous traffic report an allowance was made for 3,600 tons of sawn timber, sleepers, piles, &c., and this estimate has not been varied. He added that the action of the Railways Standing Committee in recommending the shortening of the proposed line to 11 miles from Bowser, instead of proceeding to Rocky Point, 15 miles, will not materially affect the former estimates of traffic respecting wool, hay, fruit, wine, general goods, and live stock.

4. The estimates of working expenses provide for a tri-weekly mixed train service between Bowser and Peechelba. As the locomotive and train crew operating this short line can be utilized at Wangaratta for shunting and running purposes on portions of the days when the new line services are run and full time on other days, one-third only of the cost of the locomotive and but part of the wages of the train crew will be charged against the new line, which will, however, be debited with the full cost of one passenger carriage, £3,800; one guard's van, £900; and 15 trucks, £5,625, which will be required to provide for the goods and live stock traffic. The passengers inwards were estimated at 4,000, and the same number outwards in the first year the railway is running. The total inwards goods were set down at 1,850 tons, and outwards 18,500, while the live stock traffic inwards was expected to be 25 trucks, and outwards 125 trucks.

#### ESTIMATES OF WORKING EXPENSES AND REVENUE.

5. The Railways Commissioners furnished the Committee with the following estimates of annual charges and revenue of the proposed railway, based on a mixed train service each way three days per week:—

##### BOWSER TO PEECHELBA.

###### *Annual Charges.*

Interest at 5 per cent. per annum on £81,025, being cost (£68,200) of constructing 11 miles of 5 ft. 3 in. railway from Bowser to Peechelba, with £12,825 added for rolling-stock .. .. .	4,051	5	0
Traffic expenses .. .. .	600	5	11
Maintenance charges .. .. .	1,364	0	0
Locomotive expenses, including repairs and renewals of rolling-stock .. .. .	1,161	0	7
General charges .. .. .	78	2	8
<b>Total annual charges .. .. .</b>	<b>£7,254</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>

###### *Revenue.*

	On New Line.	On Other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.	
Passengers, 8,000 journeys .. .. .	£700 19 6	£145 18 5	
Parcels .. .. .	50 0 0		
Mails .. .. .	26 0 0		
Class goods, 2,000 tons .. .. .	410 8 1	142 17 3	
Wool, 150 tons .. .. .	38 15 3		
Live stock, 150 trucks .. .. .	155 18 0		
Timber and firewood, 8,600 tons .. .. .	486 0 4	1,246 9 11	
Grain, 8,300 tons .. .. .	623 12 11	741 18 10	
All other traffic, 1,300 tons .. .. .	107 6 5	28 14 0	
	<b>£2,599 0 6</b>	<b>£2,305 18 5</b>	<b>4,904 18 11</b>
<b>Estimated loss first year of operation .. .. .</b>			<b>£2,349 15 3</b>

#### REDUCTION IN ESTIMATED LOSS.

6. The action of the Committee in terminating this branch railway opposite Peechelba township site, 11 miles, instead of at Rocky Point, 15 miles, thus decreasing the capital expenditure on construction from £99,000 to £68,200, and on rolling-stock from £13,575 to £12,825, is fully justified by the estimates furnished by the Railways Commissioners. The annual charges for a line to Rocky Point totalled £10,382, whilst those to Peechelba are but £7,254. But of this reduction of £3,128 the sum of £563 is due to 5 per cent. interest being charged now in lieu of 5½ formerly. This leaves a net reduction of £2,565 in the annual charges, whilst the loss of revenue arising from the shortening of the line is but £610.

#### VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

7. The recommendation of the Committee shortening the length of this line to 11 miles instead of carrying the railway on to Rocky Point, 15 miles, has been freely criticized locally. But a perusal of the figures in the preceding paragraph clearly shows that a reduction in the length of the line, and consequently a reduction also in the capital outlay on the railway, could be made without materially affecting the revenue or the traffic, but which would greatly lessen the annual

loss on the line, and thus make the proposed railway a practical proposition. The only reason for constructing a railway into the Peechelba district is to reduce the carting distances of the soldier settlers on Peechelba Estate. The most distant have to cart their grain at present from 16 to 18 miles, and the Committee considers that if a railway is brought within 8 or 9, or even 10, miles of them they will be reasonably served. There is a growing desire in this State to have railways within 5 or 7 miles, so that producers may be enabled to make two trips daily to a railway station, or one trip occupying but a few hours. It is, however, financially impossible to do this, as there would be an insufficiency of gathering ground for traffic for the railway, and a large annual loss would result unless the land-owners contributed liberally to the cost of building the line, and thus lessened the capital expenditure and interest charge. In New South Wales farmers have to be satisfied with having a railway brought within 15 miles of their holdings.

