

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

FRIDAY, 28 JUNE 1872

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Friday, 28 June, 1872.

Railway Surveys. — Railway Extension.

RAILWAY SURVEYS.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY moved—

That the Speaker leave the chair, and the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, for the purpose of considering certain resolutions.

Motion carried, and House put into committee.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said that in moving the resolutions standing in his name, he thought it was unnecessary that he should go into the subject at all, as he believed there would be no debate upon it. That would come on when the resolutions which were in the name of the Chairman of Committees were under the consideration of the House. He now moved—

1. That it is desirable that the Government should be authorised to expend a sum not exceeding £8,000 in additional surveys of railway lines from Brisbane to Ipswich, and Westwood to the Mackenzie River; such amount to be charged to loan unforeseen expenditure, in the first instance, and to railway loan when voted.

2. That an Address be presented to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to recommend to this House the necessary appropriation to give effect to the foregoing resolution.

3. That these resolutions be transmitted to the Legislative Council, for their concurrence, by message in the usual form.

Motion agreed to.

The House resumed, and the Chairman reported to the House that the committee had agreed to certain resolutions.

RAILWAY EXTENSION.

Mr. J. SCOTT said, Sir, in moving the resolutions which stand in my name, it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to say anything new in support of the principles they affirm. The question of railway extension has been over and over again debated in this House; most honorable members understand the matter thoroughly, and it would only be a waste of time for me to again go over the same ground which has been so often trodden before. Several causes have tended heretofore to prevent any action being taken in this very important matter—chief amongst which are two. Firstly, up to the present time railway extension has always been treated, not upon its own merits, but simply as a

party question; and secondly, the great sum per mile which those portions already made have cost, and the fear that correspondingly large sums must necessarily be wasted in future constructions, have deterred honorable members either from giving this vexed question the calm consideration which it merited, or the sanction of their votes when discussed. Now, sir, I think I may safely say, that these two grand obstacles to statesmanlike legislation on this subject, are, in a great measure, removed. Both sides of the House are agreed as to the benefits which are likely to arise from the extension of railway communication in some portion or other of the colony; and I think that the report of the Royal Commission shews, as clearly as such a matter can be demonstrated, that safe and efficient lines, suited to the requirements of our traffic, can be constructed at a cost incomparably less than any that have hitherto been carried out in any part of Australia. I need not dwell upon this point, as honorable members can satisfy themselves as to its accuracy by referring to the evidence in the report, under the head of construction. These two points being granted, sir, what we have now to consider is, what extensions will be most beneficial to the districts through which they may be carried, and most conducive to the satisfaction and profit of the community at large. The Royal Commissioners, in their report, have recommended the immediate extension of two lines—the Great Northern Railway from Westwood to Lurline, as I believe it is called, at the junction of the Comet and Mackenzie Rivers, distant from Clermont eighty miles, and from Springsure fifty miles; and the Southern and Western Railway from Ipswich to Brisbane. With regard to the latter, although this may in a remote degree benefit a portion of the district I have the honor to represent, I will leave its advocacy in other and better hands—that of those members whose constituents will more directly benefit by its being carried out—and confine the few observations I have to make to that line in which the constituents I represent are more particularly interested, and upon the extension of which their future prosperity in a great measure depends. The Great Northern Railway from Rockhampton to Westwood may, as it at present stands, be very fairly termed an abortion; it is of little benefit to any section of the community, and is, in fact, only a toy, and a very costly toy indeed, to the people of this colony. We are told by the only witnesses examined, that on account of its limited length this line is very little used. At page 22, questions 11 to 15, Mr. Thomson says:—

“11. In making bargains with the carriers for wool down—are they to deliver at Rockhampton or at Westwood? They deliver at Rockhampton.”

“12. Do they make use of the railway? Very seldom. I do not think one in ten makes use of it.”

“13. What is the reason of that? The rates are so high from Westwood to Rockhampton, that

it pays a carrier to go all the way, which takes him only two days. There is no saving in using the railway, except in wet weather—they generally go in.

“14. I suppose it is the short distance? Yes.

