

Report of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade, by Samuel Laing

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Transcribed by David Price, email ccx074@pglaf.org

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RAILWAYS.

REPORT of the RAILWAY DEPARTMENT of the BOARD of TRADE on the *London, Worcester,* and *Wolverhampton,* and on the *Birmingham* and *Shrewsbury Districts.*

(Presented to Parliament by Her Majesty's Command.)

Railway Department, Board of Trade,
Whitehall, 28 February 1845.

The Board constituted by Minute of the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, for the transaction of Railway business, having had under consideration the different schemes deposited with the Railway Department for extending Railway communication between London, Worcester, and Wolverhampton, and in the district intermediate between the London and Birmingham and Great Western Railways, and also, in connexion with the above, the schemes for extending Railway communication between Birmingham and Shrewsbury, have determined on submitting the following Report thereon for the consideration of Parliament.

The object of the first class of schemes in question is to supply Railway communication to the great mining district of Staffordshire, lying south of Wolverhampton, to the towns of Kidderminster, Stourbridge, Stourport, Worcester, &c., and to the district north of Oxford, intermediate between the Great Western and London and Birmingham Railways.

For this purpose two competing schemes are proposed; one, which is promoted by the London and Birmingham Company, comprises a line from Rugby to Oxford, and another from Wolverhampton, through Worcester and Banbury, to join the London and Birmingham line at Tring; the other scheme consists of a line from Oxford to Rugby, which is proposed to be made by the Great Western Company; and of another line from Oxford to Worcester and Wolverhampton, which is undertaken by an independent Company, but in connexion with the Great Western Company, and which must be considered as forming, with the Oxford and Rugby line, one scheme, competing with the former.

For the sake of brevity we shall distinguish these as the “London and Birmingham or Tring Scheme,” and the “Great Western or Oxford Scheme.” Their general direction will be easily understood by reference to the accompanying map.

In their general features and objects the two schemes are so nearly identical that the two manifestly cannot stand together. A further scheme for the accommodation of the country between Worcester and Wolverhampton, was proposed by the Birmingham and Gloucester Company, but it is understood that arrangements have been made by which this scheme is withdrawn in favour of the London and Birmingham scheme, to which it was moreover inferior in several important respects, so that we may consider the question as reduced to one of competition between the schemes of the two great Companies.

The first point is, whether a sufficient public case can be established to justify the construction of any Railway at all throughout the districts in question. As regards the South Staffordshire district, this point has been disputed by various Canal interests, who urge that the district is already sufficiently well supplied by water communication, and that the introduction of Railways, by destroying the resources and crippling the efficiency of such water communications, will be productive of injury rather than of benefit to the Public. Various special reasons have been urged in support of this view, more especially with reference to the mineral district of which Dudley may be considered as the centre. It is said that the Birmingham Canal Company have, at a great

expense, created a very complete and efficient system of water communication throughout this district; that a right is reserved of making branch Canals to all mines and works within certain limits, which right would be to a certain extent defeated by running a Railway parallel to the existing Canal, to the injury both of the Canal Company, and of the owners of the mines and works so cut off; that the management and charges of the Canal Company have always been of the most liberal description; and finally, that owing to the peculiar nature of the district, in which great excavations have been made for mining purposes, Railways cannot be carried through it without danger.

It will be readily conceded that the importance of the district in question is such as to entitle it to require the best means of communication, whether by Canal or Railway. Between Wolverhampton and Stourbridge there are at present about 100 blast furnaces in work, producing about 468,000 tons of pig iron annually. In order to produce this quantity, nearly 4,000,000 tons of coals, lime, ironstone, and other raw materials are consumed, which are raised from the mines of the district, and transported to the various furnaces, forges and founderies.

The export of iron from the district is about 240,000 tons annually, in addition to large quantities of heavy hardwares, tin plates, glass, and other goods. The export of coal is also very large, and might be greatly augmented by increased facilities of communication.

The population, depending for support on the iron-works, mines, and manufactories of the district, is estimated at not less than 230,000; and the total population of the respective towns and places between Wolverhampton and Worcester, which would be benefited by the proposed Railway communication, is believed to exceed 300,000.

Among these towns may be mentioned Kidderminster, a place of considerable manufacturing importance, and great intercourse with different parts of the kingdom; Droitwich, with its extensive salt works; Stourbridge, Stourport and Worcester.

The construction of a Railway in this direction will also lead, in all probability, to extensions into the fertile agricultural district on the west of the Severn, towards Leominster and Ludlow.

The claim of the district, therefore, to the most improved mode of communication can hardly be disputed; and whatever claims Canal Companies may have from benefits previously conferred, or from past liberality of management, such claims cannot be considered by us in any other light than those of other private interests, unless in so far as they may be based upon public considerations.

Our Report will not, in any way, prejudice or affect the right of those Canal Companies to have their vested interests, if any, carefully considered by the Legislature.

Upon public grounds, therefore, we have merely had to consider the allegation that the interests of the district will not be promoted by the introduction of Railways, and that Railways cannot be constructed through it without danger.