8. Much of the agitation to have the proposed railway carried on to Rocky Point, 15 miles, arose from the condition attached to the Committee's recommendation that the line be made 11 miles, terminating on the east side of the Ovens River, opposite Peechelba township site, provided the local municipal councils and other bodies interested agreed to build a road bridge and approaches over that river to give access from the west or Peechelba side to the railway terminus. It was feared by those desiring the railway that the Wangaratta Shire Council might not—apart from any contribution made by the Closer Settlement Board or the Country Roads Board—be able to pay its share towards the road bridge, but if the line were extended to Rocky Point the liability in respect of a bridge over the Ovens River there would probably be borne by the Wangaratta, Yarrawonga, and Rutherglen Shire Councils, and would not in that case be too burdensome to any of them. But apart, however, from this aspect of the matter, the Committee is of opinion that a railway extension to Rocky Point would involve a needless expenditure of railway loan funds, and cannot be justified, inasmuch as the soldier settlers at Peechelba Estate will all be brought by the line recommended by the Committee within reasonable carting distance of a railway station if the stipulated road bridge be made. Another proposal made was that the railway should be carried across the Ovens River beyond the north end of Peechelba township site, terminating about 14 miles from Bowser. But this suggestion would cause an additional outlay of close on £30,000, and would necessitate two railway stations, one on the east side of the river to accommodate the producers around Boorhaman, and one on the west to serve the settlers at Peechelba, besides freeing the local municipal council of any liability in regard to the proposed road bridge or its maintenance. Mr. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, estimated that the road bridge over the Ovens River at Peechelba township site and approaches thereto would cost £8,000 or £9,000. It was also suggested locally that the municipal councils interested, together with the Closer Settlement Board, the Country Roads Board, and the Forests Commission—the last-named being advantaged by the railway serving the Killawarra forest and the timber reserves along the banks of the Lower Ovens River—should contribute towards the cost of extending the railway across the Ovens River, thereby obviating the building of the proposed road bridge. But it was ascertained that these bodies had no legal power to use their funds in making such contributions towards railway construction.

9. It is recognised that the Wangaratta Shire Council would be placed in a difficulty if it had to bear the full cost of the proposed road bridge and approaches because those works were within its territory, whilst most of the land to be benefited by the road bridge and approaches is in the Yarrawonga Shire, which will doubtless obtain increased rates by the valuation of those holdings being enhanced by the building of the railway and road bridge. A representative of the Wangaratta Shire Council stated it did not desire to see the construction of the proposed railway imperilled, and was therefore willing to pay its share towards the road bridge and approaches. The President of the Yarrawonga Shire Council informed the Committee that that municipality was about to increase the rating in the Eastern (Peechelba) Riding to 1s. 6d. so that advantage could be taken of the Developmental Roads Act, and that would enable the Yarrawonga Shire Council to combine with other bodies concerned in building the road bridge and approaches. Mr. W. McIver, Director of Soldier Settlements, gave evidence that the Closer Settlement Board was prepared to contribute £1,000 out of its funds towards these road works, and to lend £1,400 additional to the municipalities concerned to assist them in meeting this liability. A further way of overcoming the difficulty would be for the Country Roads Board to declare the proposed bridge and approaches part of the main road to Peechelba, and to exercise its powers under section 27 of the *Country Roads Act 1915*, and so require the Yarrawonga Shire Council to contribute towards the cost of these "permanent works" and their maintenance. The section says—"A municipality may be benefited by expenditure on permanent works and maintenance within the meaning of this section, although such permanent works and the main roads maintained are not situated within its municipal district if substantial traffic to and from the municipal district of such municipality passes over, or in the case of new main roads will,

in the opinion of the Board, pass over a main road on which such expenditure has been made." An earlier portion of the section empowers the Board to apportion the liability among the municipalities concerned, according to the benefit obtained from the road works.

10. The Committee is satisfied that if Parliament authorizes the construction of the railway from Bowser for 11 miles along the east side of the Ovens River, as recommended, the municipal councils and other bodies concerned will soon agree to undertake the building of the road bridge and approaches on terms to be arranged between them, provided that the site of the bridge be selected by them at some point between the railway terminus and Rocky Point.

#### RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

11. The Committee repeats its former recommendation, namely, that a 5 ft. 3 in. railway be constructed north-west from Bowser station to the east side of the Ovens River, opposite Peechelba township site, adjoining Greenvale Pre-emptive, a distance of 11 miles, at an estimated cost of £70,600 (the present estimate) conditionally on not more than £54,000 of that capital cost being debited to the Railway Department—which will reduce the estimated loss on this line in the first year of operation to about £1,650—and the remainder of the required expenditure, about £16,000 (apart from the outlay of £12,825 on rolling-stock), being contributed as a gift out of the Developmental Railways Account so that that contribution will not bear interest, and also conditionally on the local municipal councils and other bodies interested agreeing to build a bridge and necessary road approaches thereto across the Ovens River between Peechelba township site and Rocky Point to give easy access to the proposed railway terminus at the same time as the construction of this railway is undertaken.

R. F. TOUCHER,  
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,  
State Parliament House,  
Melbourne, 5th December, 1923.