

The main reason urged for the construction of the line was the large amount of coal and timber which would be sent to the East Coast for the supply of Canterbury, and for transport to other ports. The Hon. Mr Macandrew concurred in the views expressed as to the importance of the work, but said the funds were wanting. He suggested that a better way would be to set apart lands for the purpose, but he would say nothing definitely until a surveyor was employed, and had reported as to what land would be opened up. If money was available, he would favour its construction at once, but what money there was, was wanted for works of more pressing necessity. Mr Macandrew spoke very confidently of the future of the West Coast, if a railway was carried across the island.

In the course of an editorial, the Christchurch "Star" criticised Mr Rolleston for not pressing the claims of the proposed line upon the Government. Mr Rolleston, in reply, detailed the steps he had taken in the matter, and expressed the opinion that nothing would be achieved until the public vigorously supported the advocates of railway extension.

Otago Makes a Move.

In July, 1878, it was resolved to hold a conference between Canterbury and Westland members of the House of Representatives for the purpose of urging upon the Government the speedy extension of the railway from the East to the West Coast of the Island. A counter-proposal was now advanced to run the connecting line across the Island from Otago by way of Haast's Pass. This movement gained considerable support, and a resolution in its favour was carried in Hokitika. This proposed connexion of Otago and Westland is interesting in view of the previous proposal that Westland should be joined politically with Otago instead of Canterbury. The railway proposal served the purpose of arousing interest in Canterbury, and on August 5th, 1878, in reply to a deputation, the Hon. J. Macandrew stated that "the matter of the West Coast railway had received consideration from the Government, and would be treated upon in the next Public Works Statement, and if the proposals then made were not deemed satisfactory, the deputation could then meet Ministers again."

At a meeting of the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce a week later, the president (Mr John Anderson) stressed the difficulty there would be in opening up communication with the West Coast from Otago. The route by which it was proposed to take the line from a point north of Christchurch, was for the Dunedin people, rather a shorter road than the road they would themselves have to the West Coast. It was ultimately resolved: "That, in the opinion of this meeting, the best and cheapest route for a railway connecting the West Coast of the Middle Island is that via Amberley, and that the co-operation of members of the General Assembly be invited to assist the Canterbury members in supporting the best and shortest route."

In the Public Works Statement of 1878 provision was made for a line from Amberley to Brunner, at an estimated cost of £950,000. Mr Macandrew, speaking upon the motion for the second reading of the Bill, stated that it was the intention of the Government to have the line completed within five or six years.

With the fall of the Grey Ministry in 1879, the Minister for Public Works in the Hall Ministry, Mr Oliver, stated that the resources of the country were inadequate to bear the strain of rapidly constructing expensive works. Mr Macandrew protested against the omission of the Amberley-Brunner line from the Government's proposals, but the Government prevailed, and the ambitious policy of Mr Macandrew was abandoned on the grounds of economy.

Westland Continues the Fight.

After the failure of 1879 public interest in Canterbury languished. The Westland Railway League, however, was brought into existence for the one purpose of prosecuting and sustaining agitation for the construction of the East and West Coast Railway. The project of a private company was advanced, and the League spent a long time in investigating the possibility of launching such a scheme. In October, 1880, delegates from the Westland committee came to Christchurch for the purpose of gauging public opinion in regard to the formation of a company, and of seeking assistance in finding a practicable route through the mountains. Commissioners were appointed with a view to ascertaining whether a private venture could be remunerative. The Commissioners did not think that this would be the case, and recommended that the line should be constructed by the Government. The company project was then finally abandoned.

In 1882 the Whitaker Ministry did not include the East and West Coast line in its projects, although provision was made for the construction of a line connecting Pieton with Christchurch via the East Coast. This line had never been asked for in Parliament, and had scarcely been referred to. No Canterbury or Westland member made any protest, and the railway votes were passed in Committee of Supply, without mention of the East and West Coast line.

Canterbury Protests.

The Canterbury Industrial Association took a prominent part in protesting against the neglect of the East and West Coast Railway scheme. At a general meeting of the Association the president (Mr A. G. Howland) stated that the Association had not taken the matter up as a political question, but as one intimately connected with the fostering and encouraging of the industrial resources of the Colony. The following resolution was carried, on the motion of the Hon. E. Richardson:—"That this meeting is of opinion that a line of railway to connect the West Coast with Canterbury is of paramount importance, and that the Government be urged to undertake its immediate construction."

