

## COOTAMUNDRA - TEMORA RAILWAY

In the mid 1880s Temora had a district population of around two thousand people. The production of gold was slowing and a gradual transition to rural activities was gaining some momentum. Together with eight thousand acres (3240 ha) under cultivation, and the district carrying about thirty-five thousand sheep, producing skins and hides along with nine thousand bales of wool. There was an increasing need for a quick and reliable means of transportation to get their livestock, wool and grains to the markets. Roads of that time were basically little better than tracks. Transport services like Cobb & Co together with heavy wagons drawn by either horse or bullock, were slow and unreliable particularly after heavy rainfall. The need for a railway service to Temora was becoming more and more apparent.



Loading grain Temora Railway yards very early days

The view is over the landing stage with Camp St in the back ground.

The original goods shed to the left and Station building to right, both out of picture.

In April 1886 a petition was presented to the then Minister for Public Works Hon W. J. Lyne. The petition pointed out that from either Wallendbeen, Cootamundra or Junee was a little over thirty miles. (48 kms) A railway branch line to Temora could easily be constructed starting at either of these three points along the main line south. The petition also suggested that after passing through Temora and Barmedman, the line could continue on to the Lachlan country. It appears at this early stage there was little opposition to the concept of starting the branch line from Cootamundra.

Rivalries were fierce between railway towns in the 1880s, particularly when a major railway junction was there for the taking. The potential economic benefits to a growing railway town were a prize worth fighting for. The secretary to Public Works Mr John Sutherland together with members of parliament had asked that any rivalries for the proposed route be settled before having a trial survey carried out.



Temora railway yards 1906. View is over landing stage towards Victoria St. The original goods shed can be just seen right of picture with still existing grain shed in the rear.

A railway conference was convened at the Albion Hotel Cootamundra 8 August 1887. The subject was a starting point for the proposed railway to Temora. Temora and Barmedman along with Wallendbeen Cootamundra Junee had two delegates each. The preliminary arrangements were decided upon. Mr F. Hickey of Temora to be the chairman, to have an original and casting vote. Mr F. Pinkstone of Cootamundra the secretary, opening speeches were to be fifteen minutes, with ten minutes for each reply. Majority of hands to rule, and minority to gracefully give way and assist thereafter in advocating the extension. All were unanimously carried. After all debates were heard Wallendbeen had given way to Cootamundra. Mr A. L. Deutscher of Temora moved a resolution and seconded by Wallendbeen delegate Mr J. Gibb, that this conference decide in favour of a starting point at Cootamundra. However the Junee delegates Alderman M. H. Davies and H. Penny moved an amendment in favour of Junee as the starting point. Two votes were given

for the amendment, eight were recorded against. The chairman declared the amendment lost and the motion was carried unanimously, with the Junee delegates giving way to the majority. Champagne was brought in and the event was celebrated with bumper toasts and speeches where all agreed to work together for the railway.

On 16 September 1887 a deputation met with the Public Works Secretary Mr. John Sutherland advocating the construction of a railway line from Cootamundra to Temora, a distance of thirty-five miles (56 kms). They described the route and how cheaply a line could be constructed. Also stating that once the line had been built, it could eventually be extended to the far west. Before Minister Lyne committed to having a trial survey carried out, he promised to visit the localities along the proposed route.

The following November notwithstanding the resolution from the earlier railway conference held at Cootamundra. Junee Council had written to the Minister for Public Works advocating their proposed route to Temora. Commencing from the line at Old Junee, via Junee Reefs and Sebastopol a distance of only thirty-two miles. (51.5 kms) In March 1888 the Minister for public works was in Junee for other business, when he was urged by the Mayor T. C. Humphrys to adopt their proposal claiming this distance was in fact only twenty-six miles.(41kms) This distance was however from Old Junee and not the total distance of the route. There were still the other six or seven miles back into Junee. Mayor Humphrys had also asked at this time to have a survey to be carried out, but the Minister did not give a definite answer.

Meanwhile district Superintendent of railway service Mr G. J. Roberts, left Cootamundra for a trip over the proposed line to Temora and then onto Barmedman and the lower Lachlan. The purpose of the trip was to gather information in advance of the Railway Commissioners, whom were to investigate matters for themselves in the following weeks.

In the words of Mr G. J. Roberts the statistics for Temora of that time show as follows: Population of the town and district (16 miles radius). Two thousand three hundred people in round numbers, and being continually added to by land selection. One hundred and seventy three thousand, five hundred and ninety three sheep. Three thousand two hundred and forty-one large stock. Nine thousand four hundred and fifteen acres under cultivation (3810 ha). Wool, wheat and gold at present may be said to form the staple wealth of the district. Total area thus subdivided around Temora is Twenty-three thousand acres (9307 ha). Together with reserved lands and lease holds along the line (provided the leases are not renewed) will provide room for thousands of new settlers.

