

1926.

VICTORIA

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE

DOOKIE TO KATAMATITE AND BENALLA TO
YARRAWONGA RAILWAYS CONNEXION;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 30th June, 1926.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 4.—[6D.]—7833.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

THURSDAY, 11TH DECEMBER, 1924.

9. DOOKIE TO KATAMATITE AND BENALLA TO YARRAWONGA RAILWAYS CONNEXION.—Motion made and question—That the question of connecting the Dookie to Katamatite and the Benalla to Yarrowonga railways by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report (*Mr. Eggleston*)—put and agreed to.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Fifteenth Committee.*)

J. D. DEANY, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman.*

A. E. LIND, Esq., M.L.A., Vice-Chairman.†

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

The Hon. A. E. Chandler, M.L.C.

R. H. Solly, Esq., M.L.A.

The Hon. G. C. Webber, M.L.A.

* Mr. J. D. Deany, M.L.A., was appointed Chairman on 3rd February, 1926, in succession to the Hon. A. Bell, M.L.C., whose term of office expired on that date.

† Mr. A. E. Lind, M.L.A., was appointed Vice-Chairman on 3rd February, 1926.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

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REPORT

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the Dookie to Katamatite and the Benalla to Yarrawonga railways by means of a 5 ft. 3 in. gauge railway, has the honour to report as follows :—

PREVIOUS REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE.

1. The proposal to connect the Dookie-Katamatite and Benalla-Yarrawonga lines was reported on by the Railways Standing Committee in 1909 and again in 1916, but on each occasion the report was unfavorable. It was calculated in 1909 that the annual loss on a connexion from Dookie to Devenish would be £1,898, and from Cosgrove to Goorambat, £2,575, the interest charge being reckoned in each case at 4 per cent., and the construction cost calculated at approximately £3,000 per mile. In 1916 estimates of revenue and expenditure were not obtained in detail, but it was considered that, owing to the increased cost of construction and probably higher interest rate, the loss would be greater, and, because of the small amount of development that could be expected in the area served, it was not deemed expedient to recommend the construction of the connecting line.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT.

2. The district affected by this proposed connecting railway is in the northern part of the State close to and a little to the east of the Goulburn Valley. Shepparton, which is described as the capital of the Goulburn Valley, is 17 miles from Dookie, whence the railway line runs directly north for a further 17 miles to Katamatite, while about 10 miles further north again is the River Murray. East of the Dookie-Katamatite line, and running parallel with it at a distance of about 12 miles, is the Benalla-Yarrawonga line, the terminus, Yarrawonga, on the Murray, being the commencing point for the recently-authorized border railway line to Oaklands, New South Wales.

3. The intervening strip of country between the Dookie-Katamatite and the Benalla-Yarrawonga lines consists of good agricultural soil, having a rainfall of about 23 inches, and an average wheat yield of approximately 25 bushels per acre. In the southern portion of the area 6 miles from Dookie railway station is the Dookie Agricultural College. A comparatively low range of hills (including Mount Major, 1,257 feet above sea level), running generally from north-east to south-west, affords almost the only break in a landscape of many miles of plain country. The Broken Creek, which is an effluent of the Broken River (flowing from Benalla westerly and joining the Goulburn River near Shepparton) runs from south to north, bisecting fairly equally the country between the Dookie-Katamatite and the Benalla-Yarrawonga lines. In the lower portion of the district the Major Creek, 10 or 12 miles in length, runs south from near Dookie to the Broken Creek.

4. The district is well provided with railway facilities, the figures taken out by the railway officers showing that, except in the extreme north bordering the Murray River, there is no land over 8 miles from an existing railway in the area considered by the Committee. The proposal has therefore been regarded almost solely from its value as a cross-country connexion, with less importance attached to its capacity for development and the extension of agriculture.

SHEPPARTON FRUIT AREAS.

5. Evidence was heard at Shepparton from representatives of the canned fruit and fresh fruit industries. The Shepparton Fruit Preserving Company uses approximately 1,600 tons of firewood annually, paying 16s. to 17s. 6d. per ton for it, and employs from 70 to 500 hands according to the season. At the present time this company sends its canned fruit to Sydney by boat from Melbourne, taking advantage of the low "up" journey rates to the metropolis from Shepparton. This plan works out much more cheaply than sending by rail to Sydney direct from Shepparton, the rail and boat rate amounting to £1 14s. 10d., as compared with £4 7s. for the all-rail route via Albury to Darling Harbour, Sydney. The company favoured a route for the cross-country connexion from Dookie to Devenish, considering that it would afford them better access to both the North-eastern line from Benalla northward and the Yarrawonga-Oaklands line, when constructed, with a shorter mileage and cheaper freights to Wagga, The Rock, and other New South Wales towns.