“15. If the distance were longer the railway would be used? Yes, no doubt.”

Again, at page 24, in answer to questions 6 to 8, Captain Hunter, an old resident of Rockhampton, says:—

“6. In sending goods up, and getting produce down, do you find the carriers make much use of the railway? They will not use it if they can help it, at least the most of them; but when the roads are very heavy, they will take advantage of the train to send their things from Westwood; otherwise they prefer to come down to Rockhampton and get their loading at once.

“7. Is that owing to the short length of the line? Yes, entirely so; they say that it is not worth unloading for.

“8. Do you imagine from what you know that if the railway was extended to Expedition Range, the carriers would still continue to come down? If it was extended, carriers would not come down; they would use the railway. It would be a very great saving to them, and the country outside would afford very much better feed for their cattle.”

Now when it is borne in mind that this miserable accommodation is afforded at a loss to the general revenue, exclusive of interest on construction, of £4,224 annually, as will be seen on reference to Mr. Byerley's evidence on page 20—that is to say, the working of the line costs upwards of £20,000 a-year in excess of the gross receipts—I think you will, therefore, agree with me that it is high time that such an exceptional state of matters should be put an end to. This may be effected in two ways, either by extending the line to such a point as will secure to it all the traffic from the westward, and thus render it remunerative, or, as was suggested by the honorable member, Mr. Johnston, by discharging all the employees, and shutting up the line altogether. The latter could not for a moment be listened to; public sentiment alone would prove too strong for any man who proposed such a proceeding, to say nothing of the greater evil which would remain untouched—I mean the interest on the original outlay. The line up to the present time has cost something like £300,000, and as this money was borrowed at over 6 per cent., an annual sum of at least £18,000 would then be absolutely lost to the country. The former appears, therefore, to be the only course now open, and I believe that the sooner this extension is commenced the better it will be for everybody in the country. With regard to the probable amount of traffic which would be carried along the line, or become developed by the extension of the Great Northern Railway to the junction of the Comet and Mackenzie Rivers, very little evidence was taken; consequently nothing positively certain can be stated—enough, however, was learned to enable us to make a

very fair guess. Once the northern line is sufficiently far extended to ensure its getting all the wool which at present comes into Rockhampton from the westward, the circumstances connected with that traffic there and on the Southern and Western Railway will be somewhat alike, with this difference—that while a great deal of maize, wheat, potatoes, &c., are grown up country on the southern line, nothing whatever of the sort is grown to the North. It is fair then to suppose that on the northern line there will be a greater relative amount of up carriage; but, in the meantime, we will take them at the same proportion. The number of bales of wool carried last year on the Southern and Western line was about 30,000, and if honorable members will turn to page 28 in the appendices, they will find that the gross weight carried was nearly 25,000 tons; keeping the same proportions therefore, 15,000 bales—which is the estimate, according to Captain Hunter, of what would come down the northern line—this would give 12,500 tons; and if to this is added the copper traffic—to which there is no corresponding element on the Southern and Western line, and which may therefore fairly be taken as additional, and which has been stated at over 4,500 tons, as will be seen on reference to the evidence of Mr. C. Thomson at page 23—this would give an annual traffic of 17,000 tons, most of which would be carried the whole length of the line, and, taking an average of £3 per ton, would give £51,000 as an annual gross return. Now say 80 per cent. of this was absorbed in working expenses and maintenance, there would remain £10,200 a-year to pay interest on construction: that, at 3 per cent., would represent a capital sum of £340,000, which would be an amount in excess of what would be required to construct the proposed 113 miles from Westwood to the junction of the Comet and Mackenzie Rivers, at £3,000 a mile. I have purposely stated the probable traffic at a low rate, and the working expenses at a high rate; and I have made no allowance for the development of new traffic, which always in a greater or less degree follows increased facility of transport. I have therefore every reason to suppose that the earnings of the line, when completed, will be greatly in excess of the sum I have stated. I have made no mention of passenger traffic, but, if this is taken at one-third of what is earned on the Southern and Western line, it would give an additional £5,000 as revenue; and that, if added to the £10,200, would bring the interest on the cost of construction of the new part of the line to over four per cent., and to about two-and-half per cent. on the whole length from Rockhampton to Lurline. The benefits which are likely to arise from the extension of this line are, simply, these—increased facility of transport of goods and produce to a very large section of the community; greatly reduced prices of carriage, with certainty of communication over an extensive district; and the changing of a

