

1926.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON

PROPOSED EXPENDITURE UNDER RAILWAY
LOAN APPLICATION ACT, No. 3417

(PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL TRACKS, LOCOMOTIVE
FACILITIES, ETC., AT HAMILTON);

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

RETURN to an Order of the House,

Dated 12th October, 1926, for—

A COPY of the Report from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways on Proposed Expenditure under Railway Loan Application Act, No. 3417 (Provision of Additional Tracks, Locomotive Facilities, &c., at Hamilton); together with Minutes of Evidence.

(*Mr. Mackrell.*)

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 12th October, 1926.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(Fifteenth Committee.)

A. E. LIND, Esq., M.L.A., Chairman.*

The HON. A. E. CHANDLER, M.L.C., Vice-Chairman.†

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

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

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

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

* Mr. A. E. Lind, M.L.A., was appointed Chairman on 3rd August, 1926, in succession to Mr. J. D. Deany, M.L.A., whose term of office expired on that date.

† The Hon. A. E. Chandler, M.L.C., was appointed Vice-Chairman on 3rd August, 1926.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS has, in accordance with the requirements of Section 21 of the *Railways Standing Committee Act 1915* (No. 2717), inquired into the proposed preliminary expenditure of £12,000 towards the provision of Additional Tracks, Locomotive Facilities, &c., at Hamilton, authorized in the Schedule to the *Railway Loan Application Act 1925* (No. 3417), subject to the outlay being first approved by the Committee, and has now the honour to report as follows :—

EXISTING CONDITIONS.

1. Hamilton, in the Western District of Victoria, is an important railway junction, situated 197½ miles from Melbourne. It forms the centre of a network of lines connecting with the districts of Portland, Coleraine, Balmoral and Horsham, Ararat, Port Fairy, and Warrnambool. The town itself has a population of 5,000, and is surrounded by prosperous farming and grazing districts, for which Hamilton railway station is the gateway for inward goods or outward produce.

2. The engine shed in the Hamilton station yard at present accommodates only two engines, and is situated in an awkward position between the coal stage (and ashpits) on one side and the 53-foot turntable on the other, with no direct access from the passenger lines at the platform except by means of two reverse movements. A truck of coal discharging at the coal stage blocks any engine passing along the line to use the turntable, and the practice necessarily followed is to cease the coal-discharging, shunt the coal truck beyond the engine shed and across the turntable to a dead-end siding, while the engine follows on to the turntable, is turned, and steams away, leaving the road clear for the truck to return to the coal stage, where further interruption in the unloading work may soon be expected.

3. The Commissioners aver that the present locomotive facilities at Hamilton are the worst in the State for any dépôt of equal importance, and the frequent necessity for moving engines in order to allow other engines to proceed with necessary work involves keeping almost every engine at Hamilton constantly under steam.

4. A "DD" engine is the longest that can be turned on the present turntable of 53 feet, and the capacity of the table is taxed to its extreme limit to carry out this operation. The balancing of the engine is a matter of difficulty, and causes loss of time from the extra care and attention necessary. The new "N" class engines cannot be accommodated on tables of this length, and as it is desired to use this type regularly in the Hamilton district shortly, it would mean separating the engine from the tender for turning purposes. This is a laborious operation, which is rarely carried out in less than 40 minutes.

5. Under existing conditions, when wheat is being shipped from Portland, and "K" class engines are utilized for goods-train operation, arrangements have to be made for turning these engines at Heywood and Kanagulk on account of the lack of proper facilities at Hamilton and Portland North. This arrangement involves a certain amount of tender-first running at relatively low speed, which is uneconomical and creates a lack of flexibility in utilizing available engine power in the locality to the best advantage.

6. A skeleton pit on the far side of the turntable is used for engine repairs at present, but any engine requiring such repairs has of course to pass over the turntable, and when once it is on the pit and at a dead end it is a very difficult matter to move it again until it is once more fit to raise its own steam.

7. The ashes from the locomotives are discharged into a pit adjoining the coal stage, and from there thrown up over the side of an "I" truck, nearly 7 feet from ground level. Owing to the lack of roads the clearing of ashes from the vicinity of the coal stage is a matter of great difficulty, and the methods by which this work has to be carried out are extremely inefficient when the quantities to be handled are taken into consideration.

8. The coal stage is too wide and too low for the economical and prompt handling of coal; and as a result the average cost of handling coal from truck to tender at Hamilton is 2s. 4d. per ton, which figure, the Committee was informed, is far in excess of that of any other dépôt or outstation approximately equal in size to Hamilton. The most economical method of handling the coal at present is to shovel the Maitland coal on to one face of the stage, and the State Mine coal on to the other. The coal trucks are therefore placed and worked on two roads, which are the only means of access to the turntable and engine shed. Frequent interference with the unloading of coal is unavoidable, and it was stated that Hamilton is one of the worst centres in the State for demurrage on trucks of locomotive coal awaiting unloading and release.

