

1929.

VICTORIA.

REPORT

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON RAILWAYS

ON THE QUESTION OF THE

LAANECOORIE DISTRICT CONNECTING
RAILWAY;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE, PLAN, AND MAP.

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 30th July, 1929.

By Authority:

H. J. GREEN, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, MELBOURNE.
RAILWAYS STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT No. 4.—[6D.]—8865.

EXTRACTED FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

TUESDAY, 20TH DECEMBER, 1927.

7. LAANECOORIE DISTRICT CONNECTING RAILWAY.—Motion made, by leave, and question—That the question of connecting the district of Laanecoorie with the existing railway system by means of a 5-ft. 3-in. gauge railway be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways for inquiry and report (*Mr. Tunnecliffe*)—put and, after debate, agreed to.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS.

(*Sixteenth Committee.*)

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

The Hon. A. BELL, M.L.C., Vice-Chairman.

A. A. Dunstan, Esq., M.L.A.
The Hon. M. McGregor, M.L.C.

R. T. Pollard, Esq., M.L.A.

* Mr. Lind, M.L.A., was elected Chairman, 13th February, 1929, in succession to Mr. Dunstan, M.L.A., who succeeded Mr. Pollard, M.L.A., on 13th August, 1928.

APPROXIMATE COST OF REPORT.

	£	s.	d.
Printing (250 copies)	11	0	0

R E P O R T.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Legislative Assembly referred the question of connecting the district of Laanecoorie 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 THE COMMITTEE.

1. In 1891 the matter of a through railway from Shelbourne via Laanecoorie to Arnold's Bridge was inquired into by the Railways Standing Committee. At that time earthworks had been constructed for a distance of 1 mile 69 chains from Shelbourne in accordance with a Government decision arrived at before the formation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways. This construction work was abandoned about 1890, and in 1891 the Railways Standing Committee reported to Parliament as follows :—

“ The Parliament of 1884 authorized a railway from Maldon towards Laanecoorie which, however, has only been constructed as far as Shelbourne. . . . The Sectional Committee . . . recommend that a line of railway, approximately 13 miles in length, be constructed from the present terminus of the Maldon to Laanecoorie railway to junction with the Dunolly and Inglewood railway at Llanelly”

2. In 1895 the Committee reported on a proposed line from Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner and agreed to the following Resolution, viz. :—

“ That in the opinion of the Committee it is inexpedient to construct the proposed extension from Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner, as the evidence shows :—

- (1) That the district is well served at present, no person therein being now more than 8 miles from a railway ;
- (2) That production in the district would not be increased by the construction of the line ;
- (3) That the proposed extension would add considerably to the present loss of £3,256 per annum on the Maldon to Shelbourne line ;
- (4) That any new traffic on the extension would be obtained at the expense of lines already constructed, and would result in a reduction of the revenue at present received by the Department.”

3. During 1921 the Committee inquired into the matter of “ connecting Laanecoorie with the existing railway system,” and reported to Parliament as under :—

“ It was stated by those who gave evidence that no farmer in the Laanecoorie district was more than 10 miles from an existing railway station. . . . The Committee would like to have recommended the completion of the partly constructed railway works for nearly 2 miles beyond Shelbourne so as to make them of value, and the extension of that section of the line a mile further to Johnston's Corner on the Dunolly-Bendigo main road, but the estimated cost of £25,000 was regarded as prohibitive. As the farmers in the Laanecoorie district are not too far from an existing railway station, and the roads are fairly good, or could be made so, there being ample supplies of gravel available within reasonable cartage distance, and as supplies of firewood are still obtainable along the Castlemaine-Shelbourne line, the Committee is of opinion that it is inexpedient to construct a broad-gauge railway to Laanecoorie at an estimated outlay of £41,300.”

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT.

4. Laanecoorie township lies about 8 miles north-west of Shelbourne railway station, which is $99\frac{1}{4}$ miles from Melbourne, being the terminus of a cock-spur line, 21 miles in length, branching off the main line at Castlemaine. The district generally is flat and comprises good agricultural land, which is being devoted largely to the growing of wheat, oats, and hay; also tomatoes and lucerne, and to a fair extent to pastoral use. The geological formation is mainly Ordovician, but just north of Newbridge, and again a little south of Eddington, the newer basalt of the Cainozoic period is encountered.