great public work, from being comparatively useless and a heavy burden on the general revenue, to one of very great service to the public, and largely remunerative both directly and indirectly. With regard to the question of gauge, although I consider that a matter of very great importance, still it is altogether secondary to the question of immediate extension. When this, the main point at issue, is once determined upon, I shall, I think, be able to bring forward a good many facts in support of the conclusion which the commissioners have come to—namely, that, for the northern and any other new extensions, the two-feet-nine-inch gauge is the most suitable, both on the score of economy and efficiency. I would here wish to correct a misapprehension which seems to have arisen in the North, in regard to the proposed alteration of gauge on the existing line. The commissioners had no idea of recommending the removal of the present rolling-stock until the new rolling-stock had not only been placed upon the line, but found to work satisfactorily. That could easily be ascertained by laying a third rail on the present sleepers, so as to enable engines and carriages of both gauges to travel along the line; and this could be effected at a cost of about £250 a-mile. I now beg to move—

That this House, having before it the recommendations contained in the report submitted by message from his Excellency the Governor on the 18th instant, from the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into, and report upon, the construction of railways within the colony, is of opinion that the time has arrived when the extension of the Great Northern Railway from Westwood to the junction of the Comet and Mackenzie Rivers, and of the Southern and Western Railway from Ipswich towards Brisbane, should be commenced.

That this House will, at its next sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, to consider of an Address to the Governor, praying that His Excellency will be pleased to recommend to this House the necessary appropriations for carrying out such extensions.

HONORABLE MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

MR. CRIBB said, that having been one of the commissioners appointed by His Excellency the Governor to inquire into the subject of railway construction, it might be expected that he would have something to say on the resolutions now before the House; but he thought it would be impossible to discuss the whole subject that morning, and he would, therefore, have no objection to them going into committee, on the understanding that he would then have an opportunity of expressing his opinion.

MR. FYFE said the present was a question which, above all others, was considered of the greatest importance by the constituency he represented; and he was bound to say that he now thought the Government were sincere in the promises they had made to carry out those railways. There could not be

a doubt that the resolutions of the honorable member were at first viewed with a suspicion of their sincerity by honorable members of the House, and he, therefore, thought that it was most fortunate that everything had come out so well. He could scarcely let the resolutions pass without entering a protest against the alteration of the gauge on the Northern line, for if there was a substantial line wanted anywhere it was in the North. The annual export of wool from Rockhampton was very great, and there was very little doubt but that the quantity would go on increasing. It was well known, also, that if the railway was constructed, the export of copper would be very greatly increased; for he was informed, that so soon as that was done, it was the intention of the Peak Downs Company to open another mine, when five hundred men would be employed. There was no doubt whatever that if the railway was extended to some convenient place for that traffic, it would prove a most profitable speculation; and why the construction of it had been postponed for so long, had been a mystery to all thinking men, for if ever there was an undertaking that would pay, it would be that line. He was glad to see that there was such an unanimous expression of opinion on the present occasion in favor of the construction of the two lines. He regretted that the Commission should have thought proper to recommend that the line should be of a lighter construction, as instead of being the lightest line in the colony, it should be the heaviest, on account of the great traffic there would be upon it. It struck him that the sum of £8,000 for making the surveys would be one of the best sums of money that had ever been passed by that House, as it would prevent a repetition of that extravagance from which the colony had suffered. He might mention, that at the present time Rockhampton exported one-half of the wool that was sent from the colony.

