

1925.

VICTORIA.

SECOND PROGRESS REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

MALLEE RAILWAY EXTENSION (MILLEWA
RAILWAY);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed 8th July, 1925.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 2.—[6D.]—7174.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 22ND JULY, 1924.

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

1. The question of connecting the districts lying between the Ouyen to Mildura railway and the South Australian Border with the existing railway system by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway.

* * * * *

—(Mr. Hogan)—put and agreed to.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Fifteenth Committee.)

R. H. SOLLY, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman ; *

The Hon. A. Bell, M.L.C.

(Vice-Chairman), †

The Hon. A. E. Chandler, M.L.C., ‡

J. D. Deany, Esq., M.L.A.,

A. E. Lind, Esq., M.L.A.

* Mr. R. H. Solly was appointed Chairman on the 2nd February, 1925, *vice* the Hon. J. W. Billson, M.L.A., deceased 23rd December, 1924.
† The Hon. A. Bell, M.L.C., was appointed Vice-Chairman on the 3rd February, 1925, *vice* Mr. R. H. Solly, who was appointed Vice-Chairman on the 18th November, 1924, *vice* the Hon. H. F. Richardson, M.L.C., who ceased on the 18th November, 1924, to be a Member of the Committee on accepting office as a Minister of the Crown.

‡ The Hon. A. E. Chandler, M.L.C., was appointed on the 2nd December, 1924.

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SECOND PROGRESS REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the districts lying between the Ouyen to Mildura railway and the South Australian border with the existing railway system by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway, has the honour to report as follows:—

PREVIOUS REPORTS OF COMMITTEE.

1. In October, 1921, the matter of railway connexion with the Millewa North district in the north-west Mallee was referred to the Railways Standing Committee by the Legislative Assembly as a General Reference, and shortly after the Committee recommended the construction of 35 miles of line from Redcliffs to Werrimull. Then in December, 1923, on a Specific Reference in regard to an extension from Werrimull to The Hut, the Committee approved of a further 15 miles of construction to the latter point. The line to Werrimull was opened for traffic on 11th April, 1924, but the extension to The Hut has not been proceeded with beyond a 5-miles point from Werrimull, construction work having ceased in August, 1924. Mr. Perrin, the Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, explained that the work had been temporarily suspended owing to the greater urgency of completing the extension from Hopetoun to Patchewollock to serve settled wheat-growing areas, to the necessity of completing the line from Merbein to Abbotsford Crossing within a specified time under the Border Railways Agreement, and to the scarcity during the wheat transport season of trucks for conveying construction material. It is expected that construction will shortly be re-commenced, and that the rails will possibly reach The Hut about the end of July, 1925.

DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT.

2. Prior to the extension of the Werrimull line the area of Mallee land west from the Ouyen-Mildura line to the South Australian border was mostly unoccupied Crown land, being let for grazing on annual licences. The extension of the Redcliffs-Werrimull railway, however, has induced a large amount of settlement just north of the Werrimull line in the parishes of Werrimull, Murrroong, Karawinna, Merrinee, and Benetook. South of the Werrimull line the settlement has been slower, but the parishes of Willah and Yaramba are now being settled. Westward of Yaramba, south of the line, and westward of Werrimull parish, north of the line, towards South Australia, there is no settlement for the 45 and 30 miles respectively to the border. The matter of making available the land in those areas is dealt with in this Report under the heading of land settlement. The average annual rainfall of the county of Millewa is about 10 to 12 inches.

3. The area south of the Werrimull line, extending to the Ouyen-Murrayville railway, is settled for 12 miles north of the latter line. Beyond that distance going north the land is quite unoccupied. Twelve miles north of Underbool, with fair average Mallee country and occasional patches of copi and gypsum intervening, lie the Pink (salt) Lakes. The three main lakes are held under licence from the Lands Department, and are worked at the present time by three separate firms or companies. The Sailor Salt Company has constructed a 2 ft. 6 in. tram line from the Lakes to Linga station, and, using a small petrol-driven locomotive, transports this salt approximately 12 miles to the railway. Camel teams are also used for this purpose by the other two companies, the salt being delivered at Underbool station for a cartage charge of 15s. per ton. There is a loading charge of 1s. 6d. per ton at Underbool, and a freight charge thence of 17s. per ton on the quantity consigned to Melbourne, making a total freight cost of 33s. 6d. to land the salt on the Melbourne market. The salt is mostly sold delivered at the Underbool station for 30s. a ton on rails, plus cost of bags.

