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VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

ORBOST TO BRODRIBB RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE, BOOK OF REFERENCE, PLAN, AND
MAP.

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RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 8 — 17357.—PRICE 9D.

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 Orbost to Brodribb, has the honour to report as follows :—

PREVIOUS REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE.

1. In May, 1924, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways reported to the Legislative Assembly upon the "General" Reference of connecting the districts of Murrungowar, Jirrah, and Orbost East with the existing railway system. The Committee investigated a number of proposals, and reported to Parliament that, pending the fulfilment of certain conditions relating to the preparation of maps and the closer settlement of parts of East Gippsland, it recommended "an extension at an early date of the Orbost 5-ft. 3-in. gauge railway for a distance of about 6 miles to a suitable station site on the west bank of the Brodribb River at an estimated cost of £77,700," which amount included a charge to be made against the extension in respect of the combined road and railway bridge over the Snowy River.

2. This bridge, which connects Orbost township, on the east side of the Snowy River, with the Orbost railway station, on the west side, on its construction in 1922 was built sufficiently strong to carry railway as well as road traffic, and is in a direct line with and close to the existing tracks. Included in the total construction cost of this line is an item of £9,260, representing the Railway Department's contribution towards the total cost of £17,775 for the construction of the bridge. The remainder of the cost was shared equally between the Country Roads Board and the municipality.

3. The Committee is at the present time also inquiring into another proposal remitted from the Legislative Assembly as a "General" Reference on 21st December, 1925, to serve the districts lying to the north and east of Bairnsdale. No report has yet been submitted to Parliament on that investigation, which is now in progress.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY.

4. Orbost is situated at the terminus of the main Gippsland railway line, at a distance of 230½ miles from Melbourne. The line from Bairnsdale to Orbost, a distance of 60 miles, was opened in 1916, and since then material progress has been made in the district, more especially in the production of maize, dairy produce, and timber. At Orbost the fertile Snowy River flats are used mainly for the production of maize, and exceptionally heavy crops are obtained of this cereal.

5. From Orbost eastward the country is traversed by the Prince's Highway, which extends beyond Genoa near the Victorian Border (100 miles distant) to Eden (Twofold Bay), and Sydney, and at the present time farmers and graziers are transporting their farm produce and live stock very long distances to the railhead at Orbost. The condition of the Prince's Highway is mainly good, but it is closed during the winter months against certain heavy traffic such as timber, and also fish from Mallacoota. This gives rise to a great deal of discontent, and operates to the detriment of the production of the district.

6. The Brodribb River joins the Snowy just north of Marlo, which is situated at the mouth of these rivers 10 miles south-east of Orbost. The country between Orbost and Marlo consists mainly of rich alluvial flats, which are at present being used for growing maize, beans, pumpkins, and lucerne. A large amount of dairying is carried on, the milk or cream being sent to the Orbost Butter Factory. Pigs are also raised extensively and railed to the Dandenong or Melbourne market.

7. After crossing the Brodribb River the country south-east of the proposed terminus, towards the coast, consisting of the parishes of Tabbara, Jilwain, and Yarak, is much poorer in quality than the land to the north of the Prince's Highway. This coastal country is at present occupied in large leases for grazing purposes, and it is not likely that the extension of the line would induce a great deal of cultivation in this part. The average annual rainfall of the district is about 35 inches, increasing to 40 inches at Murrungowar and Kuark.

8. An extension to Brodribb would tap also the Murrungowar and Kuark country, which is a rich reddish loam of granitic origin, and is described by the officers of the Lands Department as first-class land. An attempt was made to settle Murrungowar some 30 years ago, but the hardships the settlers had to undergo, coupled with the absence of good roads and the necessity of carting (usually with pack-horses) a distance of 80 miles to Bairnsdale, caused them in the majority of cases to relinquish their holdings. More recently, with the advent of formed and gravelled roads, and a railway station at Orbost, 22 miles distant, there has been a substantial advance in the progress of the district. This cartage distance would be reduced to 16 miles with a railway extension to Brodribb, while the permanent survey for a railway towards the New South Wales border provides for a station at Raymond, which is only 8 miles from Murrungowar. Cartage between Orbost and Murrungowar costs £2 to £3 per ton, depending on the season of the year and the state of the roads. Pigs are now driven from Murrungowar to Orbost, the journey taking about one and a half days. The settler precedes the pigs at a leisurely pace, with a cart containing maize, which is sprinkled on the roadway; the pigs follow the food, and being allowed frequent rests, reach the station in fair condition.

