

GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAMWAY

Kumara is a small town about 14 miles south of Greymouth, a little less than half way to Hokitika. While Greymouth was closer the road from Hokitika was easier and better. In the 1870's there was considerable rivalry between these larger towns both with port access. Each sought the custom of Kumara in their towns and ports.

Hokitika, in particular was keen to improve access to Kumara and was taking steps to actively achieve this. A deputation had been sent to the Provincial Government seeking the removal of tolls and improvement in the road. The Grey River Argus¹ started to urge similar actions from Greymouth people especially in the removal of tolls on the punt across the Teremakau River. The idea of extending the existing Greymouth-Paroa Tramway to Kumara was also raised. This would secure trade and open up the intervening country.

Shortly after, a further article appeared indicating that the tramway could be readily built in about two months over relatively level ground at a cost of about 350 Pounds a mile or a little over 3000 Pounds for the 9 miles to be added.² A public meeting was held a week later at which Joseph Kilgour, who had done some preliminary work, proposed a public company to raise 5000 Pounds to do the work. He was strongly supported by Martin Kennedy who suggested a tramway could compete favourably with a road alternative. The tramway route would be shorter reducing the distance from Greymouth from 21 to 14 miles and there was little if any chance that a shorter road would be built. It was also believed that there were people who would be prepared to lease the line at a cost that would yield the company an attractive return.³ It was proposed to build the line under the Goldfields Act rather than the Tramways Act. This would lead to quicker approvals and avoid issues with local Road Boards which might cause delays.

The capital of 5000 Pounds was raised in two days and the company was registered. The line was being surveyed and it was proposed to carry carriages over the Teremakau River on a wire rope which would be cheaper and safer than using a punt. A temporary tramway reserve had been established and the directors were appointed. These were Kennedy, Kilgour, McLean, Gleeson and Hamilton Gilmer.⁴

At a director's meeting, it was decided to make a call of one pound share and call tenders for clearing and forming the line from New River to Kumara and also for the supply of rails and sleepers for that part of the line.⁵ At a further extraordinary meeting of shareholders on 6 December it was agreed not to proceed to lease the tramway. Progress on the tramway was proceeding at great speed with quick decisions and rapid responses. Then on 7 December the company announced all work had ceased and the men were being paid off.

¹ Grey River Argus 13 October 1876

² Grey River Argus 30 October 1876

³ Grey River Argus 6 November 1876

⁴ Grey River Argus 24 November 1876

⁵ Grey River Argus 25 November 1876

The newspaper responded with a tirade against Hokitika and J.A. Bonar the Provincial Government Superintendent who it alleged had interfered in the project:

A PARAGRAPH in our issue of yesterday intimated to the public that the operations of the Greymouth and Kumara Tramway Company had been temporarily discontinued, in deference to representations made on behalf of the Government. But it did not state that which we are now prepared to state—that the origin and history of the objections to the progress of this very useful work—a work which will open up new country, and in every way be a public benefit, are comprised in the persistent action against the interests of Greymouth, which has been the distinguished feature of the administration of the late Superintendent; and the miserable local jealousy which operates between the rival ports, and which has undoubtedly actuated the “officer administering the Government” in the course he has taken. The history of the matter is very simple, but capable of greater amplification than we can give it to-day. The company first applied to the General Government for protection in the ordinary way under the Gold-fields Act, having discovered that to avail themselves of the Tramways Act, 1872, would necessitate delays which would seriously affect the interests of the company. To this they received a reply referring them to the Tramways Act and to compliance with its provisions, as necessary to enable them to proceed; but in order to avoid ruinous delay, the company, whilst informing the Government that they were prepared to comply with any reasonable conditions that might be imposed, proceeded with their work—let contracts, and generally entered upon the work of construction—probably without absolute legal sanction, but—as no private or public rights were involved in the matter, they were justified in proceeding. And in doing so, the company was morally encouraged by the readiness with which the Waste Lands Board, set apart a temporary reserve for the purposes of the line; but all at once, and as it has transpired, by his own motion, the Hon. J. A. Bonar, who happens to be placed in the position of acting-agent of the General Government, intervenes, and officially moves the Waste Lands Board, to notify to the company that if they proceeded with their works, they did so at the peril of a prosecution for illegal occupation of Crown lands.

