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1875.

TASMANIA.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

NARROW GAUGE RAILWAYS.

LETTER FROM MR. C. H. GRANT.

Laid upon the Table by the Attorney-General, and ordered by the House to be printed, September 17, 1875.



*Tasmanian Main Line Railway Company, Limited, Engineer's Office,
Hobart Town, 16th September, 1875.*

SIR,

NOTICING in the public press that an honorable member of the House of Assembly desires that the gauge of the Railway constructed between Latrobe and Coiler's Creek should be altered to the broad gauge of the Launceston and Western Railway, and that the extensions it is purposed to make thereto should be on the same wide gauge, I have the honor to address you on behalf of the Main Line Railway Company, objecting to such proposal.

It may at first sight be considered that the Main Line Company have but little, if any, interest in this subject; but they are really most deeply interested therein, and must consider their very existence as a Company to be embodied in the question.

There are but few in the Colony who would at the present time consider the Main Line Railway a profitable undertaking to the parties concerned therein, or who do not look forward to the construction of branch lines or feeders as necessary to its permanent prosperity; nor would anyone advocate that these branches should be constructed on a different gauge to the Main Line. How much more important, therefore, is it that its most important ally should be of the same gauge, and provided with every facility for the mutual interchange of traffic.

The experience of the whole civilised world has decisively proved the inconvenience and loss sustained by a break of gauge and within the last three years the broad gauge railways of England, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere have, at vast expense and interruption of traffic, been altered to the uniform national gauge. Many thousands of miles have, to my knowledge, been so treated within the last three years; and in the countries mentioned there are now but a very few miles in existence of an exceptional gauge, which, in all cases, it is proposed to correct to the uniform gauge so soon as the requisite funds can be obtained.

The evils of the break of gauge do not consist simply in the cost of transferring goods from one set of trucks to the other, and the expense of the necessary arrangements for this service, considerable as these may be; but also in the very largely increased quantity of rolling stock that is required, the greatly diminished use obtained of it, and the delay in the transport of goods and freight of all kinds.

The pecuniary prospects of Tasmanian Railways are not so excessively bright that the above considerations may be disregarded; and the most important conditions to their eventual success must consist in the removal of every impediment to traffic,—thus developing their carrying power to the greatest possible extent, which can alone be effected by the free interchange of the carriages and trucks, and other accommodation, between the various lines.

It will rarely be the case that the exigencies of traffic press with equal severity on the Launceston and Western and on the Main Line; and therefore an inestimable advantage would accrue from the one line being able on an emergency to utilise the spare stock and full resources of the other line. Should the difference in gauge be maintained, I have no hesitation in stating that a slight press of traffic on both lines *must inevitably result* in a complete jam or dead-lock,—causing the most serious loss and embarrassment to each line, combined with delay and inconvenience to the public.

I will trouble you with but two illustrations; viz.—the transit of timber and cattle from the Western Line to the Main Line, which must be most important items of traffic,—the timber from Deloraine being required throughout the Midland Districts, and the cattle of the west and along the Western Line finding a market at Hobart Town. For this it will be impossible, with our

present resources, to provide a change of trucks and other necessary accommodation at Evandale Junction; and therefore, if the Main Line stops at Evandale, this traffic must be entirely refused; and, should it run on to Launceston, it would have to travel an unnecessary $22\frac{1}{2}$ miles of line, and be subjected to the terminal charges and expenses of transferring and re-loading in the Launceston Station-yard.

A truck of material passing from Snake Banks along the Main Line (10 miles) to Longford on the Western Line (6 miles) would ordinarily take about 3 days on the journey, and would occupy one truck of *each* line for about two days each, if subject to break of gauge; but otherwise would, in one truck only, pass to its destination in a very few hours.

It is not in my province to advise you of the desirability, on every ground of public convenience and economy, for promptly altering the gauge of the Launceston and Western Line to that of the Main Line, since the latter could not be adopted to the broad gauge under a probable expenditure of more than one million pounds (£1,000,000) sterling; while the narrower gauge is found by the experience of very heavy traffics in Queensland, New Zealand, Norway, America, and Canada to give every traffic accommodation and facility that can reasonably be desired: but I may perhaps be allowed to state that less than £10,000 will cover every expense connected with the alteration of gauge and change of rolling stock on the Western Line, which can then be supplemented on an emergency by the spare rolling stock of the Main Line, and *vice versa*. I have therefore simply to observe that the Main Line Railway Company view with the greatest alarm the proposal to perpetuate the great evil of a break of gauge, by extending the broad gauge to the Mersey, thus depriving the freighters throughout nearly the whole Colony of a benefit from that line, and causing the most serious embarrassment and loss to both railways.

This evil would not be overcome by laying down a third rail throughout the Western Line, unless it were done as a temporary expedient until a full supply of narrow-gauge stock could be obtained, because the evils of a mixed gauge have been practically found to be even more intolerable than a break of gauge.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

CHARLES H. GRANT.

Hon. W. R. GIBLIN, M.H.A., Attorney-General.