Upon the first point it seems sufficient to refer to the unanimous opinion of the parties principally interested, and who have the best opportunities of judging of the effects likely to follow from the introduction of Railways. The only difference of opinion has arisen from the anxiety of the parties to obtain a Railway of some description or other, which has led them to support different competing schemes; but all parties have united in the strongest representations of the vital importance to the district of obtaining a good Railway communication, in addition to those afforded by the Canals. A memorial signed by the representatives of 46 iron-works, 57 furnaces,

and 98 collieries, in the Staffordshire mineral district, including the trustees of Lord Ward, from whose estate alone upwards of 1,000,000 tons of coal and iron are raised annually, in favour of the London and Birmingham scheme; and another memorial, representing 37 iron-works, and 9 collieries, in favour of the Great Western scheme, were presented to us; the memorialists in each case urging in the strongest manner the advantages of Railway communication to the district.

It is stated, that without such communication, they have to compete at a great disadvantage with the iron districts of South Wales and Scotland, which, from their readier access to the sea, can convey their products to market at a cheaper rate. The Canals are stated to be not only more tedious and expensive, but subject to serious interruptions, often for weeks together, from frost in winter and drought in summer. In short, it is urged that the apprehensions of the Canal Companies are the best test of the further advantage of a Railway; since unless the latter obtained a large proportion of the heavy traffic, which it could only do by affording the public a better and cheaper means of transport, the interests of the Canals could not be prejudiced.

With so strongly expressed a wish on the part of such an important district for Railway communication, and with two great Companies competing with one another to afford it, we do not think that, upon public grounds, we should be justified in reporting that it ought to be withheld on account of any apprehended interference with existing water communications. In the case of one Canal Company, special reasons existed which might have weighed more strongly than those derived solely from private considerations; viz. that a guarantee had been given to assist the Severn Navigation Commissioners to raise money for the purpose of carrying out a great public improvement authorized by Parliament. From this difficulty, however, as well as from the apprehension of that great improvement being impeded by the introduction of Railways into the district, we are relieved by the offer made by the Railway Company to whose scheme we recommend that a preference should be given, to take upon themselves the burden of the guarantee to the extent of any loss sustained in consequence of the construction of the Railway, subject to any reasonable conditions and arrangements.

With regard to the remaining point, that of safety, it is admitted that portions of the soil being undermined, subsidences occasionally take place; but there appears no reason to apprehend any peculiar degree of danger to a Railway from this source, beyond what equally affects the Canals, Roads, Tramroads, Foundries, Mills, and other buildings of the district, and which has never been considered an impediment to the introduction of Railways in other mining districts. Some of the most eminent engineers of the day, among whom may be mentioned Sir J. Rennie, Mr. Brunel, and Mr. R. Stephenson, have proposed the lines which pass through the district in question, and are clearly of opinion that they may be worked without any unusual degree of danger.

We are of opinion, therefore, that some one line of Railway is required, and may be properly sanctioned, for the accommodation of the district in question, between Wolverhampton and Worcester. This being conceded, the sanction of a line in connexion with it, to connect Worcester more directly with London, and to give communication to the large intermediate district, appears to follow almost as a matter of course. The supply of coals to this district, where a great reduction of price will be effected, is alone an important object; and, on the other hand, an outlet will be afforded for agricultural produce. A population of about 128,000 between Worcester and Tring would be accommodated by the line in that direction; and on the whole, taken in connexion with the Worcester and Wolverhampton Junction, the traffic seems sufficient to justify a fair expectation of return on the capital to be invested, as also on the Rugby and Oxford portion of the line, which will complete a chain of direct Railway communication from the Northern and Midland to the

Southern and South Western counties, and will afford to those counties a valuable supply of coal from the Derbyshire collieries.

We proceed, therefore, to investigate the subject, on the assumption that one or other of the competing schemes promoted by the London and Birmingham, and Great Western Companies, will be sanctioned, and that the question is reduced to one of preference between them.

In regard to distance, the two schemes are as nearly as possible equal, the distance from Worcester to London being 122 miles by the Tring line, and 119 by the Oxford line; the former, however, terminating at the Euston Square Station, and the latter at Paddington. The number of miles of new Railway to be constructed in either case is also nearly the same; nor does there appear to be anything in respect of gradients or engineering character calculated to give one scheme a decided preference over the other. The course of the Tring line accommodates a larger population between Worcester and London than the Oxford line; but the importance of the districts traversed by either line, and left out by its competitor, is hardly sufficient to give a decided superiority on a question of such magnitude.

A far more important feature of comparison is derived from a consideration of the question of gauge.

The Great Western scheme is proposed to be constructed on the wide gauge of seven feet, used upon the different Railways of the Great Western system; while the scheme of the London and Birmingham Company is proposed to be constructed on the narrow gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches, common to all the other Railways of the kingdom.

In order to estimate fully the importance of this question, it must be borne in mind that the Bristol and Gloucester Railway is on the wide, while the Birmingham and Gloucester is on the narrow gauge, and that the inconvenience resulting from the break of the two gauges at Gloucester has been so great as to lead to an amalgamation of the two Companies, with a view to obviate it, by introducing uniformity of gauge throughout between Bristol and Birmingham. From the arrangements which have been made with this view, it is perfectly evident that upon the question of the Worcester lines depends whether this uniformity will be proposed to be attained, by the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway adopting the wide gauge, or the Bristol and Gloucester adopting the narrow.