A more disgraceful misuse of authority never existed, and never was there a more serious blow given to the public enterprise, than in this particular case. To

those whose umbilical cords were not of red tape, and whose bodies were not swathed in that material, and who have not during the whole course of their lives been clad or wrapped in or tied up by it, the telegram forwarded by the Public Works department, signed “John Knowles” as Under-Secretary for Public Works, is absolutely incredible. Its audacity, born of crass ignorance of the merits of the case, and the fact that the Minister himself, was absent from Wellington, suggest that the “Under-Secretary” was moved by the “officer administering the Government” in Westland, to act as he has done. And it now remains to be seen whether the people of this district will calmly allow their interests and those of the country generally to be ignored by the action of an agent of the Government who only owes his position to the votes of the people, and who, had the Provincial Council still been sitting, would never have dared to do that which he is now doing.

The requisition to the Mayor, which appears in our advertising columns, will of itself show that the residents of this part of the Colony at any rate are not content under a system which leaves it open for the grossest misuse of power, and provides no direct responsibility to the people. Had the Provincial Council of Westland been in existence, the course pursued by the late Superintendent would have been simply impossible, and no one knows this better, nor appreciates more the bliss of public irresponsibility than the Hon. J. A. Bonar. For the present we do not care to anticipate the argument that will probably be used at the meeting on Monday, it is enough to say that a more thoroughly disgraceful and impolitic abuse of authority was never before displayed in New Zealand than the prohibition against proceeding with a work, constructed by public enterprise, and without a farthing of assistance from Government; a work which will open up thousands of acres of land and make them accessible for settlement, and give employment where it is most needed, and for the stoppage of which there is only one man responsible, and that is the Hon. J. A. Bonar, who for tricks that are vain, and sinuous courses generally as regards public matters, is proverbial.

The meeting convened by the Mayor will no doubt be largely attended, and we are quite convinced that a reasonable, but forcible, expression of public opinion must counteract mere local or private jealousy.

This was a masterpiece of journalism of the day designed to whip up the local community and unite it in anger at the petty jealousies of Hokitika and the political means which had been used to stop the work on the tramway. Never mind that a decision had been made to avoid the processes specifically established by the government to deal with the activity being implemented.

On 11 December 1876 a public meeting was held and it was agreed to send a telegram of the resolutions to Wellington⁶. The significant issue was whether the approval of local authorities was required before proceeding. In fact, the approval of the two local road boards, Arahura and Paroa, was obtained by 11 January 1877 and the Greymouth Borough Council had stipulated its conditions by 21 February. These conditions were very reasonable and were what one would expect from a local authority with most of the conditions relating to public safety and especially access and crossings and levels of the track.⁷

Works resumed and by 23 April 1877 the upgrade to the existing portion of the line, the five mile section to Paroa, was completed. The rest of the line to Kumara was finished by 3 May 1877.

The first public use of the Greymouth and Kumara tramway, yesterday, was a good indication of what traffic may be expected when the line is thoroughly completed. A good number of passengers and a fair quantity of goods were forwarded; and reached the destination at so early a time of the day that the runner of the GREY RIVER ARGUS was "run out" of supplies long before the West Coast Times arrived.

Grey River Argus 3 May 1877

The coaches on the Greymouth and Kumara Tramway, leaving Greymouth for Teremakau and Kumara, and arriving from those gold-fields, were well patronised yesterday. Merchants find the improved means of transit of goods a great convenience, and to passengers there is no comparison between the jolting of a stage coach over twenty miles of rough roads and the smooth travelling over the tram.

Grey River Argus 4 May 1877

Of relevance is the following correspondence between Bonar and the government. Pay back!

Copy of telegram sent by J. A. B. to the Colonial Secretary:—"Tramway projected Hokitika Kumara and New Rush North side. Eminently public work Gold Fields Act. Bridge across Teremakau urgent Colonial; Reply." Reply—"Hokitika Kumara tramway not being work public utility (vide your report re Greymouth Kumara tramway) must go under Tramways Act. Re Bridge must apply Grey County Council both banks river under its jurisdiction." What followed I don't know, except that there was some dread of reprisals in certain quarters.


Grey River Argus 5 May 1877

⁶ Grey River Argus 12 December 1876

⁷ Grey River Argus 21 February 1877



Greymouth Kumara Tramway
(Alexander Turnbull Library Wellington)



GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAMWAY CO. (LIMITED).

ON and AFTER WEDNESDAY, the 2nd MAY, a COACH will be RUN between Greymouth and Kumara, as follows :—

LEAVING KUMARA AT
8 a.m., arriving at Greymouth at 11 a.m.
2 p.m., do do 5 p.m.

LEAVING GREYMOUTH AT
9 a.m., arriving at Kumara at 12 noon
3 p.m., do do 6 p.m.

Temporary Booking Office, until completion of the Tramway, at Gilmer's Hotel, Greymouth.

F. WM. LAHMAN,
Secretary.

Grey River Argus 2 May 1877

GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAM CO. (LIMITED).

The above Company are now FORWARDING GOODS AND MERCHANDISE TO KUMARA and Intermediate Places.