9. The breakdown van is located on one of the yard lines, and the Committee was informed that at times it was a difficult matter to get the van out when it was required at the scene of an accident, owing to the road being blocked by engines or other vehicles. This van should be accommodated in a loop road, so that an engine can be coupled on at either end, and proceed direct to the scene of a casualty. Under present conditions there may be a considerable loss of time in getting the breakdown van out of the yards when there is any congestion of trucks.

10. The Committee also learned that a scheme had been prepared for effecting alterations and extensions to the Hamilton station and yard, but that it was impossible to carry out the proposed yard improvements until the locomotive dépôt had been removed. Although the passenger traffic has decreased slightly, the goods traffic at Hamilton station is increasing, as the following table shows, there being a gain of 40 per cent. in the combined outward and inward goods tonnage handled during the last five years:—

Year, ending June—	Outward Tonnage.	Inward Tonnage.	Outward Goods Revenue.	Outward Passenger Journeys.	Passenger Revenue.
			£ s. d.		£ s. d.
1922	14,748	18,292	14,492 17 8	46,562	16,822 18 8
1923	15,720	19,495	15,119 5 11	46,438	18,662 8 4
1924	17,572	21,504	15,924 16 3	43,123	17,633 7 6
1925	19,867	24,385	17,826 13 6	39,909	17,402 3 9
1926	19,316	26,984	16,096 15 9	39,973	17,412 12 3

11. The increases in the passenger revenue or total passenger journeys have not been at all commensurate with the goods increase, and it was stated that this was largely due to motor competition. The goods revenue increased by only 11 per cent., while the tonnage increased, as has been shown, by 40 per cent., owing to this motor competition, under which the higher classified goods in the Railway Department's Schedule were conveyed at cheaper rates by road.

PROPOSED SCHEME OF IMPROVEMENT.

12. The scheme proposed by the Commissioners provides for—

- (1) the construction of a new locomotive shed, equipped with all modern facilities, including a repair shop, a 70-foot turntable and all the requisite connecting tracks;
- (2) installation of a mechanical coal-handling plant; and
- (3) the necessary car and truck repair roads.

It is stated that the existing locomotive facilities at Hamilton have long outlived their usefulness, and that after a close study of the whole problem the plan proposed by the Department will best meet present and future requirements.

13. The proposed locomotive shed will afford cover for eight engines, with open stabling for five more, while the plan of construction will permit of an additional 21 engines being accommodated under cover if the necessity arises at a future date.

14. The site selected for the dépôt is an almost triangular area of land at the junction of the Koroit, Portland, and Coleraine lines about 75 chains south of the Hamilton station. Space is available for a considerable future expansion of the accommodation, and the carrying out of the scheme will constitute Hamilton the most important locomotive dépôt in the Western District and meet requirements for a long time to come.

COST OF THE SCHEME.

15. The total estimated cost of the proposed works is £42,050, of which £37,491 is chargeable to Capital, and the balance, £4,559 (representing the cost of the replaced assets), to Working Expenses. The programme which has been prepared for the carrying out of the work provides for the Capital Expenditure being spread over a period of three financial years, as under :—

		£	£
1925-26	.. Completing earthworks	3,000	
	Mechanical coal-handling plant on ground	2,500	
	Turntable delivered on ground	2,000	
	Carrying out track work to the extent of 60 per cent. of the total	4,500	
		<hr/>	12,000
1926-27	.. Completing track work	3,000	
	Erecting mechanical coal-handling plant and turntable and partly completing engine-shed, offices, and drainage	16,491	
		<hr/>	19,491
1927-28	.. Completing engine-shed, offices, drainage, &c.	6,000	
		<hr/>	<u>£37,491</u>

VIEWS OF THE COMMITTEE.

16. The Committee visited Hamilton and inspected the site for the proposed works in company with a number of district officers from different branches of the Railway Department, and later heard evidence at Melbourne from Mr. J. M. Ashworth, Assistant Chief Engineer of Way and Works, and Mr. N. C. Harris, Assistant Chief Mechanical Engineer, on various phases of the proposal. The inspection indicated that the traffic requirements at Hamilton have quite outgrown the present facilities. The engine shed, for instance, which is very badly situated for convenient access, holds but two engines, although there are regularly stabled at Hamilton at least five locomotives, four of the "DD" type, and one "DDE," and the result is that three of these must be left in the open yard. In addition there are five engines stationed at Balmoral, Casterton, Coleraine, Portland, and Mount Gambier which work into Hamilton at various times, although they are usually stabled at their own respective stations. In busy seasons, when wheat is being shipped to Portland, there have been as many as twelve engines located at Hamilton, not including the out-station engines referred to. The coal stage and engine shed are situated so close to the station as to necessitate two reverse movements for every engine entering or leaving the locomotive yard, thus involving three movements instead of one.