5. Between the Loddon River, on which Laanecoorie is situated, and the Dunolly–Inglewood railway line there is portion of the Waanyarra Forest Reserve (which extends for some distance on the west side of the Dunolly–Inglewood line), covering a total area of 72,733 acres. The average rainfall of the district is about 20 inches.

6. About 45 years ago a line was authorized by Parliament from Maldon towards Laanecoorie, but when construction reached a point 1 mile 69 chains beyond Shelbourne, the construction work was abandoned. The earthworks remain to-day, but the timber in the culverts and bridges has now reached a stage when it is of little use and would require to be practically wholly replaced.

7. Laanecoorie is surrounded by railways, as a glance at the accompanying map will show, but a direct rail connexion with Shelbourne would be of great advantage to the settlers, inasmuch as not only would they be saved road cartage to the station for the rail journey to Melbourne, but their freight rates would be substantially less than from other stations on adjoining lines. A farmer at Laanecoorie, for instance, carting 8 miles to Tarnagulla would then pay freight for $136\frac{1}{4}$ miles to Melbourne, while if he carted 8 miles to Shelbourne the rail distance to Melbourne would be only $99\frac{1}{4}$ miles. On wheat this would represent a difference of approximately 1s. 7d. per ton, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. per 3-bushel bag.

LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS.

8. Evidence was tendered by residents of the district to the effect that the construction of a line would probably lead to the erection of a butter factory at Laanecoorie, as cream was now conveyed as far as 25 miles to Maryborough and 30 miles to Newstead. The point was also stressed that the farmers would gain materially in the conveyance of their lambs to market. It was stated that the practice at present was to drive them along the road from Laanecoorie to Shelbourne, which in the opinion of the witnesses so detrimentally affected the condition of the lambs that it resulted in a loss of from 2s. to 3s. per head. Some of the district wool was now conveyed to Melbourne by motor lorry, and it was considered that with a station close at hand the whole of this traffic would be sent by rail, as discoloration of the wool was stated to occur frequently with dust during road transport. There was also the possibility of a saw-mill starting operations on red gum, grey box, and other available timbers if railway facilities were brought closer than at present. It was considered locally that a line from Shelbourne to Johnston's Corner would terminate just on the fringe of the good country, and would not adequately serve the district of Laanecoorie. At the same time it was admitted that it would be a material improvement on the existing conditions of having to cart to Shelbourne. The witnesses were in the main against the idea of the imposition of a Betterment Rate to meet any possible loss on the proposed line, Mr. J. C. Morrison, the President of the Marong Shire, stating, when questioned on the matter, "I am sure it would be strongly opposed."

LENGTH AND COST OF PROPOSED LINE.

9. Mr. C. H. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, supplied the Committee with the following estimates for proposed lines to serve the district, viz. :—

Route.	Length to construct.	Ruling Grade.	Sharpest Curve Radius.	Cost per mile.	Total Cost.
	M.Ch.	One in—	Chains.	£	£
Shelbourne to Johnston's Corner	3.54	50	20	6,640	24,400
Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner (Permanent Survey) ..	6.43	50	30	5,410	35,400
Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner (new route parallel with road)	6.9	50	20	5,516	33,700

10. In each case these estimates include the restoration of the existing earthworks on the abandoned line for 1 mile 69 chains. In the case of the estimate of £33,700 from Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner, the items making up the cost were as under:—

Preliminary expenses and surveys	£	300
Land transfer expenses		30
Clearing and grubbing		80
Fencing, cattleguards, gates, &c.		860
Earthworks in cuttings, 13 ft. 6 in. formation width—		
	£	
4,000 cubic yards at 3s.		600
7,800 cubic yards at 1s. 6d.		590
6,300 cubic yards at 3s. 3d.		1,020
		2,210
Restoration of existing earthworks for 1 mile 69 chains		8,900
Timber culverts		530
Metalling and gravelling in stations and road crossings—		
1,200 cubic yards at 8s.		480
Ballast, 6 inches thick; local gravel—		
4,600 cubic yards at 8s. 6d.		1,950
Sleepers, 10,480 at 6s., plus crossing timbers (£136)		3,280
Rails, 4.71 miles at £1,400 per mile		6,590
Other permanent way material		1,360
Terminal station		460
Temporary stock trucking yards		100
Signals and safety appliances		270
Telegraph, 4¼ miles at £130		550
Improved conditions for workmen		1,070
Tools and plant, 2½ per cent.		720
Engineering, Supervision and General Expenses, 8 per cent.		2,340
Provision of 5 per cent. for unforeseen contingencies		1,620
		<hr/>
		£33,700