6. Dealing with the fresh fruit the Shepparton Irrigationists Association of 250 members urged the adoption of the route from Dookie to Devenish in order that they might tap a similar area. So far as the railway rates to Sydney for the carriage of fresh fruit are concerned, there is very little difference between a rate via Yarrowonga and the proposed Oaklands line and the present route via Albury, a comparison of the charges from Shepparton being as under—

	£	s.	d.
Shepparton to Sydney via proposed Dookie connexion, Yarrowonga and Oaklands, per ton in truck-load lots ..	2	5	5
Shepparton to Sydney, via Albury, special rate per ton in truck-load lots	2	6	5

It may be added that the rate of £2 6s. 5d. is a special cut rate to encourage the fruit traffic, the mileage charge on fresh fruit to Sydney via Albury being £2 13s. 8d. The Yarrowonga route would, however, have the advantage of allowing certain towns in the Riverina, such as Oaklands, The Rock, Wagga, &c., to be supplied more cheaply than via the Albury route.

7. A further point is that on the main-line route to Sydney a fruit train is run daily in the fruit season, and although the canned fruit is ordinarily sent by boat to Sydney, the perishable nature of fresh fruit obliges the growers to use the direct rail facilities. The Shepparton fresh fruit is picked up each afternoon by a special train which runs between Kyabram and Seymour, brought round via Mangalore to Benalla, and leaves that station a few minutes after midnight for Sydney. The running of such a train is only rendered possible by the large number of consignments from many stations, and a route from Dookie via St. James or Devenish to Yarrowonga and Oaklands would not, of course, warrant such a service, so that for through interstate fruit for the Sydney market such a connexion would not be of any use. It would, however, as mentioned previously, be availed of for certain Riverina towns.

8. Another reason for urging a connexion between Dookie and Devenish was that timber suitable for fruit-case making might be obtained from the Tatong line. Over 200,000 fruit cases are used annually in the Shepparton district, and the mountain ash and other timbers from the Tatong district are suitable for case-making purposes. The timber for most of the cases used at Shepparton has been coming from Noojee, in Gippsland.

9. A motor lorry service is run during the season from Shepparton to Benalla with fresh fruit, and a Dookie-Devenish connexion would no doubt obtain this traffic. A similar motor service is run to Yarrowonga, and either a Dookie-Devenish connexion or a Katamatite-Yarrowonga connexion would be suitable for conveying the fruit by rail.

VALUE OF A CROSS-COUNTRY CONNEXION.

10. Apart from the benefit to the fruit industry it was contended that the interchange of general products and goods would be facilitated by the connecting line. Traders at and between Benalla and Yarrowonga expect to reach the Goulburn Valley with their commodities, while the Shepparton and Goulburn Valley producers and merchants hope to find markets for their goods not only on the Benalla-Yarrowonga section of line, but in the Riverina district, which, with the connexions from Katamatite to Yarrowonga and from Yarrowonga to Oaklands, would give Shepparton an advantage of 216 miles (as compared with the present Mangalore-Albury route) to Oaklands, and 60 miles to The Rock, Wagga, Junee Junction, Cootamundra, and all stations thence to Sydney.

11. With previous inquiries of the Committee southern routes were supported largely, to the exclusion of the Katamatite-Yarrowonga route, and proposals were considered at length for connexions between Cosgrove and Goorambat, Dookie and Goorambat, Dookie and Devenish, and Dookie and St. James, as a connexion at about those points on the Benalla-Yarrowonga line would nearly equally bisect the distance between Benalla and Yarrowonga. The recommendation, however, of a line from Yarrowonga (Victoria) to Oaklands (New South Wales) means that an alternative route will be afforded for reaching a number of Riverina towns at advantageous freight rates, and this has led to greater weight being placed upon the value of a Katamatite-Yarrowonga connexion, with a longer mileage and higher construction cost than any other suggested route, not so much with a view to reaching Benalla and the section of the North-eastern line thence to Albury and beyond as with a desire to quickly and directly reach Yarrowonga and the Riverina towns on the proposed new border line.

12. Lucerne hay grown in the Shepparton and adjoining irrigation areas would also be made available to pastoralists in the Riverina for their sheep in the dry seasons, and supplies could be sent over the proposed Yarrowonga-Oaklands line along the railway from Oaklands as far as Lockhart (New South Wales) at cheaper rates than from the Yanco (New South Wales) irrigation settlement.

13. A further point to be borne in mind, viewing the matter from the cross-country connexion aspect, is that, with an extension from Yarrawonga to Katamatite an alternative route to the main line via Albury is given between The Rock and Mangalore; and as the Albury main line has a single track from Mangalore to Albury, this alternative route (when the construction of the Yarrawonga-Oaklands line is completed) would, in a measure, serve as a duplicate track.

ROAD-METAL QUARRIES.