The question, therefore, upon which we have had to form an opinion is, whether it is better for public interests that the wide gauge should come up to Birmingham and Rugby, or that the narrow gauge should go down to Bristol and Oxford?

It would be difficult to overrate the importance of this question in a national and commercial point of view. If there is one point more fully established than another in the practice of Railways, it is that the inconvenience occasioned by a break upon a line of through-traffic, occasioned by want of uniformity of gauge, is of such a serious description as to detract most materially from the advantages of Railway communication.

The following description of what has actually occurred at Gloucester during the last few months, furnished to us by a gentleman who has been practically engaged in the management of the traffic, will give some idea of the working of the system:—

“We experience the greatest possible inconvenience from the change, both as regards passengers and goods; coals we have not attempted to tranship.

“In the first place as regards passengers and passenger trains:

“The passengers and their luggage have to be hurried across from one train to the other, when there is a chance of the luggage being misplaced. Gentlemen’s carriages and horses have to be changed, a process uniting time and risk. Valuable parcels have to be handed out in the confusion, and handed in.

“The result is a delay, with the Mail-trains, for instance, of half an hour sometimes, just sufficient if the coming-in train is after time, to miss the Manchester or other train from Birmingham, or the Exeter or Bath train from Bristol; annoyance to the passengers, who are anxious about their parcels and luggage; risk, and expense, as a large body of porters have to be maintained, who are not fully employed, in order that no more time than is necessary should be lost in the change of trains.

“With regard to goods, the inconvenience attending the change is far more serious.

“Up to this day a great number of waggons laden with goods of all descriptions have been lying at Gloucester, which we have been unable to remove in spite of every exertion. We keep an establishment of clerks and porters to superintend and effect the transshipment, but, in the hurry of business, mistakes occur; goods destined for Hull are perhaps put into the Manchester truck; boxes are bruised, packing torn, furniture and brittle articles damaged. There is the chance of mistake in the re-invoicing of goods; the other day, for instance, a bale for Bristol was laid hold of by a carrier at Gloucester and taken to Brecon, a claim for some 30*l.* being instantly made upon us.

“In short, all the inconvenience, delay, and expense attending an unloading and reloading of goods have to be encountered, and there is nothing the senders of goods so much dread as this. The expense involved is very considerable: there is the expense of portage, which varies from 3*d.* to 6*d.* per ton: the expense of clerks employed in inspecting and invoicing the goods, the expense of shunting the waggons, the waste of premises, the additional carrying stock it obliges the Companies on each gauge to maintain, and, above all, the loss of trade which is sure to result from the delay and risk attending the change, and the advantage which uninterrupted communications, whether by Water or Railway, are sure to have over you in competition.

“Much of this expense and delay, it may be said, can be obviated by better arrangements and more care; by ample station accommodation, by abundant carrying stock. No doubt some of it may be prevented, but this is only another name for expense. The care, too, which is required must not be confined to the Railways immediately affected, but must commence on a Railway a long way off. The goods from Leeds for Bristol, for instance, must be duly placed together at Leeds, packed in such a manner as will enable you at Gloucester to get at them in the best manner. They must be forwarded from Leeds, and again from Birmingham, in such quantities as will be convenient at Gloucester. The arrangements, in short, by which our interests at Gloucester will be best consulted, will have to be made by another Company, often not interested in the matter, and whose convenience may suggest another course. You cannot, therefore, look forward to remedying many of the difficulties attending on change of gauge, which are of this nature.”

To the above summary of the practical inconveniences mentioned, we have only to add, that the numerous representations addressed to us by the principal carrying and commercial interests

which have been concerned in the traffic affected by the change of gauge at Gloucester, have fully borne out the statement of the evils experienced, more especially with reference to the loss, delay, and misdirection of goods. The principal Railway Companies north of Birmingham have also made strong representations as to the obstacle thrown in the way of a proper development of the traffic by the break of gauge; an obstacle which, as regards coal, iron, salt, corn, and every description of heavy goods, they consider as amounting to a virtual prohibition.

The question may be raised how far it is possible to obviate the inconvenience of two different gauges by mechanical arrangements? These arrangements may consist either—

1. Of contrivances for transferring the bodies of waggons from the wheels and axles adapted for one gauge to those adapted for the other; or—
2. The laying down of additional rails, so as to permit trains of either gauge to run on without interruption.