11. This estimate is based on a rate of 15s. per day for labourers. If serviceable 75-lb. rails became available, the cost would be reduced by £2,960, or £450 per mile. It will be noted that the sum of £8,900 is allowed in connexion with the restoration of the section of abandoned earthworks, and in this respect Mr. Perrin informed the Committee that the approximate cost of constructing that portion of line to-day on its present grading would be £14,300. The benefit to the whole line therefore by the existence of that section may be stated as £5,400. The top timbers of the bridges were found to be in good condition, but the piles were not.

12. The estimate to Johnston's Corner shows a reduction of £600 on that supplied the Committee in 1921 of £25,000. This is due to a slight re-location resulting in a saving at the terminal station ground. On the other hand the cost of the telegraph line has been calculated at the rate of £130 per mile, using iron poles, as compared with the previous estimate of £60 per mile with wooden poles. The Railways Commissioners, however, strongly urge the use of the iron poles, because of the lessened maintenance cost as compared with timber.

13. Dealing with the proposal to reach Cousin's Corner by turning sharply to the west at the terminus of the abandoned earthworks, the Committee requested Mr. Perrin to consider the advisability of using the 1-chain road for the railway location, but in evidence later Mr. Perrin stated that there were two objections to the adoption of this suggestion. The first was that it was a road with a good surface, although unformed, and that a number of land-owners used it to some extent; secondly, that the land was of a good agricultural type, frequently cropped, and that the danger from fire with the narrow side-widths would be considerably increased. He thought it preferable that the line should be constructed about 70 links north of the road, and parallel with it. The strip of land required would be about 1½ to 2 chains wide.

TRAFFIC OFFICER'S REPORT.

14. Mr. J. H. Olsson, Chief Special Officer of the Department visited the district and submitted a report to the Committee on the prospects of proposed lines from Shelbourne to Johnston's Corner, or alternatively to Cousin's Corner on either the permanent route from Johnston's

Corner to Cousin's Corner, or on that parallel with the road running westerly from the terminus of the abandoned earthworks. A plan prepared showed that the area outside a distance of 6 miles in a direct line from an existing railway is only 32,500 acres. The distance from Shelbourne in a direct line across country to railway stations on other lines surrounding the Laanecoorie district, is as under :—

		Miles.			Miles.
Between Shelbourne and	Marong	.. 12	Between Shelbourne and	Tarnagulla	.. 13
„	Leichardt	.. 13 $\frac{3}{4}$	„	Laurie	.. 14 $\frac{3}{4}$
„	Arnold	.. 16	„	Painswick	.. 16
„	Llanelly	.. 14	„	Dunolly	.. 16

15. It is, however, cheaper from the rail-freight point of view for residents to convey their produce to Shelbourne, for the reason that the distance to Melbourne is substantially less, the figures being :—

		Miles.			Miles.
To Melbourne from	Shelbourne	.. 99 $\frac{1}{4}$	To Melbourne from	Tarnagulla	.. 136 $\frac{1}{4}$
„	Marong	.. 112 $\frac{1}{2}$	„	Laurie	.. 132 $\frac{3}{4}$
„	Arnold	.. 139 $\frac{1}{4}$	„	Painswick	.. 130 $\frac{1}{4}$
„	Llanelly	.. 138	„	Dunolly	.. 125 $\frac{3}{4}$

16. The area which Mr. Olsson regarded as tributary to a line constructed to Cousin's Corner, was 51,200 acres, including roads, rivers, Forest Reserves, and agricultural and pastoral country. Some of this land is already within 2 or 3 miles of existing railway stations. The greater portion of the area to the east of the Loddon River is good agricultural country, while to the west most of the land is reserved for forestry purposes, growing ironbark, box, and other timbers. The settlement in the tributary district would comprise about 40,000 acres, approximately 25 per cent. of which would be devoted to agriculture, combined with sheep grazing, the balance being utilized wholly for grazing purposes. The number of holdings in the tributary area would be approximately 100, the population, including that of townships, being about 1,000. The production of the tributary district has been estimated as under :—