In November, 1882, the "East and West Coast Railway League" was formed in Christchurch. Public meetings were held in various districts, and delegates from the League gave full details of its proposals. A conference was called by the committee of the League on April 26th, 1883, between the League and the members representing Canterbury and Westland, in order to secure unity of action. The following resolutions were agreed to:—"That this meeting is of opinion that all the Government land for fifteen miles on each side of the determined route to the West Coast be reserved, and that the proceeds of its sale be applied towards the construction of a railway between Canterbury and Westland."

"That, in the opinion of this meeting, the £180,000 set apart for the extension of the Middle Island Main Trunk line northward should be diverted towards constructing a line to the West Coast by the route decided on."

A Discussion on Routes.

The Commission appointed in April 2nd, 1883, to enquire into the merits of the various proposals to connect Westland and Canterbury by railway, made an extensive and carefully prepared report. The most interesting passage of the report concerned the important problem of the route to be traversed. The settlers in Reefton urged that the line should commence there and go through the northern passes of the mountains to the East Coast and Christchurch. The settlers in Westport were comparatively indifferent to the question of railway communication, and were more interested in the improvement of their Harbour.

The settlers in Greymouth and Hokitika were anxious for a line that should commence at Brunner, and go through the southern passes to the East Coast and Christchurch. The question was finally narrowed down to considerations of distance and engineering difficulties, and the choice lay between the Hurunui and Arthur's Pass routes. The latter route possessed the advantage of shortness and the existing coach road was available for the conveyance of men and material for construction. On the other hand the engineering difficulties were considerably greater in the Arthur's Pass route. In concluding, the Commissioners summed up as follows: "After considering the whole of the foregoing conclusions and opinions, we most respectfully report to your Excellency that on account of its being the shortest line between the centres of production and demand, we recommend the route by Arthur's Pass as the most suitable; but the most sanguine view the Commissioners can take is, that there is no prospect of the traffic paying more than working expenses on the completion of any of the alternative lines. No commensurate indirect results can be anticipated from the expenditure of so large a sum as would be necessary for its construction, and not for as many as ten years or more can full interest on the cost be hoped for."

Public Men's Views.

Mr W. Rolleston s.a.d., at a meeting of his constituents at Papanui on April 19th, 1884, "The existing circumstances of the colony do not warrant the borrowing of a million and a half to make the line. If such an expenditure were proposed in Parliament, it could only be made concurrently with one for the expenditure of millions elsewhere, which the present circumstances of the colony would not justify."

Sir George Grey, speaking at the Oddfellows' Hall, Christchurch, on May 8th, 1884, said in reply to a question, that no man had struggled harder for the West Coast railway than he had, and if he had been left alone, the line would have been far advanced by this time. Any fitting measure for getting it would still command his support.

Sir Julius Vogel, in a manifesto published on May 17th, 1884 said: "I am of opinion the trunk line should be completed without delay. Wellington and Auckland should be joined. Nelson and the West Coast should be united with the Eastern trunk line."

At Ashburton on June 14th, 1884, Sir Julius Vogel said: "I look upon the railway to the West Coast as of immense importance. The West Coast has never had justice done to it. It has been an appanage of Melbourne, whence it has drawn immense supplies. It has so far been merely scratched, and we have no conception of the wealth it may yet produce. Now, picture to yourselves the difficulty of getting to the West Coast and the costs of provisions there. I take the following comparative statement of prices for provisions from the Parliamentary papers for 1881-82:—

	Chch.	West Coast.
Flour, per ton	£10 to £11	£17 to £18
Bread, 4lb loaf	6d	10d
Butter, per lb	1s	2s
Wheat, per bushel	4s	7s
Mutton, per lb	2½d to 4d	7d

It is very clear that such sales must stand in the way of developing this district, and that when you open up the district, and have that large additional traffic which invariably follows on increased facilities of communication, you will afford a new field to the West Coast, whilst at the same time you open to the producers on this side a new market available to their energy and enterprise."

