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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

THE GREAT MIDLAND AND WEST COAST
RAILWAY BILL, (PRIVATE):

REPORT OF THE GENERAL MANAGER, TASMANIAN
GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS.

Laid upon the Table by Mr. Minister of Lands and Works, and ordered by the
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*Tasmanian Government Railways,
General Manager's Office, Hobart, 6th September, 1898.*

MEMORANDUM for Hon. Minister of Railways.

The Great Midland and West Coast Railway Company Bill.

I HAVE to acknowledge your instruction to report on the above, and beg leave to refer you to the voluminous evidence I gave before the Committee—printed in Parliamentary Paper No. 75 of 1897,—in which I dealt very fully with the provisions of the original Bill. It is now before Parliament as amended by the Select Committee. The Amendments principally are a curtailment of the land grant and water rights. As the Bill now stands, the Company ask for 300,000 acres of land, 20,000 brake horse-power of water, the right to generate power and to supply power and light to such towns and cities in Tasmania as may seem fit to them, with the restriction that in municipalities the consent of the local bodies must be obtained.

I wish to point out that the construction of the proposed line must be detrimental to the interests of the traffic over the Government Railways. The Bill gives power to the Company (*vide* Preamble) to construct a railway from some point on the Chudleigh Line to a point (undefined!) within the Western Mining Division of Tasmania. No survey has been deposited, and there is no certificate whatever as to the route which the line may take, except that in Clause 15 the Committee in an Amendment mentions "a point at or near West Mount Pelion." Here we have evidence of the evil of discussing a Bill without a survey and without defined points.

The line, if constructed, may interfere considerably with the traffic of our narrow-gauge tramway, and must, I think, interfere with its extension. We have heard frequent mention of a possible competition between the Emu Bay Company's Line and the Government Line to the West Coast. The line under discussion will probably become a second competitor, and, as the Government has spent considerably over a quarter of a million in railways on the West Coast, competition from outside railways may form a serious factor in reducing the earnings of these lines. Here is one strong reason why the concessions should not be granted.

It is proposed to give the Company 300,000 acres of land, and also, conditionally, further grants of land (*see* Sub-section XII. of Section 86). It is proposed, also, to give the Company 20,000 brake horse-power of water: this means effective horse-power. I think the term is wrongly used. There can be no brake or effective horse-power until the water has been harnessed at the point of discharge. If the water is to be given, I recommend that it be measured by sluice-heads, such sluice-heads to be in terms of the mining regulations.

It may have escaped attention that the Bill seems to give power to take or divert water from the Mersey, the Forth, and possibly the Leven Rivers.

Section 177 provides that it shall be lawful for the Minister to withdraw from selection under "The Crown Lands Act, 1890," and from the operation of "The Mining Act, 1893," for a period of two years from the passing of the Act, so much land as the Minister may deem fit as lies between the parallels of latitude which run through the towns of Sheffield and Strahan respectively. A glance at the map of Tasmania will show what an unreasonably large area of land it is proposed to lock up from selection for agricultural or mining purposes.

The description of the blocks of land which are to be allowed to be selected is not very clear. The back line, if the blocks front on the railway as provided under the Committee's recommendation, will be the western or the eastern boundary, and not, as defined in the Committee's amend-

ment, by "a line lying due east and west." The areas of land to be selected by the Company must be taken between two parallels 30 miles apart, as shown by red lines in the plan I attach. The line of railway is supposed to be 60 miles in length. Blocks of land taken alternately on 60 miles of railway would take up approximately 54 miles of railway frontage.

I observe that the Committee proposes to cut out the Schedule to the Act, which Schedule is really a specification for the construction of the line. This seems to me to be a mistake, and may be the cause of a great deal of trouble and contention.

I have pointed out that the only defined point on the line, except the starting point, which is to be somewhere on the Chudleigh Line, is Mt. Pelion. In a direct line Mt. Pelion is only 45 miles from Ulverstone, and 55 miles from Burnie.

Section 16. The Committee's recommendation to reduce the axle load to 4 tons must have been made under a misconception. Such a restriction would prevent the use of our rolling-stock over any portion of the line which may be constructed of a 3 ft. 6 in. gauge. This, under the Committee's recommendation, would be between Mole Creek and Mt. Pelion west. The axle loads of our largest engines are 10 tons, and of our ordinary goods trucks, 6 tons. I think a clause should be framed which would enable any interchange of rolling-stock.

Section 160 gives power to the Minister to refuse a mining easement within 10 miles of the railway. I submit that this requires further consideration, as a rectangular block of 50,000 acres, having the railway for its base, would not exceed a distance of 9 miles from such base.

Section 151 gives power to make by-laws, *but withdraws from the control of the Governor in Council* the by-laws fixing tolls, rates, fares, and charges on the railway, or of fixing charges for electricity or for the supply of water, motive-power, light, &c. This, I think, must have been overlooked.

Section 153 specially exempts from publication in the *Gazette* the items in the by-laws I have just enumerated.

Let us now see what advantage the Colony is to derive from the concessions asked for, viz.—300,000 acres of land, water to generate 20,000 effective horse-power, the right to sell water and light, the right to erect telegraph and telephones, the right, under certain conditions, to a further concession of land over and above the 300,000 acres referred to, the right to take water from such rivers as the Mersey, Forth and Leven, which are already in places thickly settled upon, and, further than this, the right to come into competition with some of the Government Railways which are already working. The Company proposes to construct 60 miles of railway, the cost of which is not ascertained, but for the purpose of comparison may be set down at £200,000. If the Company can make full use of the concessions asked for in the Bill (and if they cannot do so there is nothing to prevent the rights being locked up from the public for years) they will receive an annual income exceeding the primary cost of the railway.

I cannot see that any advantage will accrue to the Western Railway from the construction of this line. Produce will continue to be shipped at the ports of Launceston and Devonport, and no extra carriage will be brought to the Government railways in consequence of the connection from Mole Creek to a point within the Western Mining District of Tasmania.

As a separate system of railway, I cannot see that it will pay the Promoters, consequently their profits must come from some other source than the traffic of the railway.

The country lying between Mount Read and the Rosebery district in the west, and between Ulverstone and Railton in the north-east, is the country into which the Government may look for extensions in the future of the existing system of Government railways. The concessions applied for would militate against such extensions.

Before the Bill is further considered, it seems advisable that it should pass through the hands of the Solicitor-General and the Surveyor-General, and, as on previous occasions, I recommend that a survey should be deposited.

I am, however, strongly of opinion that, for the reasons I have advanced, the Bill should be rejected.

FRED. BACK, *General Manager.*