With regard to the first, it is stated that the experiment has been repeatedly tried on the Liverpool and Manchester, the Newcastle and Darlington, the Leicester and Swannington, and other Railways, where crossed by local coal Railways of a narrower gauge, and has never succeeded. The practical difficulties also are obvious, of securing with waggons constructed with moveable bodies, the rigidity and solidity requisite for safety, and to prevent excessive wear and tear, and damage to the articles conveyed. Even if we were to suppose, however, all mechanical difficulties overcome, the serious objection would still remain, that in addition to the expense of transfer, a large additional stock would require to be kept by all Railway Companies, owners of mines, and other parties who had occasion to send traffic sometimes in the direction where the gauge was uninterrupted, and sometimes in the direction where waggons of a special construction were required. This consideration is the more important as, under the system of the clearing-house, the whole stock of the narrow-gauge Railways of the country may be considered as becoming more and more common property, available wherever there may be a press of business, and for as great distances as may be required, in order to avoid the inconvenience of unloading.

The second arrangement, of laying down additional rails, may be practicable under peculiar circumstances, and to a limited extent, but it is open to great objections.

It is very doubtful how far the addition of a single rail only would be consistent with safety, as in this case the centre of gravity of the carriages of different gauge in the same train would not be in the same straight line. If a complete double set of rails were laid down the expense would be very considerable.

The complication of switches and crossings that would be necessary would involve considerable additional risk and great expense. The difficulty and expense of maintaining the permanent way, and of keeping the double set of rails in proper adjustment, would be greatly increased; and on the whole, the expense, inconvenience, and risk, would probably be so great as to prevent the experiment from being tried to any extent.

We cannot therefore consider the plan of laying down additional rails as applicable, unless perhaps to a limited extent and under special circumstances, such as enabling, for instance, mineral waggons constructed for the narrow gauge to pass for a short distance and at a slow speed over a wide-gauge Railway; with which view alone it is proposed to lay down extra rails upon the Oxford, Worcester, and Wolverhampton line, for a few miles south of Wolverhampton.

On the whole, therefore, we cannot consider any of the mechanical arrangements which have been proposed for obviating the inconvenience of a meeting of different gauges (even if we could assume their practicability, which in the present state of experience we should not be warranted in doing,) as anything better than partial and imperfect palliatives of a great evil.

Assuming this to be the case, and assuming also, as we are compelled to do, that an interruption of gauge must exist somewhere, the question is reduced to this: to ascertain at what points such interruption should be fixed in order to occasion the least inconvenience to the traffic and commerce of the country. From the fact that nearly 2,000 miles of Railway are already made or sanctioned on the narrow gauge, while not more than 300 are sanctioned on the wide gauge, a disproportion which will be still more largely increased by the new Railways now in contemplation, an inference might be drawn in favour of confining the gauge which is in such a decided minority within the narrowest possible limits; and this inference might be strengthened by referring to the obvious fact that the wide gauge has not realized those decided advantages over the narrow gauge which were at one time anticipated. The actual speed of trains upon the Great Western Railway, as shown by the published time-tables, and by official returns, is not so high as upon some narrow-gauge Railways, and notwithstanding the excellence of its gradients, very slightly higher than the average speed of other great Railways on the narrow gauge. In respect of safety, it is manifest that both gauges are alike unobjectionable, with due precaution and proper management; and in respect of convenience and of economy, including the cost both of construction and working, the opinion of a great majority of the most eminent authorities is unfavourable to the wide gauge.

Without wishing to express any positive opinion ourselves upon the point, it is enough for us to say that we think there is nothing in the relative merits of the two gauges in themselves materially to affect the question between them, which turns upon commercial considerations.

In this point of view the question is, as we have already observed, whether the points of junction between the wide and narrow gauge should be at Rugby, Birmingham and Wolverhampton, or at Oxford and Bristol. In support of the first view, it is contended that the principle which should regulate the choice of the points of junction ought to be to fix them at great *foci* of traffic, and centres of converging Railways, where delay must take place and large establishments be maintained at any rate; while on the other hand it is contended that such points are the worst possible to select, and that the opposite principle should be adopted, of confining an inevitable inconvenience within the narrowest possible limits, by fixing the points of junction where there is least through-traffic.

The correctness of the latter proposition seems perfectly obvious upon general considerations; but the question is one of such great commercial importance, that we have thought it right to inquire fully and in detail into the practical effects that would result to the principal interests concerned from an interruption of the gauge, on the one hand, at Birmingham and Rugby, and on the other at Bristol and Oxford.

By either combination the traffic of places intermediate between Birmingham and Bristol with each other, and with London, would not be affected; uniformity of gauge being secured equally in the one case by the wide, in the other by the narrow gauge. By either combination the traffic between places north and east of the line of the London and Birmingham Railway and places south of the line of the Great Western Railway would not be affected, interruption of gauge having equally to be encountered in the one case at Bristol and Oxford, in the other at Birmingham and Rugby.

By the former or wide-gauge combination, the traffic between Devonshire, Cornwall and all places south of the line of the Great Western Railway, and Birmingham, and all places between Birmingham and Bristol, would gain, *i.e.* would escape an interruption of gauge; also such of the traffic of South Wales, to Birmingham, and places short of Birmingham, as in the event of the South Wales Railway being sanctioned, would take the circuitous route by that Railway to the north of Gloucester.

On the other hand by the narrow-gauge combination, a break is avoided in the whole of the traffic between Manchester, Liverpool, Hull, and the Northern, Eastern, and Midland portions of the kingdom, and Bristol, Gloucester, Worcester, and the whole district intermediate between the London and Birmingham and Great Western Railways.