4. Twelve miles north-west of the Pink Lakes the Sunset country is reached after traversing a sand ridge about 1 mile in width and a few small patches of light soil covered with saltbush and blue bush, the rest of the intervening country being good mallee land. At Sunset there is an area of approximately 12,000 acres of plain country, good wheat-growing and grazing land, and 7 or 8 miles north-east are the Birthday Plains, comprising approximately 50,000 acres of soil of similar quality.

5. To the west of Sunset the country falls away in quality, and after passing Carter's Spring, at about 10 miles, is known as "The Desert." To the north-west of Sunset, towards Rocket Lake and Widgil Tank, the land is of good quality, being covered with typical mallee, hop-bush, quinine tree, cabbage tree, turpentine, and on occasional lighter sandy ridges, porcupine grass. This class of country as a matter of fact comprises practically the whole of the area proposed to be served, the land being almost entirely level or slightly undulating sandy areas, with occasional treeless plains, as at Sunset, Birthday Plains, and to a less extent at Mopoke Plains, the plain country comprising usually the best land. The Committee traversed the district from Ouyen to Mopoke Plains; from Underbool north to Sunset and beyond Birthday Plains; from Murrayville north to the land that would be served by a connexion from Peebinga (S.A.) to Murrayville; and from Mildura to Lake Cullulleraine and the district beyond Werrimull.

PRESENT RAIL FACILITIES.

6. A distance of approximately 60 miles separates the Werrimull line from the Ouyen-Murrayville line, while about 70 miles lies between the Ouyen-Mildura line and the South Australian border lines to Renmark and Peebinga. The Peebinga railway station is within $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of the Victorian border, and serves the district north of Murrayville up to Bell Bird Tank and The Pines, where Victorian land abutting on the border is being allotted this month by the Lands Board (Victoria). The settlers on this land will all be within $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 12 miles of either Peebinga ($171\frac{1}{4}$ miles from Adelaide), or Murrayville ($177\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Adelaide, $356\frac{3}{4}$ miles from Melbourne). The South Australian line from Meribah to Yamba (thence to Paringa) runs north and south parallel with the border at an average distance of about 5 miles west. There is no settlement yet on the Victorian side opposite this line, but as the water supply channels are gradually extended westward and then south (as this area is above the boundary line of the fresh-water bores), and the land thrown open, there is no doubt that the settlement for 5 to 7 miles on the Victorian side will be served by this line, and that because of the considerably lesser distance to Adelaide via Meribah ($171\frac{3}{4}$ miles) than Melbourne via The Hut (393 miles) the traffic both inward and outward will almost wholly be South Australian.

7. Along the Ouyen-Murrayville-Pinnaroo line a great deal of the goods traffic, with the exception of wheat, is conducted to and from Adelaide. Walpeup forms an approximate dividing line for the Adelaide and Melbourne markets, but in certain classifications goods more favourably treated by South Australia come right through to Ouyen. The distances of the various stations in this section are as under:—

			<i>To Adelaide.</i>		<i>To Melbourne.</i>
			Miles.		Miles.
Pinnaroo	..	..	161 $\frac{1}{2}$	..	373
Murrayville	..	..	177 $\frac{3}{4}$	..	356 $\frac{3}{4}$
Cowangie	..	..	189 $\frac{1}{4}$	..	345 $\frac{1}{4}$
Underbool	..	..	214 $\frac{3}{4}$	..	319 $\frac{3}{4}$
Walpeup	..	..	227	..	307 $\frac{1}{2}$
Ouyen	..	..	245 $\frac{3}{4}$	..	288 $\frac{3}{4}$
Redcliffs	..	..	299 $\frac{1}{2}$	..	342 $\frac{1}{2}$
Mildura	..	..	308 $\frac{1}{4}$	..	351 $\frac{1}{4}$