9. The Kuark country, which is higher than Murrungowar, and adjoins it on the north side, is more thickly and heavily timbered, principally with yellow, brown, and white stringybark and silvertop. This country also was subdivided many years ago and an effort made at settlement, but the handicap of 90 miles cartage to Bairnsdale and the absence of formed roads rendered the attempt abortive, and the settlement was abandoned.

TIMBER TRAFFIC.

10. With the opening of the Bairnsdale-Orbost line large timber supplies were obtained in the Colquhoun and other forest areas within reasonable carting distance of the line, but those supplies have now been to a great extent depleted, and it was stated that an extension of the line to the Brodribb would make immediately available ample further supplies of timber for various purposes. The principal varieties of timber in the immediate tributary area to the line are messmate, stringybark (white and yellow), spotted gum, blue gum, mahogany, and silvertop or Gippsland mountain ash (*Eucalyptus Sieberiana*), a rough-barked tree quite distinct from the smooth-barked mountain ash (*Eucalyptus Regnans*) of the Warburton and Healesville districts.

11. It is not likely that the cheaper varieties of timber will compete in the Melbourne market with the supplies obtainable from districts much nearer Melbourne, such as Healesville, Warburton, and Noojee, but there is a good demand for the better classes of timber to be found in this area for use as railway sleepers, crossing timbers, bridge beams, telegraph poles, electric light poles, piles, &c., and as the supplies at present being railed from stations between Bruthen and Orbost are becoming scarce, involving cartage for longer distances, it is expected that with the provision of railway facilities a large portion of this traffic will be diverted to the proposed station at Brodribb.

12. Timber and other material carried for the Construction Branch of the Railway Department is charged freight at the rate of fourth-fifths of a penny per ton per mile, and the same rate is paid by the Railways Commissioners on timber used on works which are charged to capital. Timber used on maintenance and repair work, however, is carried free of any charge, and to the extent of the timber so carried the revenue of the line will not be a fair reflex of the traffic conveyed over it.

13. The Committee examined Mr. Harold W. Clapp, Chairman of the Railways Commissioners, on this matter in its relation to the Bairnsdale-Orbost line a few months ago. Mr. Clapp stated that if that line were credited with freight for the railway material carried free it would enhance its revenue by about £2,000. He was asked—

“ . . . You recognize a line of that kind, carrying trade of that description, is of great value to your service ? ”

Mr. Clapp replied—

“ I have not denied that at any time. If you asked me if I thought that a good line to build for the State I would say ‘ Yes,’ and I do not question it at all. . . . You can get figures from us as to the tonnage we haul over the Orbost line to show what an asset it is to the State.”

The figures which were afterwards supplied showed that for the year ended June, 1924, while the total outward tonnage for the Bairnsdale-Orbost line on which freight was paid amounted to 29,609 tons, there were 19,870 tons carried free of charge, and used for railway maintenance purposes in various parts of the State.

14. It will thus be seen that an extension to Brodribb, opening up further supplies of timber, will be of benefit not only to the Railways and other Government Departments but to the State generally. In the estimated revenue for this proposed extension the Railway Officers have allowed for a substantial timber traffic, including 4,000 tons of poles, beams, sleepers, &c., for the Railway Department for construction purposes, apart altogether from the requirements for ordinary repairs and maintenance, which, as stated previously, are carried free of charge.

TRAFFIC OFFICER'S REPORT.