The paramount importance of this consideration has been strongly urged upon us by parties practically acquainted with the traffic, and by the principal interests affected by the question.

In the memorial already referred to, signed by the representatives of 46 iron-works, 57 furnaces, and 98 collieries, in the Staffordshire mineral district, in favour of the London and Birmingham line, and narrow-gauge system, it is stated that, of the total export of the district, only eight per cent. is sent in the direction of Bristol, of which by far the greater quantity is shipped from that port, and would therefore be unaffected by a break of gauge there; while 37 per cent. is sent to Liverpool and the north and north-west of the kingdom, and 13 per cent. to Hull and the east, all of which would consequently suffer by a break at Birmingham.

The wool trade between Bristol, where wool fairs are held annually, and Leicester and the West Riding of Yorkshire, is very considerable, all of which would escape a break of gauge by the narrow-gauge combination.

The export of salt from Droitwich, both to Gloucester and Bristol, and to Hull and other parts of the kingdom, is already large, and likely to receive very great increase, if an unbroken Railway communication is afforded, which can only be done by the narrow-gauge combination.

The same combination affords the important advantage of an unbroken communication to the traffic of Manchester and Liverpool with Bristol, and indeed with the whole of the West of England, as a very inconsiderable proportion of the goods actually dispatched require to be carried in transit through Bristol. The same remark applies to the trade of the Potteries with the West of England; of Bristol and Gloucester with the Midland Counties, where the imports of these ports now meet those of Hull and Liverpool; of Worcester, Kidderminster, &c. with Liverpool, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, and of various other branches of traffic that might be specified.

As a proof of the importance of some of the branches of traffic that would be thus inconvenienced by a change of gauge at Birmingham, it may be mentioned that single carriers already send as much as 20,000 tons a year in transit through Birmingham, by the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway, and that the total quantity thus sent is estimated at from 50,000 to 100,000 tons per annum, and is considered to be capable of great increase, the line of communication having been only very recently completed by the opening of the Bristol and Gloucester Railway, and the development of the traffic having since been greatly impeded by the interruption of the gauge at Gloucester, and other circumstances.

With the low rates which it is now proposed to establish on coals, salt, agricultural produce, and other heavy goods, the amount of traffic that may be expected to pass from the west in transit through Birmingham, and *vice versâ*, if the advantage of an unbroken communication can be

secured, will be exceedingly great. It has been represented to us that Droitwich alone would send upwards of 250,000 tons of salt annually.

The same observation applies as to the coal traffic from the Midland Counties through Rugby to Oxford. The whole of the extensive district between Rugby and Oxford, where coal is now usually at a very high price, may be cheaply supplied by Railway; an object of great importance, which could be only partially attained if the impediment of an interruption of gauge were allowed to exist at Rugby.

Another important consideration which seems to point to Bristol rather than Birmingham, as a proper point for the interruption of the gauge, and which has been strongly urged upon us by carriers, merchants, and practical men acquainted with the course of traffic, is, that Bristol, like London, is a great emporium and shipping port, through which a comparatively small portion of the goods which enter by Railway require to be forwarded in transit without repacking and assortment. The facilities for water communication with Bristol also give the public a better alternative than they would enjoy elsewhere of avoiding the inconvenience of the change of gauge, and thus afford the best possible security, that if the interruption be fixed there, the Railway Companies interested will use every possible effort to reduce the inconvenience to a *minimum*.

For all these considerations, we can have no hesitation in expressing our preference, on public grounds, to the alternative that proposes to fix the break of gauges at Bristol and Oxford, rather than at Birmingham and Rugby.

Another important advantage offered by the London and Birmingham scheme, and intimately connected with the question of the gauge, is the arrangement by which it is proposed to lay down an additional double line of rails throughout the mineral district, to be devoted entirely to the accommodation of the mineral traffic.

We have already seen that the production of iron of the district requires a continued interchange of coals, lime, ironstone, and other raw materials among the different mines and works, to the extent of about 4,000,000 tons annually.

It is only by obtaining ready access to the Railway by means of short branches or tramroads from those mines and works, that the benefits contemplated from the introduction of Railway communication can be fully realized. But if this is to be the case, and if any considerable portion of this immense local traffic is to pass by Railway, it is manifest that the rails so used could not be rendered available without extreme danger and inconvenience for the general traffic. Even the export trade alone in coals and iron could not be conducted with convenience upon the same line of rails as the passenger traffic, and would require a separate line of rails in order to allow the waggons passing and repassing from the different works within the district to reach without interruption some principal station at its extremity, where trains of the proper size could be formed and dispatched to distant points. This object would be very imperfectly fulfilled by the plan proposed by the wide-gauge Railway, of laying down an extra rail, or pair of rails, on the narrow gauge, inside the principal rails, which would, in fact, obviate none of the objections to the accumulation of slow mineral trains upon the main passenger line, and would allow of no access by lateral tramroads, without cutting up the main line by crossings. It is represented also that the waggons of the wide gauge are, from their greater weight and size, ill adapted for the purposes of the mineral traffic.