Freight to Kumara—40s per Ton of 2000lbs.

Office—At Temporary Station near the Hospital, where a Clerk is in constant attendance for receipt of goods.

G. H. CHEVERTON,
Manager.



GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAMWAY CO. (LIMITED).

ON and AFTER WEDNESDAY, the 2nd MAY, a COACH will be RUN between Greymouth and Kumara, as follows :—

LEAVING KUMARA AT
8 a.m., arriving at Greymouth at 11 a.m.
2 p.m., do do 5 p.m.

LEAVING GREYMOUTH AT
9 a.m., arriving at Kumara at 12 noon
3 p.m., do do 6 p.m.

Temporary Booking Office, until completion of the Tramway, at Gilmer's Hotel, Greymouth.

F. WM. LAHMAN,
Secretary.

Grey River Argus 7 July 1877

Not surprisingly there was pressure on the company's funds and an Extraordinary General meeting was held to consider the funding position.

complete the works. After a prolonged discussion and several amendments being moved, the following resolutions were put and carried:—"1 To increase the capital of the company from L5000 to L12,500, by the issue of 1500 new shares of L5 each; 10s per share to be paid on application, and calls not to exceed 10s per share per month. Shareholders to have the privilege of taking up shares in the proportion of their respective interests at L4 each; and that no shares be issued until the promissory notes given by the shareholders to the Bank of New Zealand are demanded, and the amount of such promissory notes, when paid, to be deemed payment of the calls to be made by the directors upon such shares." "2. That 20 per cent per annum be guaranteed on the amount of the promissory notes given by the shareholders." This concluded the business, and after a vote of thanks to the Chairman, the meeting separated.

Grey River Argus 30 July 1877



GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAMWAY COMPANY, LIMITED.

On and after MONDAY, 22nd APRIL, TRAMS will leave as follows:—

Leave Greymouth	8 a.m.
"	"	...	12 o'clock noon
"	"	...	3.30 p.m.
Leave Kumara	8 a.m.
"	"	...	12 o'clock noon
"	"	...	3.30 p.m.

SUNDAY TRAMS.

Leave Greymouth	...	8 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.
Leave Kumara	...	8 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.

Goods Freight, 35s per 2000lb.

G. H. CHEVERTON,
Manager.

Grey River Argus 22 April 1878



GREYMOUTH AND KUMARA TRAMWAY COMPANY, LIMITED.

TRAMS will leave Greymouth and Kumara respectively as under:—

Monday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
Tuesday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
Wednesday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
(To suit the Christchurch mail)						
Thursday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
Friday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
Saturday	...	8 a.m.	...	12 noon	...	3.30 p.m.
(To suit the Christchurch mail)						

SUNDAY TRAMS.

Leave Greymouth	...	8 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.
Leave Kumara	...	8 a.m. and 3.30 p.m.

Goods Freight, 35s per 2000lb.

WM. A. HEATON,
Secretary.

Grey River Argus 4 June 1879

Hamilton Gilmer had been elected a director on 24 November 1876. In 1877 all of the directors resigned and Martin Kennedy and Hamilton Gilmer were the only two of the original directors to be re-elected. Hamilton was also re-elected in 1880. In 1881 the company declared its first

dividend of seven and a half per cent and this was increased to twelve and a half per cent in 1882 *"with every probability of this being continued."*⁸ Hamilton Gilmer was retiring as a director and did not stand for re-election *"because he was leaving the district."*

The establishment of this tramway was a very successful venture reflecting the aggressive approach to getting things done that was a characteristic of the West Coast business people of Greymouth. The tramway continued to run until 1893 until increased competition from railways and improved roads had an impact.

The Kumara Tramway Company, which has done duty by its 13-mile "wooden belt" between the once-wonderful gold mining township and the port of Greymouth for the past 16 years, is to shortly become a historical item, as the railway line will replace the old wooden rails. The company will yet run for a few months, but are obliged to move part of their line from a main street to make room for a sewer.

Otago Daily Times 25 February 1893

The company had its last meeting on 11 January 1894 after which the assets were progressively sold.

Messrs Nancarrow and Co yesterday afternoon sold the whole of the Tramway Company's line and plant, which included the cage across the Teremakau, a sawmill, and a license to cut timber over 142 acres of excellent bush, besides a saw bench that cost the company £120. All these effects were purchased by Mr Sheedy for £70, while Mr Kilgour bought all the company's property on this side of the Teremakau for £24.

Grey River Argus 1 March 1894

⁸ Grey River Argus 13 February 1882



The last Greymouth to Kumara Tram 1893⁹

⁹ Illustrated History of the West Coast Anna Rogers.