15. Mr. J. H. Olsson, Chief Special Officer of the Railway Department, submitted a report which shows that in the area regarded as tributary to the line there were 590,000 acres which might be classified as follows:—

	Acres.
Freehold or in course of alienation	49,500
Reserved as forests, but partially let on grazing lease	101,300
Balance, including roads, swamps, rivers, and leased for grazing purposes or unoccupied	439,200
Total	590,000

16. The population in the district represented by the 49,500 acres (which area is held by 144 persons) is about 600. In addition to the 144 holders mentioned there are 45 settlers with small allotments of 1 to 3 acres. The Lands Department has under consideration a proposal to throw open for settlement approximately 15,000 acres in about 100 blocks in the Murrungowar and Kuark districts. This land was originally classed as first class at £1 per acre, but the price will probably be reduced to amounts between 7s. 6d. and 15s., and the land may possibly be loaded for the balance of the 20s. per acre for road-construction purposes. While 101,300 acres have been reserved for forestry purposes, the whole of the country, with the exception of the low-lying coast lands, is heavily timbered, and though a large proportion of the timber is over-matured, there is available an enormous quantity of timber suitable for saw-milling purposes. The element of competitive freight charges may, however, operate against the early use of so much of this timber as is not of the better varieties and superior quality.

17. The number of live stock in the parishes regarded as tributary to the proposed extension is as follows:—

Dairy cattle	1,231
Other cattle	2,408
Pigs	1,785
Horses	477
Sheep	437
Lambs	97

18. The principal road in the district is the Prince's Highway, running in a north-easterly direction through the tributary area towards Mallacoota Inlet. This road is formed throughout, partially gravelled, and in good condition. The Country Roads Board has constructed a road with a good grade through the centre of the Murrungowar district and along a section bordering the Arte River, while several roads of less importance are provided to serve other parts of the district. Generally speaking, however, the district is poorly provided for with roads, and those that have been constructed are suitable for only light traffic.

LENGTH AND COST OF PROPOSED EXTENSION.

19. Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, supplied the Committee with figures showing that the length of the proposed extension is 5 miles 69 chains; the ruling grade is 1 in 50, and the sharpest curve of 15 chains radius. It is estimated that the cost of construction will be £67,000, plus an allowance of £1,718 for rolling-stock, or a total amount debitable to the line in this respect of £68,718. This includes an allowance of £9,260 for the bridge over the Snowy River at Orbost previously referred to.

ESTIMATED ANNUAL CHARGES AND REVENUE.

20. The Railways Commissioners furnished the Committee with the following estimates of annual charges and revenue of the proposed railway based on a daily rail-motor service with a goods train twice weekly, viz. :—

ORBOST TO BRODRIBB.

<i>Annual Charges.</i>		£
Interest at 5½ per cent. per annum on £68,718, being cost (£67,000) of constructing 6 miles of 5-ft. 3-in. railway from Orbost to Brodribb, with £1,718 added for rolling-stock	3,608
Working Expenses, Transportation and Traffic Branches	701
" " Way and Works Branch (Maintenance, &c.)	870
" " Rolling-stock (Locomotive expenses, repairs, and renewals)	892
General Expenses (Administration, Printing, Auditing, &c.)	68
		£6,139

<i>Revenue.</i>		On New Line.	On other Lines from New Traffic from New Line.	£
		£	£	£
Passengers, 3,600 journeys	128	464	
Parcels	30		
Mails	20		
Live stock, 270 trucks	84	635	
Class goods, 600 tons	58	215	
Vegetables, 100 tons	4	71	
Timber, 7,300 tons	215	2,975	
Grain, 1,500 tons	27	405	
Butter, 250 tons	14	216	
Fish, 200 tons	16	249	
All other traffic	25		
		£621	£5,230	5,851
Estimated loss first year of operation			£288

21. In the foregoing figures the estimate of £892 for Working Expenses for the Rolling-stock Branch, includes an allowance of £364 for all costs in connexion with the running of the rail-motor, and £315 for locomotive working on the goods train service. Under the heading of Revenue the 1,500 tons of grain would be almost wholly maize. The 7,300 tons of timber would be divided between 4,000 tons for railway purposes (other than repairs and renewals) and 3,300 tons for the general public.

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

22. The Committee has recently inspected the district beyond Orbost, and heard evidence at Orbost, Murrungowar, and a number of places further east. There is no doubt that this extension of the Orbost line for approximately 6 miles to the west bank of the Brodribb River will be of material advantage to all the settlers east of Orbost, but more especially to those at Murrungowar, where the soil is exceptionally fertile, but cartage difficulties prevent its use to anything like the full extent.