HONORABLE MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

Mr. FYFE: That was a fact. Six million lbs. were exported last year, and all that would come down by the proposed line, or nearly so; he merely mentioned that to shew the necessity of having a heavier line than that recommended by the Commission, which recommendation had very little weight with him. He had had some experience of railways in Victoria, having been connected with their construction, and he believed that for the northern line they should have the 84-lbs. rails used in Victoria, instead of the light 45-lbs. rails, and thus make a good substantial line at first and avoid having to spend money constantly for repairs. The benefits which would accrue from the construction of the line would be very great—the country along the line would be opened up for settlement, and he believed; that the population of Copperfield would be doubled so soon as the principle of railway extension was known to be affirmed by the House.

Mr. BUCHANAN said he was entirely opposed to the resolutions, although he was

perfectly aware, from the feeling in the House, that they would be carried in spite of everything, and that the proposed lines would be carried—inasmuch as all the northern members were pledged to support the northern line, and the southern members were pledged to support the Ipswich and Brisbane extension. Allowing that those resolutions would be carried, it would be almost useless for him to go into figures—at any rate, the present was not the proper time for so doing. He would not have arisen to speak upon the question were it not that the first resolution affirmed that "This House is of opinion that the time has arrived, &c." Now, he must enter his protest against that, as it was not his opinion—he maintained that the principle was a wrong one altogether, that railways should be constructed at the cost of the colony, and that a tax should be fixed upon the whole colony for works which benefited only a portion of it. He thought there were plenty of capitalists eager to invest in railways when the proper time arrived, and that they should be constructed by private capital and not at the public expense. The honorable member who had first spoken, had made the absurd statement that half the wool was exported from Rockhampton, when, in point of fact, the wool which went there was from only a million of sheep, and allowing three pounds to each sheep, that would give three millions pounds of wool. He could also shew that the figures quoted by the honorable member who introduced the resolutions were wrong, and that allowing for copper and everything, the whole traffic on the northern line would not exceed £24,000 a year—that was at £3 a ton. He should vote against the resolutions, and against any similar to them, no matter in what shape or form they were brought forward.

Mr. THORN said he did not rise to oppose the resolutions of the honorable member for the Leichhardt, but he wished to reply to the statement made by the honorable member for Rockhampton, that the exports of wool from that town were greater than from Brisbane. Now, that was a great mistake, as Brisbane exported double the quantity at least, and, again, in estimating the weight of wool at Rockhampton, the honorable member should have borne in mind that the principal part of it was shorn in the grease. He might go so far as to say that fully three and a-half times as much wool was exported from Moreton Bay as from Rockhampton. He noticed that it was now proposed to extend the northern line to a greater distance inland than was originally intended, and that it was now to go to the Comet and Mackenzie Rivers, which he considered quite proper, as by extending the line there, large districts would be tapped to some extent. Although he had always been opposed to railway extension, it would not be long before he should be prepared to vote for a further extension of the Southern and Western line from Dalby to Roma. Now, that prosperity appeared to have set in, and

rich mineral discoveries were being made, he thought the time would not be far distant when the House should vote a sum of money for the construction of that line, more especially as he believed that it would be an inexpensive line to construct—not more than £3,000 a-mile. The honorable the mover of the resolutions had not informed the House how far the Comet was from Clermont, and he contended that unless the line was extended far enough to catch all the copper traffic of Peak Downs, it would not be worth the money spent on it. He believed that the line would run westward from what was originally intended, and unless it would catch the whole of the copper traffic, it would only be a useless burden on the country. He was not going to speak on the subject of the Brisbane and Ipswich extension, except to say, that he contended that the line should be taken to North Brisbane; as by bringing goods across the river in any other way, the expense would be rendered greater than what was charged for taking them to Ipswich by water; unless the line was taken across the river, it would be useless, and a burden to the country.

Mr. LILLEY said it was not his intention to enter into any discussion on the resolutions, but as a member of the Railway Commission, which had sat to make inquiries into the matter during the last recess, he felt it was his duty to bear his testimony to the ability and industry with which the inquiry was conducted by the Chairman, the honorable member Mr. Scott. He should say nothing on the subject of the resolutions, as he knew that honorable members were acquainted with every argument that could be brought forward in favor of them, and he perceived that the House was willing to agree to the proposition that the two lines of railway should be constructed.