Areas suitable for agriculture and grazing	..	..	40,000 acres
Number of holdings	..	..	100
Average area per holding	..	..	400 acres
Total cultivation (25 per cent.)	..	..	10,000 acres
Production of wheat per acre	..	..	15 bushels
Production of oats per acre	..	..	17 bushels

17. There has been no material increase in the outward tonnage sent from Shelbourne railway station since 1900, and although the inward tonnage has increased, it has fluctuated considerably, the figures being :—

Year ending 30th June.				Outwards.		Inwards.	
				Tons.		Tons.	
1900	..	..	..	7,448		849	
1905	..	..	..	9,694		1,161	
1910	..	..	..	5,452		1,626	
1915	..	..	..	3,758		1,428	
1920	..	..	..	5,217		895	
1925	..	..	..	6,460		1,050	
1926	..	..	..	4,129		2,578	
1927	..	..	..	6,425		2,952	
1928	..	..	..	5,826		1,356	

18. The quantity of wheat and wool sent from Shelbourne during the last four years has been :—

Year ending 30th June.				Wheat.		Wool.	
				Bags.	Tons.	Bales.	Tons.
1925	..	..	..	48,955	4,080	554	80
1926	..	..	..	24,467	2,039	448	67
1927	..	..	..	50,962	4,247	381	54
1928	..	..	..	41,132	3,428	424	61

19. It was not considered likely that any great quantity of firewood or other timber would be sent over the proposed line, as the stations on the Dunolly–Inglewood section are much nearer to the timbered areas, the quantity sent away from those stations last year being :—

	Tons.
Dunolly	15,000
Painswick	311
Laurie	1,018
Llanelly	386
Arnold	2,665
	19,380

20. Dealing with the condition of the roads in the district, Mr. Olsson says :—

“ The roads throughout the district are formed and gravelled in parts, and at the time of my visit were in good condition. Special notice was taken of the roads in the State Forest leading to Dunolly and Tarnagulla, and while they are slightly undulating in parts, they are located in auriferous country, and it is not considered that they offer any serious difficulty in the cartage of any description of traffic.”

VIEWS OF COMMITTEE.

21. The Committee has visited the district and heard local as well as Melbourne evidence on this matter. At first glance it would seem that it should be reasonably practicable to utilize the 1 mile 69 chains of abandoned earth-works in providing some extension towards Laanecoorie from Shelbourne. Mr. Perrin, Chief Engineer for Railway Construction, supplied figures showing that there was an advantage to the line owing to the existence of the abandoned section of £5,400. Even with this concession, however, a new line could not be expected to pay, on account mainly of the restricted gathering ground.

22. The distance from Shelbourne to stations on the other lines has been shown to vary between 12 and 16 miles in a direct line. The practice of the Committee has been to regard 10 miles as a reasonable limit for cartage to a railway station in this class of country, and it will be obvious that such a tributary area in this case not only affords no gathering ground whatever for traffic, but actually overlaps to a substantial extent the tributary area of other existing lines. Traffic would, probably, be induced to a station at Laanecoorie from an estimated area of 51,200 acres, as is shown in Mr. Olsson's report, but mostly this land is now tributary to stations on existing lines, and to that extent the revenue obtained would be merely diverted from those stations. It is not likely that any material gain in revenue would be obtained from increased production in the district, as it is now closely settled, and the construction of the new line, while possibly stimulating production a little, would not have a very marked effect in that respect.

23. The residents of the Laanecoorie district are in approximately the centre of the unserved area, and to that extent are unfortunate, but they are so surrounded by railway lines that a further extension of the Shelbourne line to suit them could only be made at the expense of robbing other stations which are not outside a reasonable cartage distance.

24. The interest charge on the cost of construction for a line from Shelbourne to Cousin's Corner would amount at 5½ per cent. to £1,853, and if it be assumed that the revenue from the proposed line would be equal to the annual charge for working expenses, there would be a deficit of this amount of £1,853, while in addition there would be a substantial loss of revenue to the Railway Department by the traffic diverted from other stations, which could have handled it with probably no additional expense whatever.

RECOMMENDATION.

25. The Committee for the foregoing reasons recommends that it is not expedient to connect the district of Laanecoorie with the existing railway system by means of a 5-ft. 3-in. gauge railway.

26. 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. A. Dunstan, M.L.A., did not take part in the deliberations of the Committee when this question was being considered.

A. E. LIND,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
Parliament House, Melbourne,
1st July, 1929.

[Minutes of Evidence and Plan are not printed.]

