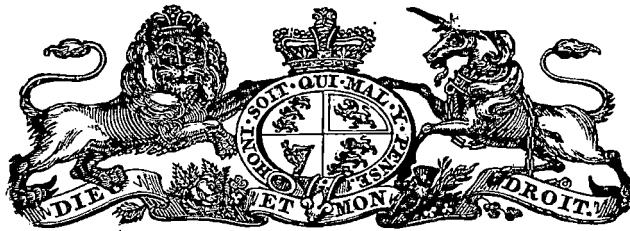


(No. 137.)



1890.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

RAILWAY ESTIMATES:

MEMO. BY ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF.

Laid upon the Table by the Minister of Lands, and ordered by the House of
Assembly to be printed, September 9, 1890.



RAILWAY ESTIMATES.

*Engineer-in-Chief's Office,
Hobart, 4th September, 1890.*

SIR,

I HAVE the honor to submit further explanation in connection with the votes now before Parliament for completion of some of the Railways, and am glad of the opportunity thus afforded me of bringing as clearly as I can before you the causes which have led to the necessity which divides what is, after all, the very reasonable cost of our lines over two or three votes before they are complete.

While aware that, as Head of the Department, I must take all responsibility both for my own personal work and that for which I am wholly dependent upon the skill or carefulness of my officers in furnishing me as far as possible with the particulars and quantities of the multitudinous and often complicated works contained in a railway estimate, yet I venture to submit that the chief fault is in the system of invariably initiating the railway proposals without requisite preparation, and for this I am not responsible.

Roughly speaking, it will have been noticed that there have been about three votes proposed for each line—these represent three distinct phases through which the estimates go:—

1. *The original estimates*, which are essentially of a preliminary character, for they have invariably been asked for with hardly any notice, and when the data had consisted only of (a) a contract survey, but without other complete particulars as to quantities, designs for works, yards and buildings being ready, or (b) upon a mere parliamentary or trial survey, or (c) partly upon no survey at all, or (d) for a line which Parliament afterwards extended without monetary provision for such extension, or (e) for tramway lines afterwards altered in character.

All Ministers have been anxious that these estimates should be kept down, and to that end have expressed themselves in one case or another as requiring only approximate estimates for economical light construction with small train service. With the scanty data referred to I have given the best "approximations" I could, and so marked them in some cases especially for information of Parliament.

2. *The working estimates*, after surveys and bills of quantities were completed, and calculations made as to probable liabilities for land, general construction, rolling-stock, and equipment. *These should be regarded as the estimates proper, and only this form adopted*, if this course were practicable, *before a vote is proposed at all*.

I presume, however, that there might be some difficulty in so doing (under absence of any continuous and permanent staff, who in slack times could be quietly preparing information), because a Minister, after deciding to propose a vote for construction of a railway, would have to postpone it until a following Session in order that full contract estimates and plans might be got ready, and in some cases (as Derwent Valley Line, Fingal Line, and Scottsdale Line) possibly even for more than one Session, so that the absolutely necessary precedent to proper contract estimates—viz., the contract survey—might be effected.

With proper working estimates I would guarantee works being carried out within a very reasonable margin, if unknown contingencies, as new stations, alterations, or extension of lines, are allowed for.

3. *The estimates to finally complete*, after the construction is so far advanced that the unforeseen contingencies in extra foundations, tunnel work, slips and drainage, additional accommodation works, new stations, additions to stations or equipment to satisfy Manager's requirements, and other charges, can be ascertained.

With regard to No. 1 class, I certainly should have hesitated to hamper the Government of the day and load my estimates with an excessive allowance for contingencies never contemplated at the time, but which have since developed themselves in more permanent construction, new stations, and more complete arrangements than required for cheap lines; and most certainly I could not have foreseen that, while original estimates and proposals for the Mersey Line ended at Latrobe, an Act would be passed on these estimates extending it seven miles to Formby, with all the costly work on this section (town properties through Latrobe, costly bridge work for crossing the River Mersey and flooded lands beyond, as well as other works, and the Spreyton, Tarleton, and Formby station yards) *without any provision at all for the cost of the expensive extension.*

Again, a large sum had to be paid on the Derwent Valley Line as compensation owing to the action of the Royal Commissioners in stopping works for three months and so voiding the contract; while, with all deference, I hope I may be permitted to say that, to satisfy public opinion, I believe the department paid more for its completion by contract than if the day-work under the Resident Engineer had been allowed to go on.

In the proper and efficient direction of my Department I am, of course, largely dependent upon good trained officers familiar with their work and each branch of it, who should be accustomed by length of service to the requirements of the Department; but when the original proposals for works under consideration were made I had no such staff to rely upon.

In conclusion, I would ask you to judge by results, not by processes. The results are palpable: the Colony has lines constructed almost continuously through more or less broken and much difficult country, with an elaborate completion of detail in accommodation, with all the more important works constructed in a most solid and substantial manner, carrying for years a faster traffic than on same class of lines elsewhere, without any accident due to construction, *and the whole at a cost as low or even lower than in any other Colony*, where very large stretches of flat easy country materially assist in reducing the cost of construction,—the gross cost of the Tasmanian Government Railway per mile, as opened, being only £6300 for the narrow gauge line.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. FINCHAM, *M. Inst. C.E., Engineer-in-Chief.*

P.S.—Just the same excesses, from same cause, have been experienced on a large scale in Victoria, where, on an estimate of five millions for a recent group of railways, the excess at present amounts to two and a half millions. The same excesses have occurred in South Australia and other Colonies, and in England have proceeded from same cause.—J.F.