14. There are quarries at Dookie owned jointly by the shires of Shepparton and Rodney. The stone quarried is of a very good quality for road-metalling purposes, being a very hard species of granite. Last year the output was 33,500 tons of broken metal, and this year it is expected to be 40,000 tons. It was represented that there was a scarcity of stone in the Riverina, and that with the construction of the Yarrawonga-Oaklands line, and a connecting link from Katamatite to Yarrawonga, there would be good markets in the Riverina for the stone from the Dookie quarries. Approximately 35 to 40 men are permanently employed, the wages sheet last year amounting to over £8,000. The average price paid for the stone on the trucks at the present time is 9s. per yard.

LIMESTONE DEPOSITS.

15. The Committee also inspected the limestone quarries at Boxwood, about mid-way between Dookie and Devenish, near Major Creek, where a company has just commenced operations. An area of 25 acres has been obtained with the limestone outcropping on a portion of it, and a depth that has been proved up to 60 feet over a cut of 900 feet running north and south. An assay showed 98·3 per cent. of carbonate of lime. It was considered that in the Shepparton and other irrigation areas, as well as in the dry areas in the Riverina, there would be a good demand for the lime for agricultural purposes. The limestone from this quarry is not burnt, but finely pulverized, and is intended to be used without burning. The cartage charge at present from the quarries to Devenish, about 8 miles, amounts to 12s. per ton, as compared with 6s. 4d. railway freight from Devenish to Melbourne. At the time of the Committee's visit the company had only crushed about 200 tons of limestone altogether; but it was represented that with good support from the public a plant capable of dealing with 9,000 tons per annum would be installed, and there would in addition be about 400 tons of railway freight annually from the carriage of by-products.

DOOKIE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE.

16. The Dookie Agricultural College, consisting of approximately 5,000 acres, is situated about 6 miles south of Dookie township, and would not be benefited by a connexion from Dookie to Devenish or Dookie to St. James. A line from Dookie to Goorambat would be about 3 miles distant from the college, while the old surveyed route from Cosgrove to Goorambat just touches a corner of the property. The amount of freight either inward or outward from the college would not be heavy. The inward freight would be mainly firewood, of which approximately 1,000 tons per annum are used, and the local supplies are gradually becoming cut out. There would in addition be a small amount of building timber used, estimated at about two truck-loads per annum. The outwards traffic would consist of probably 100 separate consignments of high-class stud sheep or cattle—mainly one or two animals at a time—and possibly 2,500 bags of seed wheat, of which 400 would be destined for the Riverina via the Yarrawonga-Oaklands line. It was stated that if the college were convenient to a railway line its popularity would be greatly enhanced, not only with and for students, but also with farmers who would attend the farmers' classes, which are held during the vacations.

SUGGESTED ROUTES FOR RAILWAY CONNEXION.

17. A route favoured by many witnesses was from Katamatite to Yarrawonga. The proposals from Dookie were to connect up with Goorambat, Devenish, or St. James on the Benalla-Yarrawonga line. An old survey showed a route also from Cosgrove to Goorambat, 17½ miles, but except on behalf of the Dookie Agricultural College, this route did not receive any support. One witness also suggested a route running due east from Yabba South to St. James, but such a proposal would not offer any material advantages over a Dookie-Devenish or a Dookie-St. James connexion.

18. The connexion from Katamatite to Yarrawonga was wholeheartedly supported in each of those towns and by a few witnesses elsewhere. The two main reasons advocated for this construction were, firstly, that such a connexion would be preferable to an extension from any point lower than the terminus at Katamatite, which would leave a short length of cockspur

line (with a consequent necessity for a comparatively costly and separate train service), and, secondly, because it would serve areas in the Boosey and Burramine parishes which are suitable for irrigation, and which, it was stated, would be irrigated at a future date when the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission had established a weir at Yarrawonga for the storage of the necessary water.

ESTIMATED LENGTH AND COST OF VARIOUS ROUTES.

19. Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, supplied the Committee with the following particulars relating to the routes shown, viz. :—

Route.	Length to Construct.		Ruling Grade.	Sharpest Curve Radius.	Cost per Mile.	Estimated Total Cost.
	M.	Ch.	One in	Chains.	£	£
Dookie to Devenish	11	63	100	20	5,900	69,600
Dookie to St. James	12	44	100	20	5,630	70,700
Katamatite to Yarrawonga ..	18	40	100	20	4,970	92,000

The foregoing figures are for a third-class line, fenced, with $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches of ballast and minimum station equipment. The plans supplied show that the only Victorian territory outside an 8-miles air-line from the existing railway system was a very small area of 7,300 acres bordering the Murray River at a point about mid-way between Katamatite and Yarrawonga. About half of this area would be river frontage and probably too low-lying for cultivation unless protected by levees. The surveys showed that on any of the routes the engineering difficulties would be negligible, the clearing light, and the grades easy to obtain.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