23. On the higher lands oats and other cereals grow well, while along the foothills and in the valleys heavy crops are obtained of potatoes, beans, maize, pumpkins, &c. Too large an area is a serious disadvantage with this soil and climate, as immediately following the killing of the green timber the growth of wattles, musk, hazel, lilly-pilly, dogwood, and bracken fern is so rapid as to completely overrun the land unless the settler has sufficient time and labour available to keep it constantly cultivated.

24. North from Murrungowar, in the parish of Kuark, and for 10 miles to the north-east of Murrungowar settlement, along the valley of the Arte River, the rich, red soil of excellent quality continues, and although the distance of 16 miles from Murrungowar to the proposed rail terminus at Brodribb is undoubtedly far for horse-drawn vehicles, the advent of the motor car and motor truck has rendered possible production at much greater distances from a railway than was previously the case.

25. The various timbers, both at Murrungowar and Kuark, are exceptionally fine, both as to quality and size, one extensive belt of straight and stately blue gums 3 or 4 miles north of Murrungowar being particularly conspicuous. These and other varieties in the district are especially suitable for heavy engineering works where length and strength are necessary attributes of the timbers required.

26. At Orbost approximately 12,000 acres are under maize, and the Committee agrees with the local views expressed that with an extension to the Brodribb the large area of fertile flats near the terminus and along the route of the proposed line would be placed almost solely under maize cultivation.

27. The permanent survey for a line east from Orbost towards the New South Wales border passes the Brodribb River on practically the route now suggested for this short section, so that the carrying out of the extension to Brodribb will not result in any deviation of the permanent survey in the event of a further easterly construction being decided upon in the future.

28. The Committee was impressed with the evidence tendered at Orbost on behalf of the sleeper-cutters of the district to the effect that most of the good sleeper timber between Bruthen and Orbost has been cut out, especially on the coastal side, while on the north side of the line the cutters were working as far back as 12 miles. At Bruthen, Tostaree, Hospital Creek, and Nowa Nowa the cutters are paying 1s. 6d. cartage for each yellow stringybark and 2s. for each ironbark or grey box sleeper. This applies in fine weather only, as in winter it is impossible for any cartage at all to be done. The Committee is of opinion that the proposed extension will make available large supplies of timber of excellent quality for sleepers and general engineering purposes with much less cartage involved than is the case at present. Apart from the supply in the immediate tributary area, the Murrungowar timber will be brought 6 miles closer, with a good road to the rail-head at Brodribb, and it is expected that this will lead to much more extensive cutting in the Murrungowar forests.

29. The Cann River Butter Factory is obliged to send its butter 60 miles by road to Orbost at present, while settlers as far east as Genoa and Mallacoota have 90 to 100 miles road cartage, and many of them, finding it too far to drive their pigs or fat lambs those long distances, are now resorting to the use of the motor truck. The proposed rail extension 6 miles eastward, while not sufficient to afford them a very substantial benefit is, in the opinion of the Committee, a step in the right direction, and will reduce the return journey by 12 miles.

30. Furthermore, the very small estimated loss of £288 for the first year's working on this proposed extension, making this section of line almost self-supporting from the outset, is an unusual and gratifying feature in these days of costly construction and heavy interest charges, and has rendered much easier the Committee's task of dealing with the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