By now the new Mayor of Junee Alderman G. Dobbys, in what seems like a last ditch effort to have their route favoured by the Government. On 22 June 1889 had called for a meeting to be held at the Council Chambers. Apart from the exaggerated statement of it being shorter in distance they were convinced it would be cheaper and easier to construct. In their opinions opening up the best wheat producing country in the colony. Mayor Dobbys prior to the meeting had been reported saying the country between Stockinbingal and Temora was iron bark and poor, he also said it would not support a mosquito. Mr P. Heffernan of Clear Hills in his speech submitting the resolution of the meeting, said he would not except the country even if it were a gift. The resolution was seconded by Ex Mayor Mr T. C. Humphrys that a deputation should go to Sydney and urge the Government. That before starting to construct the proposed railway line to Temora from Cootamundra. Should inspect the route from Junee to Temora as this route would be in the best interest of the country.

On 9 July 1889 a meeting was quickly convened at the Albion Hotel Cootamundra for the purpose of replying to the Junee arguments against the Temora railway starting from Cootamundra. The room was filled with representatives of the town and district. Junee delegate Mr P. Heffernan together with Inspector Roberts of the railway service were both in attendance. However neither took any part in the meeting. The opinion of the meeting was, it would be an over site on their part if these exaggerated and rash statements were let go uncorrected. And further that the Minister be telegraphed as to have in his hands the resolution of this meeting before he met with the Junee deputation the following morning.

Eventually the Junee to Temora route was abandoned. While admitting that rail traffic to the South would have had some advantages. It was the trip from Sydney to Temora that would be much greater in distance. Also having to traverse some of the steepest grades of the main line at Bethrungra would have added to haulage costs.

In the meantime there had been several other suggestions, one of which was a starting point from Bethungra. Again based on the grounds of saving distance, this idea it seems was never given a lot of consideration. There was another that bi-passed Temora altogether, this suggested line would start from Coolamon and than proceed on to Hilston. There was also the earlier proposal from the Cootamundra Railway League that had a starting point from Salt Clay Creek, which is three miles south on the main line from Cootamundra. (Salt Clay Creek had been the scene of a major rail disaster 25 June 1885 when the Albury Mail crashed into the creek after flash flooding

had washed away the culvert supporting the rail lines) However this proposal was rejected due to Engineering difficulties along the route.

Due to the large amount of wrangling that had taken place and in an effort to settle the matter, all proposals were submitted to a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. On 15 January 1890 the committee started taking evidence from any persons interested in the proposed lines. Also during this inquiry, a number of surveyors and engineers gave evidence that seemed to generally support the proposal of a line commencing from Cootamundra.

A sectional committee was appointed to inspect, inquire and report with reference to the proposed railway line Cootamundra to Temora. The sectional committee held meetings along to the proposed route that had been organised to hear evidence from those persons interested in the proposal. Twenty-seven witnesses in total were heard at both Cootamundra and Stockinbingal . A further Twenty witnesses including three from Barmedman were examined at the Temora Courthouse. On their return to Sydney the committee were meet at Stockinbingal by a number of residents from Wallendbeen. They drove the sectional committee over their suggested alternate route to Wallendbeen from Stockinbingal. Upon their arrival at Wallendbeen four more residents were interviewed, after which they boarded a train for the return journey to Sydney.

As a result of their inquiry the Committee recommended that the line submitted to them should be constructed to Temora, via Stockinbingal, from Cootamundra.

After tenders were called for and subsequent to this end on 13 July 1892 a construction contract was let to Messrs A. Baxter & J. Saddler for the construction of a single track railway line from Cootamundra to Temora. The Cootamundra-Temora railway line together with the Temora Railway Station were both opened 1 September 1893 by the Governor General the Right Honourable Sir Robert William Duff. Minister W. J. Lyne was unable to attend the official opening due to illness however the Minister for Public Instruction Mr F. B. Suttor attended on his behalf.



The inscribed silver shovel presented by Messrs Baxter & Saddler for the turning of the first sod ceremony by the Minister for Public Works Hon. W. J. Lyne held 6th August 1892.

#### Authors Comments:

With the benefit of hindsight a starting point at Wallendbeen may have been better. A junction here gives a more direct route west to Stockinbingal and would have meant a significant time saving for freight and those traveling to Temora and beyond. It would have also benefited interstate travellers and any freight heading west on the line toward Broken Hill. However the political view at the time when the Temora railway line had been commissioned, was that Cootamundra would one day be a great city between Goulburn and Albury.

Compiled by Max Oliver with special thanks to Neville Pollard.

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