Mr. WIENHOLT said that he had always stated on former occasions that he was opposed to the extension of railways in this colony, not that he did not believe railways to be good and desirable undertakings, but because he had not considered the state of the colony to be such as to warrant their going hurriedly into such large and expensive works. From the information the House had obtained from the Commission he now thought that they might be able to carry out a system of railways much cheaper and at less cost to the country than had been yet seen in any of the colonies, and with that idea he should certainly support the resolutions. With regard to the extension of the Ipswich and Brisbane line he could only say that when that line was constructed it would have to be constructed on the present system; although he still adhered to his previously expressed opinions that, with the good water carriage there was between the two places, the construction of the line would not in any way further develop trade. He should not, however, now object to it, as it appeared to be the wish of the country that it should be

carried out, and as he found that his constituents were in favor of it. He thought that the improved state of the country, resulting from the recent large mineral discoveries, and the large passenger traffic, together with the trade which was being established across the New South Wales border, would warrant the House in going on with that undertaking, and he should therefore not oppose it. He did hope, however, that when the railways were gone on with again, the country would not, as was the case before, be rushed at once into a heavy expenditure; but that the works would be carried out gradually, so as not to withdraw altogether from other industries to those works, a population which, on their completion, would be thrown out of employment.

Mr. HANDY desired to say only a few words to express his intention to support the resolutions of the honorable member for Leichhardt. The subject had been absolutely exhausted before, both as to the northern and the southern railway extensions. It could not be disputed that the former would be not only advantageous to the northern districts of the colony, but also a remunerative undertaking. As to the latter, it was the most extraordinary anomaly known, that the capital of the colony should be cut off from its railways. As the honorable member for Western Downs had said, the extension to Brisbane must be of the same gauge and character as the railway to the Downs. He joined in the hope that not a shilling would be wasted in carrying out the works.

Mr. FERRETT said he could not allow the resolutions to pass without saying a few words. It appeared to him that many persons were carried away by what he conceived to be the theory that the colony was about to get some extraordinarily cheap railways. The House ought to have had enough of theory after the construction of the southern and western lines. They were constructed to supersede the undertaking of the Tramway Company, which was to have cost £4,000 a mile, and the railways were guaranteed not to exceed that amount for their construction; but they had cost something like £7,000 a mile! It was again proposed to rush into railways; and he could not see his way to support anything of the kind, though he should be disposed to support, what he thought the colony ought to have, some more substantial roads than existed. He did not profess to know anything about the northern line, but if the South required a railway, the North was as much entitled to one. He was not so narrow-minded as to say, that if the southern line was extended from Ipswich, it should only come into North Brisbane. It mattered very little, whether the line came to North or South Brisbane, but if a railway to the river mouth was ever to be made, certainly it could be taken at less expense down to the open roadstead from South Brisbane than from the north side of the river. He had little doubt the resolutions would be carried, whatever he might say against them.

MR. MOREHEAD said, as he represented one of the districts whose traffic and property would be affected by the construction of the northern line, he should like the House, his constituents, and the country, to know that he would not be a party to the construction of an expensive railway. Unless the northern line was to be a cheap one, he would not support it. He did not think the House should again plunge the colony into debt, and bring on ruin, as was done by the last railway scheme. As far as the Brisbane and Ipswich extension was concerned, if he thought there was any use in opposing it, he would oppose it; because of the navigable river at their doors. But there was no use in opposing it. There must be a little log-rolling over the business; as northern members wanted their railway, if they got votes for it, they must give theirs for the southern line. So he should vote for the resolutions as they stood.

MR. MILLS said he should endeavor, in committee, to get support to have the western line extended to Roma. He did not see why, if there were to be extensions to the East and to the North, there should not be an extension to the West.

MR. CRIBB, in explanation, said that he now understood there would be a division: should there be one, he would, of course, go with the "noes."

MR. JOHNSTON said he should not oppose the resolutions at the present stage; but in committee he should certainly question the extension to Brisbane, and in lieu of it propose an extension from Dalby to Roma. He thought that the money proposed to be expended on the line to Brisbane would carry the western line a long way towards Roma, which had a greater claim to the consideration of the House than a district with a good road and a navigable river. He should say nothing more, as he wanted to go off by the coach, and he offered no opposition to going into committee.

