

# Otago Central Railway League.

(From the Otago Daily Times, August 8, 1902.)

The Otago Central Railway League have ordered the following to be circulated amongst members of Parliament and others:—

The executive of the Otago Central Railway League submits a few facts for public information:—

The railway was authorised by act of Parliament in 1878 at an estimated cost of £1,100,000, and the Ministerial promise then was that it would be completed to Wanaka in 1884. To set at rest doubts arising from insufficient knowledge with respect to the value of the railway as a profitable undertaking, the County Councils of Vincent, Maniototo, and Taieri appointed a commission to "examine and report on the area and value of the Crown lands which would be opened by the Otago Central railway, the capabilities of the land for settlement, and to what extent its value would be enhanced, and population, production, and traffic in the Central District of Otago increased by the construction of the said railway." The commission consisted of Messrs John Bathgate (District Judge), Henry Clark (member of the Waste Lands Board), Donald Reid (formerly Minister of Lands), and Horace Bastings (M.H.R. and land agent). That commission, after exhaustive inquiry and carefully inspecting the district from Dunedin to the terminus of the railway at Lake Wanaka, made a complete report in June, 1881, from which the following extracts are made:—

"We have no hesitation in stating our opinion that the line as laid out follows the course most suitable for the development of the resources of the interior, for the increase of settlement, and for the benefit of the widely scattered mining population, combined at the same time with the greatest economy in the cost of works.

"The extent of agricultural land is not less than 550,000 acres. Of this extent only about one-sixth has been alienated from the Crown, leaving about 450,000 acres of land adapted for agricultural settlement as yet unsold. There are 2,000,000 acres of pastoral land. . . . As the leases fall in and the lands are subdivided into smaller areas . . . the carrying capacity of the country will be largely increased. . . . The quality of wheat and flour was remarkably good." And between Ophir and St. Bathans alone, one settler stated, "there is a length of 20 miles of as fine land as any farmer could wish to put a plough into."

"From Hindon to its terminus at Lake Wanaka the line proceeds through a chain of agricultural plains, ancient lake basins, the soil of which appeared to be well adapted for the growth of cereals and root crops. Its character is fine alluvial silt, easily worked, and showing capability of raising crops of good quality and of high average. These plains are surrounded by hills, from which numberless perennial streamlets flow, affording an easy and unailing means of irrigation should it be found necessary in very dry seasons. We saw a grass paddock of 95 acres which carries 85 head of cattle all the year round.

"There are extensive forests in the vicinity of Lake Wanaka, which reach back as far as the West Coast.

"The whole of the district which would be opened up by the line is an established and productive goldfield."

The commissioners finally stated that the line was "a matter of colonial concern, which should be removed beyond the region of local jealousies or prejudices, and should command general support."

Messrs M'Kerrow, Maxwell, and Hannay, railway commissioners, reporting on June 20, 1889, in favour of the railway said "it would enhance the value of the largest and most valuable estate of Crown land in the colony."

An official map, prepared in 1894, by order of the Minister of Lands, shows that there are, within a limit of 15 miles of the railway,

1,862,800 acres in pastoral runs, 409,800 acres in small grazing runs, besides over three-quarters of a million acres otherwise dealt with. Included in these pastoral runs there are 449,000 acres of arable land.

Mr M'Kerrow, then chief surveyor, reported in 1885 that the total quantity of agricultural land available for settlement throughout the colony was 2,201,760 acres, and of that quantity 480,000 acres, or one-fifth of the total, was on the Otago Central railway route.

Sir Robert Stout, in speaking in the House of Representatives in 1887 regarding 250,000 acres then proposed to be given to a company for the construction of the railway, said: "I think 150,000 acres is perhaps fit for wheat-growing. If that land is kept by the Crown, and is leased on perpetual lease after the line is finished, it will yield in rent more than sufficient to pay the cost of the whole line to Lake Wanaka."

That Central Otago is pre-eminently suitable for the growth of fruit, the cultivation of the vine, and the profitable production of wine is proved conclusively by the reports of such undoubted experts as Mr Blackmore, the New Zealand Government pomologist, and Signor Bragato, formerly chief viticulturist for the Government of Victoria, and now for that of New Zealand.