Mr D. Reese spoke as follows to the electors of Stanmore on July 3rd, 1884: "The West Coast railway is a matter which has been of great interest to this province during the past few years, but in 1885 when the diggings broke out on the West Coast, we were put into a gold fever by the fact of such quantities of gold being found at our back door. It was then a leading question with our politicians, and there may be some present who recollect Mr J. E. Fitzgerald saying that, in his opinion, Canterbury was on the wrong side of the ranges, that Christchurch ought to have been on the West Coast, drawing her supplies from this side, as it was more suited over there for manufacturing purposes. However, Mr Fitzgerald worked hard at the question. We always respected what he said, and that was one of the opinions he expressed. . . . The West Coast is to us what Wales is to England, and you may depend upon it that we shall never progress as we should until we get that railway constructed."

Parliament's Action.

In the House of Representatives on July 4th, 1884, on the motion of Sir George Grey, it was agreed to go into Committee of Supply on Wednesday, July 11th, to consider an address to the Governor, to request his Excellency to cause a sum to be placed on the Estimates for the construction of a railway for the connexion of the city of Christchurch with the West Coast of the Middle Island.

On Wednesday, July 11th, Major Atkinson (Premier) declared in the House that under no circumstances would he consent to any portion of the £180,000 allocated for the construction of the East Coast line being diverted from the purposes to which it had been appropriated, and for which it was raised.

The Atkinson Government resigned on August 8th, and the first Stout-Vogel Ministry was soon defeated. The same fate overtook the Atkinson-Wakefield Ministry, and the second Stout-Vogel Ministry was formed on September 3rd. On October 3rd a Bill was introduced by Sir Julius Vogel, authorising the construction of the East and West Coast railway by a syndicate, and giving a guarantee of 2 per cent. In Committee of the House, the guarantee of 2 per cent. was struck out of the Bill, and the line of route from Springfield via Arthur's Pass to Stillwater (Brunner) was inserted, as the cheapest, easiest, and most advantageous to the colony.

Delegates from Canterbury and Nelson were sent to England to secure the necessary financial backing for the scheme. The Governor, in his speech at the opening of Parliament on June 11th, 1885, said: "No time was lost in making an agreement under the East and West Coast and Nelson Railway Act. My Ministers are in hopes that, in accordance with its provisions, Nelson and the West Coast will before long be connected with the East Coast of the Middle Island, and that a vast area of land, which from its nature requires a railway to develop it, will become available for useful purposes. The gain to the colony from opening these lines of communication with the West Coast my Ministers consider will be of immense importance, whilst the utilisation of the land, of which the colony will retain alternate blocks, must prove of great service."

The delegates in England cabled the terms upon which Meiggs and Sons, South American contractors, would undertake the construction of the railway. In Canterbury petitions were immediately circulated and numerous signed praying for the acceptance of the terms. The greatest enthusiasm on behalf of the railway prevailed. On July 27th, 1885, there was a great public meeting at the Tuam street Hall. The following resolution was carried unanimously: "That this meeting of residents in the County of Selwyn desires the hearty co-operation of Mr Wakefield, as their county member, in passing the West Coast Railway Bill, as being a measure bearing greatly on the welfare of his

constituents." In another resolution satisfaction was expressed at the prospect of an early commencement being made in the construction of the railway. Similar resolutions were carried at other meetings in Canterbury, Nelson, and the West Coast.

On August 4th, in the General Assembly, Sir Julius Vogel submitted his motion for the reference of the whole question of the construction of the railway to a Committee. The motion was lost by 34 to 27 votes. A majority of fifteen for the proposal in the Middle Island was wiped out by a majority of twenty-two against it in the North Island. The rejection of the proposal was received with great indignation in the Middle Island, and a fierce agitation ensued.

Canterbury's Indignation.