8. This factor would have an important bearing on any proposed north-south extensions from Underbool or Walpeup as compared with east-west connexions with the Mildura line. Freight to and from the new line stations would, with an east-west connexion, be Victorian freight, while a north-south line would afford settlers an opportunity of utilizing either the Adelaide or Melbourne markets.

PROPOSED ROUTES.

9. The route most favoured by witnesses for an east-west connexion was west from Trinita (a siding on the Ouyen-Mildura line $8\frac{1}{4}$ miles south of Hattah, and $13\frac{1}{4}$ miles north of Ouyen) or Hattah to serve the Birthday Plains and Sunset country. Running due west from a midway point between Hattah and Trinita the line would traverse one long sandhill and some lighter country. The Hattah take-off is designed to keep north of the lighter land, while starting at Trinita and dipping a little to the south would also avoid the same light area. This line could without unreasonably increasing the length be curved sufficiently, on its way to tap the Sunset and Birthday Plains country, to serve the Pink Lakes at a distance of about 5 or 6 miles.

10. At Underbool the witnesses advocated a route due north to the Pink Lakes and Birthday Plains area passing within 6 or 7 miles of Sunset. This route would have the advantage of affording a connexion with the Underbool line, and consequently to Adelaide or Melbourne on a through 5 ft. 3 in. gauge. It was also contended that, in the event of the Patchewollock line being extended northward in future, a through southerly route would be given for grain and other produce to

Warracknabeal, Horsham, and Portland. A route from Peebinga, South Australia (3½ miles from the border), through Murrayville to Yanac was advocated at Murrayville. This route would traverse at its northern end land which is just now in process of being thrown open, the Land Board sitting this month and dealing with applicants for 70,000 acres in the parishes of Manya and Berrook.

LAND SETTLEMENT.

11. Following on the construction of the line from Redcliffs to Werrimull, the land within 8 or 10 miles north for the section Redcliffs-Werrimull, 35 miles, and within about 6 miles south for the section Redcliffs-Merrinee, 25 miles, has been thrown open and is being cleared and cultivated. Between Merrinee and The Hut, a distance of 25 miles, on the south side the parish of Tarrango has been surveyed, and the Land Board is now (May, 1925) allotting the blocks, while the parishes of Koleya and Mallambool are under survey, while Kurnwill and Malloreen surveys are just commencing. On the north side of the line the parishes of Yarrara and Merringur have been finally surveyed, and the Land Board is now dealing with the applications, which are a long way in excess of the number of blocks available. The land has been made available at prices ranging from 9s. to 24s. per acre, these rates including a 4s. per acre loading to reimburse the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission its expenditure in constructing roads for the settlers. The adjoining westerly parish of Karween has been completely surveyed, and west again towards South Australia the parish of Morkalla is at present under survey. North and south of the parishes named the Lands Department has no present intention of effecting subdivisions.

12. It will thus be seen that railway extension in this area is well ahead of land settlement, and it is expected the Lands Department will have the land in the parishes of Mallambool and Koleya made available as early as possible, as these areas are tributary to the present 5-miles Werrimull extension, and that Kurnwill and Malloreen will be made available coincident with the extension of the line to The Hut, assuming the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission can provide stock and domestic channels.

WATER SUPPLY.