In 1887 a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives for the extension of the Otago Central railway on a land-grant system similar to that adopted in reference to the Manawatu and Midland railways. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives by a large majority, but met with opposition in the Legislative Council, where it was abandoned on the understanding that another bill with the same object, also on the land-grant system, but differing materially in detail, should be introduced in 1888. Such bill was accordingly introduced the following session, and the second reading was carried by a majority of 53 to 12, but it subsequently met with determined and successful opposition from a hostile minority. Sir Harry Atkinson then promised to make other provision for the extension of the line, and in 1889 introduced his bill creating a trust with £15,000 from public funds and £15,000 a year from pastoral rents to provide interest on the money the trust was empowered to borrow to complete the railway. This bill was strongly supported by leaders on both sides of the House, but was subsequently sacrificed to party complications.

From the evidence herein adduced it is manifest that the value of the country to be affected by the railway, and the importance of that railway as a profitable colonial undertaking, cannot be disputed by any unbiassed person.

It must also be evident that had the Legislature given effect to the proposals contained in the bills of 1887, 1888, or 1889 the Otago Central railway would have been completed years ago, and the colony would now have been in receipt of a much greater direct and indirect revenue from it, besides the settlement of Crown lands would also have been materially advanced.

These bills prove that the people of Otago had such confidence in the railway as to be willing to find means for its construction, and also that its merits have been frequently recognised by the House of Representatives and successive Governments; and that, apart from the claims of settlers who many years ago took up land in the district on the faith of Government promises made to them, it deserves fairer treatment than it has yet received, especially as party differences and insufficient knowledge have caused the line to suffer so materially. Not only have the people of Otago been prevented building the line for themselves, as they desired to do, but the numerous Ministerial promises that it would be speedily constructed which have been repeatedly made during the last 20 years still remain unfulfilled.

WILLIAM BURNETT,  
Chairman of Executive.

Dunedin, 7th August, 1902.

Rough copy

Vincent County Council,

Hyde, 23rd August, 1902.

W. Burnett Esq

Chairman of Executive

Otago Central Railway League

Sir

I am directed by the Chairman of the Vincent County Council in acknowledging the receipt of your letter and attached extract from the O,D,Times to inform you that a telegram has been sent to the Members representing the districts in which this County is situated, <sup>by</sup> strong <sup>ins</sup> protest against such an injustice as mentioned in your letter; this Council, when it meets next month, will no doubt, pass some resolution on this important matter and of which I will notify you.

I have the honour to be

Sir

Your obedient servant

*W. J. Little*  
County Clerk

*W. J. Little  
The telegrams to Messrs. Burnett  
and Dixon, should be in the name of  
the League, & forwarded in a copy  
of same, for record*

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**Notice to Sender.**  
**PLEASE AFFIX STAMPS IN THIS SPACE.**

Checked by

TO { *Copy sent Fraser & Bennett M & Co*

*26/8/02*

*Vincent county expect full share loan applied Otago Central Railway strongly protest- against- any injustice / governments- actions keenly watched here*

*Home Chairman*

**Note.**—When it is not intended or desired that the sender's signature should be telegraphed it must be written on the back of the message.

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1029

G. NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.

Code: *WJ*  
Handed in (Time): *CR*

Office of Origin and Instructions:  
*Wellington*

*J. Fraser*  
Chairman Vincent County  
*Bannockburn*

Words: *37-11*



Time finished: *2 45* m.  
Operator's initials: *LP*  
Ackgd. by  
Checked by  
Time delivered: m.

Minister has assured me and other ~~Members~~  
Blago Members that Blago Central railway will  
receive a fair proportion of loan money in  
public works estimates these estimates not  
down yet if result not satisfactory Blago  
members will resist

*J. Fraser. M.H.R.*



Wellington August 24<sup>th</sup> 1912

James Horn Esq  
Chairman N. C. Council  
Essex

Enclosed please find  
reply from Dominator of P 18  
to your view re Stage Central  
I have also handed him the  
Resolutions passed meeting  
and will send on his reply  
to Mr. Sturms as soon as  
I need hardly tell you  
that he <sup>the Acting Premier</sup> promised a deputation  
of Southern members that  
waited on him that all parties  
would be treated alike  
Yours Respectfully  
J. P. Salmon



OFFICE OF MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS,

Wellington, 27th August, 1902.

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge receipt of the telegram you handed me from Mr Horn, Chairman of the Vincent County Council in reference to the expenditure upon the Otago-Central Railway Works.

In reply I have to inform you that I consider the residents of Otago Central have no just cause for complaint, as very material progress is being made with the work. A large number of men have been sent up to work upon this railway quite recently.

Yours very truly,

James Bennett, Esq., M.H.R.,

WELLINGTON.