The arrangement in question, of an additional double line of rails, is equally proposed by the line

from Birmingham to Shrewsbury, *viâ* Dudley and Wolverhampton, which traverses the same mineral district, and must be considered as, to a great extent, identified with the Tring or London and Birmingham scheme.

The case of the Shrewsbury line, as compared with the competing scheme of the Grand Junction Company, which stops at Wolverhampton, depends very much on the same arguments, of the importance of opening up the Staffordshire mineral field by Railway communication, which have been already adduced in favour of the Tring line; and the objections to it on the part of the Canal and other interests are of the same description. The arrangements proposed for supplying the local wants of the district are also of the same nature, and the plans and sections of the two lines correspond, so that the portion between Dudley and Wolverhampton is common to the two; the understanding being that, if both are sanctioned by Parliament, this portion is to be made by the Shrewsbury Company, and used on equitable conditions by the other Company.

The Great Western scheme, on the other hand, introduces a different gauge and different arrangements, and adopts a different line between Dudley and Wolverhampton, so that its existence is hardly compatible with that of the Shrewsbury scheme.

For the reasons stated we are therefore of opinion that, for the purpose of accommodating the great mineral district of Staffordshire, the combined scheme of the Tring and Shrewsbury lines is preferable to any other that has been proposed.

The Tring scheme is equally superior for the local accommodation of Kidderminster, Stourbridge, and Stourport, to which it gives better stations, by pursuing a lower level along the bottom of the valleys, and it admits of more easy extension towards Leominster, Ludlow, and the West. Between Worcester and London it accommodates, as we have already seen, a larger population; and therefore, on the whole, both in these respects and in the important particular of the gauge, it seems to us to be in itself decidedly preferable to the competing Great Western scheme.

It remains to be seen whether there are any other considerations which might modify this conclusion.

It is urged, that the concession of this line to a Company promoted by the London and Birmingham Company, will constitute a great monopoly, extending over a vast extent of country, while, by giving it to the Great Western Company, a competition would be introduced, from which the Public might derive benefit. On the other hand, it may be said that, to allow the Great Western Company to embrace, by their influence, not only the whole western communications of the island, but also the whole of South Wales, and the whole district up to Worcester and Birmingham, would be to establish a monopoly much more gigantic than that of the London and Birmingham. This latter monopoly would also be more obviously objectionable, inasmuch as an interest adverse to the Public would at once be established if the line from London to Worcester and Wolverhampton, and that from Bristol to Birmingham, were to be in the same hands, and upon the same wide gauge, as the line now proposed through South Wales. The accommodation of Herefordshire, Worcestershire, South Wales, and the important districts lying to the west of the present lines of Railway, will evidently, at no distant period, require not only a wide-gauge Railway along the Southern coast, to place them in communication with London, but also a narrow-gauge Railway to place them in direct and unbroken communication, through Birmingham, with the manufacturing districts and the great Railway system of the rest of the kingdom.

The extension of such a Railway would be greatly facilitated by the establishment of the narrow

gauge, and of an interest independent of the Great Western, in the Worcester district, and, on the other hand, would be greatly impeded if that district were assigned to the Great Western interest and to the wide gauge.

In respect therefore of the general question of monopoly, it appears to us that nothing would be gained by substituting that of the Great Western for that of the London and Birmingham, which is the only alternative; at the same time, if the latter Company had shown no disposition to meet the fair demands of the Public by a reduction of rates, and to obviate the objections of monopoly by the offer of reasonable guarantees, it might perhaps have become necessary, notwithstanding the disadvantages of the Great Western scheme, in respect of the gauge and other points, to adopt this alternative.

This is, however, by no means the case; but, on the contrary, the London and Birmingham Company have come forward voluntarily to offer guarantees and conditions of a very advantageous character.

They offer, on condition of their Worcester scheme being sanctioned, at once to meet the objections of monopoly, by inserting in their Act the following provisions:

1. The whole of the Railways under their control, including the existing London and Birmingham Railway, to become subject to the options of revision and purchase contained in the Act of last year: the option of revision, however, at 10 per cent. to accrue at an earlier period than that of 20 years, specified in the Act.
2. A revised tariff to be framed for the whole of the said Railways, including the London and Birmingham Railway, upon the principle of fixing *maximum* rates for passengers and goods lower than those at present charged, and at as low a level as those charged upon any of the principal Northern Railways.
3. One article of such tariff to be, that coals and iron are to be carried at rates not exceeding 1*d.* per ton per mile, including toll and locomotive power.
4. All differences with other Railway Companies, by which the public safety or convenience are affected, to be referred to the Board of Trade, or other competent authority for that purpose established by Parliament.
6. The London and Birmingham Company to pledge the whole revenue of their existing line for the completion of the proposed undertaking within a reasonable time.

It appears to us that these guarantees hold out for the Public a prospect of permanent and certain advantage greatly beyond anything that could be expected from the competition of two great Companies, who would be urged by every motive of interest to combine.