17. The shipping of wheat at Portland is a very variable factor, and would not in itself warrant the provision of additional facilities at Hamilton. The number of bags of wheat passing through Hamilton for shipment at Portland during the years mentioned was as shown hereunder, viz. :—

Year.					Number of Bags.
1921-22	..	..	..	..	93,308
1922-23	..	..	..	..	40,848
1923-24	..	..	..	..	nil
1924-25	..	..	..	..	68,368
1925-26	..	..	..	..	nil

18. It will be seen that last year and in 1923-24 no wheat at all was shipped from Portland, and as the quantity dispatched from that port is controlled by the shipping firms, and may range from nothing at all to over 90,000 bags, it could not reasonably be expected that the Railway Department should make provision for the maximum shipment at Portland without any certainty that a single bag would be conveyed to that port. However, the additional and modern facilities now proposed to be installed at Hamilton, although warranted for general business apart from the Portland wheat, will, of course, be of immense service in a heavy grain-shipment season, and will probably be found quite sufficient even under those conditions.

19. The expansion of the goods business at Hamilton is also causing the department to make investigations as to an enlargement of the Hamilton station, and it is possible that the provision of an island platform and other improvements will shortly be considered in detail. At present the plans for this work have not been finalized, although a tentative scheme has been prepared, but nothing of a definite nature can be done until the locomotive shed, turntable, coal stage, &c., are shifted from their present position, so as to afford the additional yard room which is needed. The motor competition for the goods traffic is slackening, and two of the three motor vehicles which had been in operation have retired from the field.

20. The Committee made careful inquiries into the proposal to install a mechanical coal-handling plant with a belt conveyor operated by power. It was thought that possibly a gravity system could be provided which would save the cost of the power, but it was found that in the space available a sufficient length of line could not be placed with suitable grades to run the coal trucks on a raised track up to a staging, and also to run the engines taking coal down on a depressed track below the staging. Electric power is not available at the site, and an oil engine will be used for the purpose. The cost of handling coal at present at Hamilton is 2s. 4d. per ton, but with the proposed mechanical plant the actual labour cost is expected to be less than 6d. per ton. However, with a proper allowance for interest, depreciation, and maintenance, the cost on the basis of the present turnover will be approximately 2s. It is expected that with the continued growth of the turnover the cost per ton of handling will gradually fall to less than 1s. per ton. In addition the indirect saving resulting from the reduced delays to coal trucks and the more prompt coaling of locomotives should go a long way towards rendering the new installation profitable from the outset.

21. With regard to ashes, it is proposed to install a new type of cinder conveyor operated by an oil engine. The Committee was informed that this type of plant eliminates manual labour, and is extensively used in Canada and the United States of America; and as it is believed to be an improvement on the methods in use here it is desired to gain experience of it under Victorian conditions. The present cost of handling ashes by manual labour is approximately 1s. per ton, and with the cinder conveyor, allowing for interest, depreciation, and maintenance, the cost is expected to be about 1s. per ton on the present turnover, gradually falling with the increased quantity handled to about 6d. per ton. The proposed 70-foot turntable will be suitable for "A2," "C," or "N" class engines, and even the proposed new Pacific and heavy Mikado types ("S" and "X" class respectively) which it is proposed to construct may be turned on this table. The present 53-foot turntable will also remain at Hamilton and be used for turning rail motors.

22. The Committee was informed that the water supply at Hamilton is of reasonably good quality for locomotive use. A shortage has occurred in dry years, the trouble being that although the storage is ample, the main is too small. A new main is, however, to be laid, and it is anticipated that this will be completed by the time the Department's requirements have materially increased.

23. The Department owns all the land that will be required in connexion with the carrying out of the proposed works; no resumption of private property will be necessary, and there will be no interference with the streets or roads of the Hamilton municipality.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

24. The Committee, after a careful investigation and inspection, is of opinion that the proposed expenditure is justified, owing to the inadequacy of the present facilities for the growing traffic at Hamilton, and accordingly recommends to Parliament that approval be given to the proposed expenditure by the Railways Commissioners on improved station, yard, and locomotive facilities at Hamilton of £42,050, of which £37,491 is chargeable to Capital Account, and £4,559 to Working Expenses, the expenditure to be spread over a period of three years, as outlined in paragraph 15 of this Report.

A. E. LIND,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 27th September, 1926.

[Minutes of Evidence are not printed.]