On Wednesday, September 2nd, there was a great public demonstration in Christchurch, when it is estimated that 25,000 people assembled in Hagley Park. The description of the unparalleled demonstration occupied five and a half columns in "The Press" on the following day. Mr C. C. Bowen proposed the first resolution: "That in the opinion of this great gathering, representing all classes of the people of Canterbury, it is an injustice to the interests of Canterbury, Westland, and Nelson that the prosecution of a colonial work of the importance of the East and West Coast and Nelson railway should be any longer delayed, and that, while trusting that the sum of £150,000 placed upon the Estimates will not be rejected by the House, the Legislature be earnestly invited to proceed with the development of a scheme for deal-

ing finally and comprehensively with the construction of this line." The resolution was carried unanimously, with much cheering. A second resolution was also carried unanimously: "That this gathering desires to tender its best thanks to the Canterbury and other members of the House of Representatives who have advocated the construction of the East and West Coast and Nelson railway, and trusts that they will not relax their efforts until this important work has been commenced."

A telegram from Nelson, dated September 5th, appears in "The Press" of September 7th, 1885: "A great railway demonstration in connexion with the Nelson branch of the League took place this afternoon, when it is estimated about 5000 persons were present, many having come in from the country. Every place of business was closed for a couple of hours. The streets were decorated, and the greatest enthusiasm prevailed. The chief resolution expressed the appreciation of the action of the Government and of those members of the House who are loyally supporting the construction of the East and West Coast and Nelson railway, and called upon every member of the Legislature having the welfare of the colony at heart to support by every legitimate means the construction of the railway. A resolution expressing thanks for the loyal support received from Canterbury and the West Coast was also carried with cheers."

The House of Representatives refused even to entertain the petitions of Canterbury, Westland, and Nelson for consideration, and at the instigation of a Canterbury member—Captain Suller—cut down a vote of £150,000, placed upon the Supplementary Estimates for the line, to £1000.

In October, 1885, the union of Canterbury with Westland and Nelson was decided upon, and Mr Acton-Adams, formerly of Nelson, was elected chairman of the Railway League. The policy of the League was thus set out: "Cordial co-operation between the people of Canterbury, Westland, and Nelson, to secure the construction by the Government of the East and West Coast and Nelson railway, simultaneously with the Northern Trunk and Otago Central, and to advocate the extension of the League to all parts of the colony, with a view to securing political support to those members who will advocate the completion of the trunk railway system."

Thus after twenty-five years of agitation in three provinces, the East and West Coast and Nelson railway was yet to be commenced.

C.A. Press Aug 4. 1823

CHRONOLOGY OF THE WORK.

- 1864—Arthur's Pass discovered by Mr A. D. Dobson.
- 1873—Railway Act. Nelson-Westland-Canterbury line adopted.
- 1878—February 3rd. Selwyn County Council meeting.
- 1878—July 22nd. Deputation to Government urges trans-island line.
- 1878—Amberley-Brunner line promised for completion in five years.
- 1879—Amberley-Brunner project dropped.
- 1880—Westland Railway League formed.
- 1882—East and West Coast Railway League formed.
- 1883—Commission recommends Arthur's Pass route.
- 1884—Agitation in Parliament.
- 1884—Bill introduced for construction of railway by a syndicate.
- 1885—Vigorous agitation. Railway project vetoed in Parliament.
- 1885—September 2nd. Indignation meeting in Hagley Park, 25,000 people present.
- 1885—Westland, Nelson, and Canterbury still agitating.
- 1886—Mr Blair reports on line.
- 1887—Act authorising contract with Midland Railway Company.
- 1888—August 3rd. Contract with Company signed.
- 1890—First sod turned at Springfield.
- 1892—Company asks for extension of contract time.
- 1895—Arbitration between company and Government arranged.
- 1895—Mr Blake as arbitrator delivered his judgment. Government takes over the work.
- 1898—Government begins work at Staircase.
- 1900—Jackson's Otira section completed in November.
- 1905—Canterbury and West Coast deputation to Mr Seddon, who promises completion of tunnel by 1910.
- 1907—Contract for tunnel let to McLean and Son.
- 1908—May 5th. Tunnel commenced at Arthur's Pass.
- 1912—McLeans released from their tunnel contract.
- 1913—January 6th. Public Works Department carries on.
- 1918—August 21st. Tunnel headings meet.
- 1919—May 16th. "Press" predicts completion in four years.
- 1922—Passengers, mails and goods occasionally taken through tunnel.
- 1923—Line officially opened for traffic on August 4th.