

**PRACTICAL HINTS FOR
LIGHT RAILWAYS AT
HOME AND ABROAD**

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Practical Hints for Light Railways at Home and Abroad by F. R. Johnson

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F. R. JOHNSON

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LIGHT RAILWAYS

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PRACTICAL HINTS
FOR
LIGHT RAILWAYS.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE question of light railways has been brought very prominently before the public of late, but so far little of a practical nature has been done, and although the subject would appear to have a considerable interest for the merchant, farmer and man of business generally, as being a possible something which might improve trade, one and all somehow fail to get much further than discussion. The writer ventures to think that the public generally are not so much to blame as the professional men who advise them, and who, with a few exceptions, have not the courage to advocate anything except the standard gauge, whatever it may be, of the country they reside in.

If ever light railways are to be light railways in the proper sense of the term, and if they are to be

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a pecuniary success, which in many districts, under proper management, would be pretty well assured, the idea of adhering to one or other of the wide gauges must be dismissed at once. A light railway in Great Britain on the 4-feet $8\frac{1}{2}$ -inch or 5-feet 3-inch gauge, in Africa on the 3-feet 6-inch, or in India on the 5-feet 6-inch or metre gauge, as the case may be, is simply a branch line, neither more nor less, and the cost can only be less than that of the parent line at the expense of efficiency, and even then not low enough to enable a paying line to be made in many districts.

The question and cost of transshipment has been much over-estimated, and magnified out of all proportion to the actual difficulties involved.

At the present time thousands of tons of goods are brought to railway stations in carts, and transferred to trucks under difficulties greater than would be the case if proper arrangements were made at the junction of a narrow with a wide gauge line.

What is required is to give facilities to the farmer and trader which would make it worth their while to dispense with cartage, and at the same time to construct a railway which would give the investor not less than 4 per cent. for his money.

To attain this end it may be taken that lines of 2-feet or 2-feet 6-inch gauge, generally not less than

20 miles long at home or 40 miles in the colonies, and speeds of 8 to 12 miles an hour, would be found to have the best chance of success ; whilst in all probability even a trunk line on the 2-feet 6-inch gauge would serve every necessary purpose in some of the pastoral districts of our colonies.

In India and Ceylon, millions have been spent in making the broad 5-feet 6-inch gauge, only in many cases to run two or three trains a day, so that for hours together all the staff and paraphernalia of a huge railway equipped with every known modern, and in many cases unnecessary, appliance, stands to a great extent idle, doing nothing but rusting the rails of its permanent way and the brains of its employees, who, in India at any rate, spend much of their spare time in useless correspondence.

Again, Ireland would undoubtedly have been a much more prosperous country had she possessed a network of light railways on the 2-feet 6-inch gauge, instead of the present 5-feet 3-inch gauge, which is out of all proportion to her needs, and hangs like a mill-stone round her neck, with the result that the lines are in most cases badly worked, badly maintained, do not pay, and stand in the way of all progress.

In the writer's opinion the only remedy now available in her case would be for the Government

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to purchase all the existing railways on the 5-foot 3-inch gauge, with the exception of such as it might be advisable to leave as trunk lines; transfer all the rolling stock to the latter, and alter the gauge of the former to 2 feet 6 inches, and extend on that gauge in future.

Government has on more than one occasion proposed to purchase the Irish lines, and now, when in many cases bridges have to be strengthened to meet the heavier axle loads in vogue, would be the time to take over at any rate a part of them and reduce the gauge, rather than that more money should be spent in making them efficient for loads which are not required. On the Great Western, in Cornwall, there is a recent example of the comparative ease with which a broad gauge can be narrowed.

With regard to Government legislation at home, what is required in place of the routine, time and expense necessary before a Bill can be obtained when it is proposed to construct a standard gauge line, is that the procedure should be simplified, so as to take the form of a local inquiry, held by an officer of the Board of Trade, who should be empowered to grant a license to construct and work a light line when a majority of the ratepayers in a district are in its favour, and possibly to grant a loan towards construction, if the promoters can

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