20. The Committee inspected the district and heard local evidence regarding the proposed connexions. There appears to be no doubt that the line recommended from Yarrawonga to Oaklands, New South Wales, has caused the residents of the district to look more to the Katamatite-Yarrawonga connexion than has hitherto been the case. A connexion from Dookie to Devenish would best suit the flow of traffic between Benalla or Wangaratta and Shepparton, and vice versa, but to serve the Riverina with canned fruit, fresh fruit, and lucerne hay from the Goulburn Valley it is immaterial whether a connexion be made from Dookie to St. James, Yabba South to St. James, or from Katamatite to Yarrawonga. The through mileage and rates would be about the same in each case, but the Katamatite-Yarrawonga connexion would entail a longer mileage and higher cost of construction. It would, however, have the compensating advantage of serving the largest area of land furthest from a railway, and if the expected developments take place in connexion with irrigation it may traverse an area devoted to more intense culture than any of the other proposed routes.

21. It is quite probable that in a dry season there would be a heavy demand in the Riverina districts north of Yarrawonga for lucerne hay from the irrigated areas of Victoria, and with a connexion established from Yarrawonga to Oaklands an opening would be afforded for a great deal of traffic of this nature, or alternatively for live-stock traffic from the dry country in the Riverina or the Benalla and North-eastern districts to the Goulburn Valley irrigated areas.

22. There is also an apparent scarcity of metal for road-making purposes throughout this portion of the Riverina, and the Dookie quarries may find an outlet here for their stone, but the Committee does not think it likely that the Riverina municipalities will expend a great deal of money in metalling to any large extent roads which are now almost level and, except in a few low-lying parts, in fairly good condition.

23. The market for crushed limestone will also be found more in the North-eastern districts of this State than in the dry areas of the Riverina, and a connexion with Yarrawonga would not, in the opinion of the Committee, lead to a great demand for agricultural lime. In any case the competition with burnt lime would be so keen that it is difficult to say whether the pulverized article would command a market. At Benalla, for instance, the Committee found that pulverized lime from Lara was being retailed at 29s. per ton, and burnt lime from Lara at 43s. per ton, while the pulverized lime from Boxwood, near Dookie, was 46s. 6d. per ton.

24. The Railways Commissioners do not at present regard a cross-country connexion as being of any use for the interchange of rolling-stock or as being necessary to afford an alternative route for goods and live stock from The Rock (New South Wales) to Melbourne, following upon the construction of the Oaklands-Yarrawonga line. As a matter of fact, the routing of the Balranald line traffic via Echuca and Toolamba to Melbourne, as is intended by the Railway Department, will greatly increase the number of trains on the Toolamba-Mangalore section of the Shepparton line.

25. The very small area of 7,300 acres over 8 miles from an existing railway means that the line must be considered on its merits as a cross-country line, as only a small increase in revenue could be looked for from the developmental point of view.

26. Dealing with the matter of timber for case-making from the Benalla-Tatong line to Shepparton and adjacent stations, the distance from Tatong to Shepparton via Benalla, Devenish, and Dookie is 73 miles, and the freight per ton (360 super. feet) is 8s. 10d. Via Benalla and Mangalore to Shepparton the distance is 116 miles, and the freight 12s. 2d., a difference of 3s. 4d. per ton, or about 1s. per 100 super. feet. To the Committee it seems doubtful that a possible reduction of 1s. per 100 super. feet will induce a largely-augmented demand for the timber from the Tatong district, especially when it is considered that much of the timber used at Shepparton now for case-making comes from Noojee, a distance of 202 miles, as compared with Tatong, 116 miles.

PROBABLE FINANCIAL RESULT.

27. It is calculated that the proposals from Dookie to Devenish or Dookie to St. James would involve a loss of nearly £4,000 per annum, while a connexion from Katamatite to Yarrawonga would mean a loss of between £5,000 and £6,000 for the first year of operation. The interest charge at $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. (which is the prevailing rate for railway construction estimates) on the £92,000 necessary for the Katamatite-Yarrawonga construction is alone £4,830, and to this must be added a substantial additional cost for interest on the expenditure for locomotive, carriage, and truck stock. It is not likely that the revenue would balance the working expenses of the Traffic, the Way and Works, and the Rolling-stock Branches, as well as a proportion of the General Administration Costs, but assuming that it did, it would mean that there would still be an amount of between £5,000 and £6,000 representing interest which the revenue would be insufficient to meet.

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE.

28. The Committee, for the foregoing reasons, is of the opinion that it is not expedient at the present time to connect the Dookie-Katamatite line with the Benalla-Yarrawonga line.

J. D. DEANY,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 10th June, 1926.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]