MR. MACDEVITT: It was very unfortunate that the discussion of the resolutions should take place at such a time, when there was not an opportunity for honorable members to give their opinions, many being in a state of anxiety to get away by the coach. Without wishing the resolutions hurried through the House, and protesting against summary and indecent haste in dealing with an important subject, he sympathised with those honorable members whose support of the resolutions, coupled with their desire to dispose of them with the greatest rapidity, indicated political consistency. On occasions when honorable members who were now so much in favor of railway extension were against it, he expressed his entire sympathy in a progressive railway policy. No doubt the country required it. Where there was land to be opened up, where there was room for population to settle down, and where there was a large increase of industrial employment going on, a progressive railway policy was necessary. But

in making provision for future railways, the injustice that was done before should not be repeated or continued. Those railways would cost a great deal of money. From the natural configuration of the country, money so expended in some districts would be of no advantage to other districts. The expenditure on railways had entailed a burden on the general revenue of the colony, as had been suggested by the honorable member for Warrego. The Financial Settlement Bill, for the adjustment of accounts amongst the divisions of the colony, which had been promised by the Government, and which was now before the House, would no doubt become law; and it would provide for relieving those parts of the colony which were not benefited by the railways from the burden of contributing to, or any liability on account of, the cost of such works. But for the adoption of that principle, which he had formerly brought under the consideration of the House, he should oppose the resolutions. With this explanation he had to state that there was nothing in the resolutions to which he was opposed. He was of the same opinion now as when the present railway policy was first submitted to the country, namely, that it would be unfair in honorable members representing constituencies like Kennedy or Warrego to interfere to prevent the construction of railways in districts where they would be of advantage, because they did not believe in a railway policy; provided that those districts which got the benefit of the railways paid for them, and did not get them at the expense of the rest of the colony. It was with that clear understanding he would vote for the resolutions; and he would add also, that—the resolutions did not pledge the House to details—unless the Financial Adjustment Bill was carried into law, he should oppose the details which were yet to be submitted to the House for giving practical effect to the resolutions.

MR. GRAHAM remarked that it might be in consequence of his want of experience of the customs of the House, but he could not see the advantage of splitting a debate of this kind. The railway question was one question for discussion. There were three sets of resolutions on it before the House:—First of all, the Premier's resolution for additional surveys, which had been passed; in the next place, there were the resolutions now under consideration, advocating the extension of existing lines; and, thirdly, there was the motion which the Minister for Works would, no doubt, be prepared to bring forward, on an early day, for dealing with the construction of railways by private enterprise. Those ought all to be considered together. The House should not make the two principles of Government railways, and railways constructed by private enterprise, clash. As this morning the House must adjourn at an early hour, and could not go

into the whole question, they ought to do no more than pass the resolutions for going into committee; and, on a future occasion, they could go into the consideration of the whole of the resolutions together in committee. Whatever principle should be adopted, he could say that the northern railway was not only desirable, but absolutely necessary, and it would be highly remunerative to that portion of the colony through which it would pass, and to all the districts that it would connect.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY said there could be no objection to the resolutions being passed, as the House could, in committee, go into the consideration of the whole subject of railways on a future day. He quite agreed with the last speaker, that when the House went into committee, it would be the proper time to do so. He did not wish to speak on the question, to-day, further than to say that the Government did not object to the resolutions being passed. When the House went into committee, he should be prepared to give his opinion upon the question.

Question put and affirmed, upon a division, as follows:—

Ayes, 22.	Noes, 4.
Mr. Palmer	Mr. Bramston
" Bell	" Cribb
" Lilley	" W. Scott
" Thompson	" Buchanan.
" Hemmant	
" Ferrett	
" Thornton	
" Miles	
" Johnston	
" J. Scott	
" Morehead	
" Griffith	
Dr. O'Doherty	
Mr. Wienholt	
" Royds	
" Groom	
" Graham	
" Stephens	
" Fyfe	
" MacDevitt	
" Handy	
" Edmondstone.	