

HUDDERSFIELD CORPORATION BILL.

THE TRAMWAY SCHEME PASSED.

(FROM OUR LONDON REPORTERS.)

The Select Committee of the House of Commons, presided over by Mr. Jeffreys, and of which the other members were Sir Wm. Wedderburn and Mr. Vaughan-Davies, yesterday reconsidered the tramway portion of this bill, in respect of which the bill had been recommitted to them. It will be remembered that his portion of the bill for tramway extensions to Holmfirth, Holmbridge, New Mill, Mirfield, Kirkburton, Marsden, and Brighouse was rejected by the Committee on the ground principally that the subject of municipal trading was about to be considered by a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament, and also because they thought that the proposal of the Huddersfield Corporation to construct tramways through outside districts, which, although consenting, were not contributing to the cost of the scheme, would infringe some of the rules of Parliament.

At the outset the Chairman intimated that the Committee had on the previous occasion felt constrained to reject the scheme for outside tramways on Standing Order grounds, and also on account of the inquiry into municipal trading. The House of Commons had, however, relieved the Committee of this difficulty by authorising the Committee to reconsider the bill in respect of the tramways lying outside the borough.

Mr. Balfour Brown, Q.C., in opening, said the opposition of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company to these outside tramways had now been withdrawn. He admitted that it was the duty of the Corporation to show that a good case existed for the proposed extensions, and that they proposed to do by evidence. Even since the Committee had last sat fresh precedents had been created. The Committee had then wanted to be assured that this scheme was not a new departure. But under almost precisely similar circumstances the Halifax Corporation had last week secured leave to construct as many tramways outside its own area. Bradford also, before another Committee, had secured powers to construct similar tramways. Only a day or so ago, in the case of Glasgow and district it was stated that although their tramways' system was 121 miles in length, they were constructing 34 miles outside their own area, so that, if a case could be made out, Parliament was clearly not averse to granting the necessary powers. The case Huddersfield made was this: If the borough were not in the centre of the whole district, it was possible that some great traction company might come in and supply the wants of these outside areas, but under present circumstances, with Huddersfield possessing the key to the situation and all the best paying part in the centre, it was impossible for any company to supply the tramways for the outer districts except the Corporation. The Corporation did not want to do that at a loss, and he thought that the Committee would be convinced that these tramways could be constructed and worked at a considerable profit. Owing to the introduction of electric traction, a great many difficulties in regard to tramways had been removed. Electricity provided a constant road without increasing the expense. In Glasgow 120 million people were carried in one year on the tramways, or the whole population of that place 171 times in each year. Halifax, which had only operated its own tramways for two years, and had only 100,000 population, carried seven million people last year. The desire of every municipality was to spread the population from dense and congested districts into less populated ones, and the only way to do that was to provide facilities by making tramways for people to get to and from their work. Sir Henry Fowler, in an address he had lately delivered, had contended that anything that would tend to relieve congestion was a fair municipal undertaking. By the construction of these tramways, no loss would be incurred by Huddersfield, and a great boon would be conferred on the outside districts. The opposition offered by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway might have weighed with the Committee on the previous occasion, but the arrangement now come to with that company was a fair one. If the outside districts had made these tramways for themselves, and a loss had been incurred, the railway company would only have had to contribute to that loss on the general district rate, to which they were liable, only to the extent of one quarter of their assessable value, and it had now been agreed to limit the contribution of the railway company in case of a loss being incurred by Huddersfield to an amount similar to what they would have been liable for if the loss had been incurred by the outside districts. The usual clause would be inserted in the bill enabling the outside authorities to acquire the tramways at the end of the Corporation's term. The Corporation during the term of their lease, of course, would retain any profit made.

Alderman Sugden, member of the West Riding County Council, said he was in the chair when the County Council passed a resolution in favour of these trams, and he was asked to give evidence as representing the Council in favour of the extensions, which would be to the advantage of the districts to be served. The districts were willing to contribute their share by widening the roads. They were anxious to have these tramways, as they would serve a population which the railways, owing to the conformation of the country, could not adequately serve.

Mr. Bruce, of the Marsden District Council, and a manufacturer in that district, said that his Council had asked the Corporation to make a tramway to serve the constantly increasing population of Marsden, and he considered the scheme would be of great advantage to his district.

Mr. E. B. Wilson, solicitor, of Mirfield, and chairman of the Mirfield Urban District Council, said there had been considerable discussion as to the desirability of having these tramways, and the feeling of the neighbourhood was very strongly in favour of them. Mirfield could not construct a tramway for itself because it would entail the borrowing of a considerable sum of money, and Mirfield had already borrowed so much for sewage and other purposes that they would probably be exceeding their borrowing powers if they made a tramway. Unless the Mirfield tramway were connected with some central system it would not be of much use. By being connected with the central system of Huddersfield they would be enabled to make use of all the lines meeting in Huddersfield, which would be a very great advantage. They would get their tramways for 21 years, and then they would have the right to acquire them at their structural cost.

Mr. W. Butterworth, of Holmfirth, also gave evidence in support of the proposed extensions. He had been chairman of a committee appointed by several districts to negotiate for railway extensions and improvements, and was asked to give evidence in this case. At the present time, as the railway did not come down to the bottom of the valley, his district was lacking in facilities for travel. The railway came as far as Holmfirth, but there were two miles to Holmbridge without any accommodation whatever. Boys had to walk to Huddersfield to get the advantage of secondary education, and the tramway would accommodate them. There was also a rifle range in the neighbourhood which was much used, and which would be served by the tramway.

The Committee intimated that they had heard sufficient evidence, and passed the preamble of the bill in respect to the outside tramways portion.

The clauses having been considered, the bill was ordered to be reported to the House of Commons with the tramway extension clauses re-inserted.

The fact that the Parliamentary Committee had agreed to the whole of the Tramways Bill was communicated to Huddersfield through private sources yesterday afternoon. The communities as a whole will not be ungrateful to Sir James Woodhouse, the Member for Huddersfield, and Mr. F. C. Lloyd, the Town Clerk, the former of whom was mainly instrumental in the recommitment of the bill to Committee, and the latter of whom, by his ability and energies, secured a comparatively smooth course for the bill through its Parliamentary stages so far traversed. One of the first outer extensions to be taken in hand will probably prove to be to Slaithwaite and Marsden. Already trams run on the new line to the Slaithwaite side of Linthwaite, and it is stated that they have received an amount of patronage in excess of expectations. Ten years hence the Huddersfield tramways system will be one of the most important in the rovinces.