We attach the greatest importance to the security obtained for the cheap transit of coals and minerals. Not only will a great benefit be thereby, as we believe, secured for the important mineral districts of Staffordshire and the Midland Counties, but also a still more important benefit for the poorer and industrious classes, and for the consumers of coals generally throughout the Southern and Western Counties, and in the Metropolis.

The charge of conveyance of coals by Railway from South Staffordshire or Derbyshire to London will not exceed 11*s.* or 12*s.* per ton, and it has been stated to us, that, after payment of all charges, good house coals could be sold here, with a profit, at prices not exceeding 20*s.* per ton.

During the recent frost and easterly winds the price of coals in London has been as high as 40s. per ton; and during the winter the price frequently exceeds 30s. for coals of ordinary quality. When we consider how materially the comfort of all classes, more especially of those in humble circumstances, depends on a regular supply of cheap coal, and also how much the employment of industry is affected by the same circumstances, and when we bear in mind that a saving of every shilling per ton on the average consumption of the Metropolis is equivalent to an annual saving to its inhabitants of 150,000*l.*, it is impossible not to appreciate the importance of insuring low rates of charge upon the principal Railways which are in connexion with the great inland coal fields.

In other respects also we think that the introduction of a system of moderate charges upon the London and Birmingham and its tributary Railways, will be calculated to afford great advantage to important commercial interests, and to the community at large, while we see every reason to hope that it will not be unproductive of benefit to the Company itself. We must remember, however, that this latter point is, to a certain extent, experimental, and that it is highly important to obtain voluntarily from the Company guarantees of a permanent character.

It must not be forgotten that, without some arrangement of this sort, the Company, if so disposed, has a perfect legal right to resort to charges so high as greatly to inconvenience the Public, and that, under an altered state of things, with a depressed money-market, and all fear of immediate competition removed, it is by no means certain that it might not find it for its interest to do so.

We have also the authority of the Select Committee of last Session for attaching great importance to the prospective guarantee, for the future, in the shape of options of revision or purchase, which are now voluntarily offered by one of the first Railway Companies in the kingdom, whose line could not be, otherwise than by their own consent, subjected to the operation of any conditions not contained in their original Act.

On the whole, therefore, when we consider on the one hand the superior advantages afforded by the London and Birmingham scheme in itself, and by the adoption of the narrow gauge, and on the other the great advantages offered by the London and Birmingham Company, in connexion with it, over their whole system, and the ample guarantees given against any possible abuses of monopoly, we can arrive at no other conclusion than that the scheme promoted by that Company is preferable on public grounds to the competing scheme, which is inferior in itself, and which holds out no such collateral advantages.

Having already referred to the Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton, Dudley, and Birmingham scheme, as connected, in a great measure, with those between Worcester and Wolverhampton, it will be convenient to include this scheme in the present Report.

We have stated that the general question involved in the comparison of this scheme with the competing line proposed by the Grand Junction Company is, that the latter joins the Grand Junction line at Wolverhampton, and thus affords no accommodation to the mineral district between Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

If the views which we have stated in regard to the importance of opening up this district by Railway communication are correct, this consideration alone is sufficient to give a decided preference to the more extended scheme. It also appears to us, that to entrust the branch to Shrewsbury to the Grand Junction Company would be open to the objection which we have stated in our previous Report upon the South Eastern schemes, when discussing the general policy of giving a preference to lines proposed by existing Companies for the accommodation of adjoining

districts, viz. that there may be danger in giving such preference where the scheme proposed by the existing Company, although insufficient for the complete accommodation of the district to be provided for, may yet be sufficient to throw impediments in the way of other parties coming forward with more extensive schemes.

A line to Shrewsbury, in the hands of the Grand Junction Company, would manifestly be not unlikely to be used for the purposes of protection against competition, rather than of encouragement to Extensions beyond Shrewsbury, and to the legitimate development of the traffic. It appears to us, therefore, that, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, the fact of the Shrewsbury and Birmingham line being promoted by a substantial and independent local party, is a legitimate ground of preference, in addition to that already pointed out, of the superior advantages afforded by the independent line to the populous mining district between Wolverhampton and Birmingham.

As regards the line between Shrewsbury and Stafford, of which plans and sections have likewise been deposited by the Grand Junction Company, it appears sufficient to say, that although as a mere line for the town of Shrewsbury, it might afford considerable advantages, it accomplishes none of the more important advantages for the district at large which are held out by the line to Birmingham.

We are of opinion, therefore, that the latter line is preferable to all the competing schemes proposed, upon general grounds of public policy; and we are aware of no public reasons why it should not receive the sanction of Parliament.

At the same time, there are points of detail connected with it, more especially as regards the mode of passing through the town of Birmingham, and of effecting a junction with the London and Birmingham Railway, to which we think that the attention of Parliament should be especially directed. With regard to the first point, it depends to a great extent upon considerations of private property, which we are precluded from entertaining; but with regard to the second point, it appears to us of the greatest importance that provision should be made for an uninterrupted and convenient junction in Birmingham between the projected line and that of the London and Birmingham Railway.