13. The Lake Lonsdale water supply scheme has not yet reached the area north of the Ouyen-Murrayville line. At present channels are near Speed, on the Mildura line, and it is expected that shortly the Lonsdale water will be available at Walpeup and portion of the territory beyond. The Redcliffs-Carwarp scheme supplies the territory near Redcliffs, while near No. 9 Lock on the Murray, 35 miles west of Mildura, water is pumped into channels to feed Lake Cullulleraine. A lift at this point of 125 feet supplies the country down to Werrimull, Yarrara, and portion of Merringur; and 8 miles west of Werrimull, on Block 38, parish of Yarrara, a second lift of 150 feet is proposed, which will cover the area to The Hut at the terminus of the line, supplying also portion of Merringur and Karween, north of the line, and, south of the line, the parishes of Tarrango, Koleya, Mallambool, Kurnwill, and Malloreen, these five southern parishes, with the exception of the south-east corner of Tarrango, being at present wholly unserved although they are abutting on the Werrimull railway line. It is expected that the pumping machinery for this second lift will be installed by June, 1927, at the present rate of progress, and that the channels will be then ready providing the area to be served has been selected.

14. In the south-western corner of the area towards Murrayville bores are sunk and good supplies of fresh water are obtainable; but unfortunately this method cannot be extended to the unsettled territory to the north and north-east because of the water gradually becoming brackish and unfit for use over the major portion of the area; and even in places where it is possible to tap fresh water by boring, it is at such a great and gradually-increasing depth going north towards the Murray that it becomes cheaper to install a pumping plant and channels. Catchment tanks (or dams) are sunk in public reserves by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, but settlers will not be secure until assured of a regular stock and domestic channel supply throughout the area.

15. The rate per square mile under a gravitation scheme is usually somewhere about £12 or £15. Following on the first lift at Lake Cullulleraine it is expected that the charge will be about £25, and after the second lift about £30 per square mile, which area is about the average-size farm on allotment.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

16. The Committee inspected the various routes suggested to serve this area and also a large portion of the land lying outside the direct gathering ground. Evidence was heard at several places, and the Committee is satisfied from both the evidence and its inspection of the district that while the land in many portions of the area (notably the Sunset, Birthday Plains, and Mopoke Plains territories, and possibly the Rocket Lake area) warrants settlement, with water and railway facilities, it would be unwise, in view of the only partially settled state of the land adjoining the

Werrimull line, and the lesser settlement still towards The Hut (whence railway construction was recommended in December, 1923) to extend further railways into this area at the present juncture, more especially as the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission does not anticipate being able to supply the necessary water and channels to the whole of the natural gathering ground for the Werrimull line until June, 1927.

17. Dealing with the Sunset area the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission states in its last Annual Report—

“Surveys in what is known as the Rocket Lake and Sunset area, previously referred to, in which no settlement has yet taken place, are in progress in order to determine the best method of supply. The possibilities being investigated are its supply from the Millewa Second Lift system, or by gravitation from the proposed new Walpeup extension of the Wimmera-Mallee system. It may prove necessary to supply some portions of this area from each source. Investigation so far shows that the nature of the country will make any channel scheme somewhat difficult and costly, both to construct and maintain, and this fact will probably necessitate special treatment if the interests of the State demand the settlement of this area.”

After the completion of these surveys the Committee will be in a better position to make a recommendation regarding a line to serve these areas.

18. The advantage in concentrating the expenditure on land settlement, water supply, and the construction of railways in one area at a time is so obvious as to need no laboured reiteration, and the Committee considers that until more settlement takes place along the area tributary to the line from Redcliffs to The Hut the matter of providing further railway facilities should be temporarily held in abeyance. The Committee is also of opinion that the Lands Department and the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission should continue to make every effort to make lands available and supply water channels, so that full use may be made of the railway construction in the Werrimull-The Hut district.

RECOMMENDATION.

19. For these reasons the Committee recommends that at present no further railway extension be authorized into the districts lying between the Ouyen to Mildura railway and the South Australian border; but at the same time the Committee wishes to record its conviction that the quality of the land to be served does warrant settlement and the provision of railway facilities, and it has accordingly made this a Progress Report, so that when water channels have been provided and further settlement has followed the construction of the Werrimull-The Hut section this proposal may be reconsidered and a suitable route or routes selected for a railway or railways to serve the district.

R. H. SOLLY,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 1st May, 1925.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]