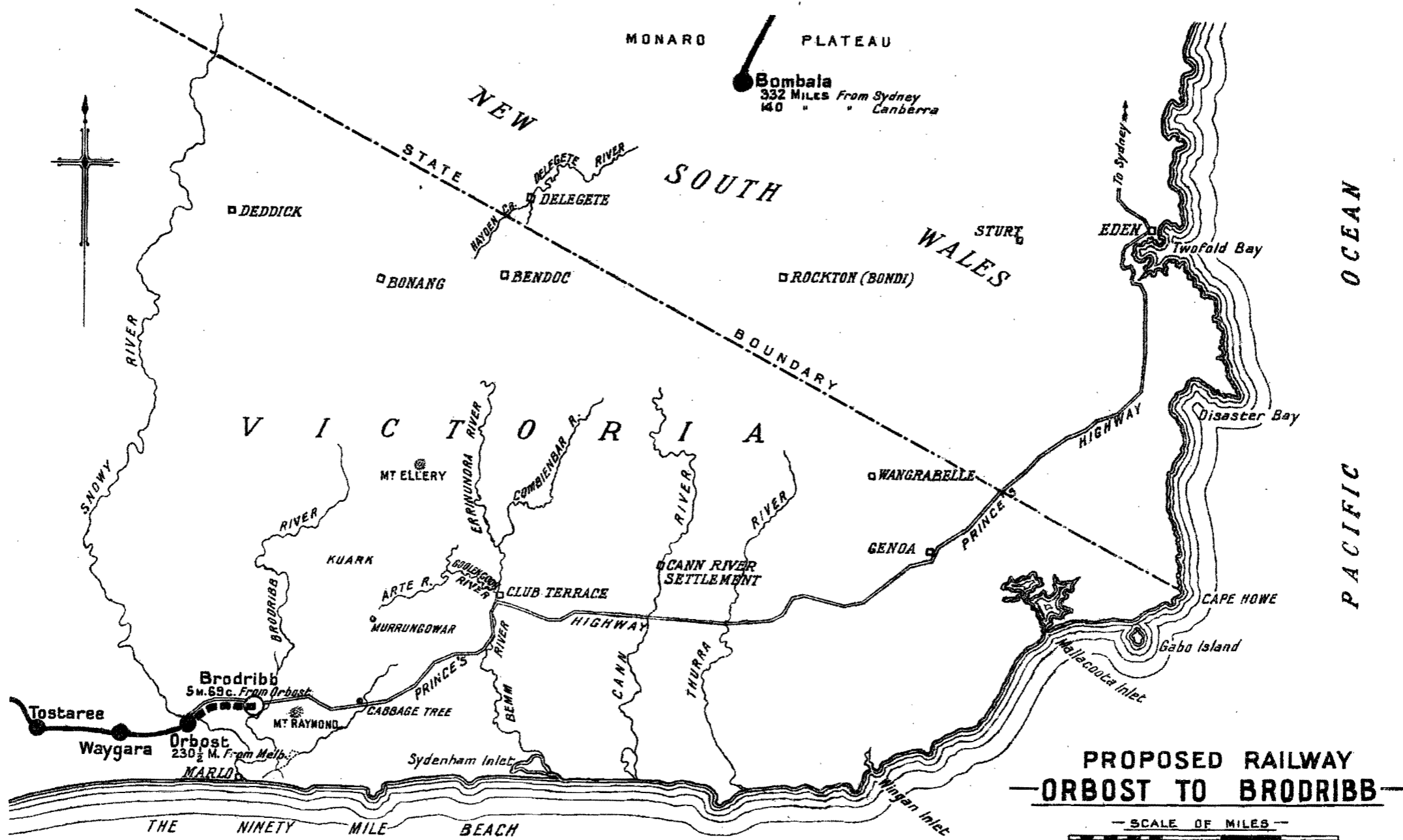
31. The Committee, for the foregoing reasons, confirms the recommendation of May, 1924, and recommends an extension of the Orbost line for a distance of 5 miles 69 chains, terminating on the west bank of the Brodribb River, at Block No. 24, parish of Orbost East, county of Croajingolong, at an estimated cost of £68,718, including £1,718 for rolling-stock.

32. Section 14 of the Railways Standing Committee Act (No. 2717) prohibits a member of the Committee taking part in its proceedings when any proposed line running into or through his electoral district is being considered or reported on by the Committee; consequently Mr. A. E. Lind, M.L.A., did not take part in the deliberations of the Committee when this question was being considered.

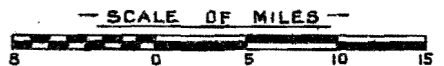
A. E. CHANDLER,
Vice-Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 17th November, 1926.

[Minutes of Evidence, Book of Reference, and Plan are not printed.]



**PROPOSED RAILWAY
—ORBOST TO BRODRIBB—**



Existing Railways shown thus ————
Proposed Railway " " ■■■■