* * * * *

In conclusion, we beg to draw attention to the passage of the Fifth Report of the Select Committee of last year, in which it is stated, in recommending that Reports should be made to Parliament by this department upon Railway Schemes, "That no such Report should be held to prejudice the claims of private persons, the examination of which should be altogether reserved to the Houses of the Legislature."

In submitting to Parliament, in conformity with the recommendations of that Committee, the results at which we have arrived, with a view to the information and assistance of Parliament in forming a judgment upon the schemes in question, in so far as our Report may be available for that purpose, we are anxious that it should be distinctly understood that we have arrived at these results solely upon public grounds, and to the exclusion of all considerations how far such results might require to be modified by a due regard for private rights and interests.

DALHOUSIE.

C. W. PASLEY.

G. R. PORTER.

D. O'BRIEN.

S. LAING.

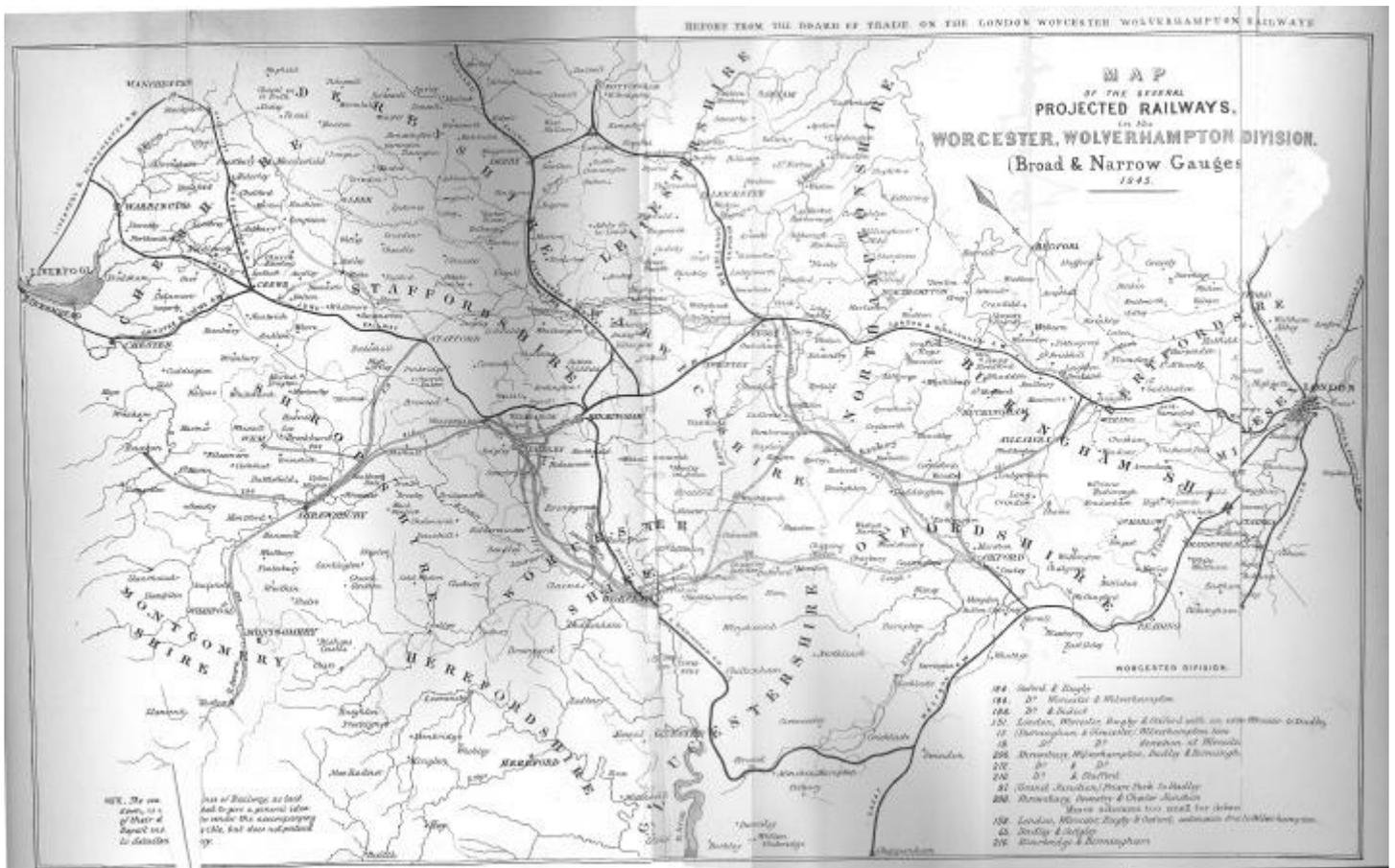
RAILWAYS.

MAP OF THE SEVERAL PROJECTED RAILWAYS, IN THE WORCESTER, WOLVERHAMPTON, &c, DIVISION.

(Broad and Narrow Gauges.)

REFERRED TO IN THE
REPORT of the RAILWAY DEPARTMENT of the BOARD OF TRADE on the LONDON, WORCESTER, AND
WOLVERHAMPTON, and on the BIRMINGHAM AND SHREWSBURY DISTRICTS.

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