

Andrew Bruckner
MA Dissertation in Railway Studies

To Develop the Colonial Estate:
The Reasons for British West African
Railways

Andrew Daniel Bruckner

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Andrew Bruckner
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Abstract

This Dissertation is a history of reasons and motivations behind building the first railways in British West Africa. It analysis Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Lagos and Northern Nigeria from the early 1890s to 1906. This is a history not only of the railways but of British imperialism, and helps illustrate its economic nature. This work uses a variety of sources such as government papers, speeches, newspapers, books and journals written around the time of lobbying, planning and construction of these first railways. One of the goals of this paper is to shed more light on a region of the British Empire that has not been dealt with in great quantity and to do so with the intention to further both railway and British imperial history. This dissertation also highlights the different nature of the railways built in British Africa and the importance of studying all of them in order to have the best possible understanding of railway imperialism.

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Authors Declaration

This dissertation is the work of just myself under the supervision of Professor Colin Divall.

All sources used in the production of this work have been cited in the bibliography. The

word count is 27,753.

1. Introduction:

Intentions and reasons are a critical aspect to the study of any topic within history. Intentions and reasons can grant insight into the ideas of a person or people and the desired effect of an action which is often different from that which is actualized. Analysing the intentions and reasons can grant insight into the political and economic culture and other aspects of a society. Information about individuals and groups and even entire historical movements can be garnered from this sort of study as well as an improved understanding of a specific topic. These notions hold true for the railways of British West Africa, a region of the empire consisting of Northern and Southern Nigeria, Lagos, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and the Gambia.¹ Studying why the initial lines were built not only enhances one's knowledge of the railways and the colonies but also imperialism and the motives behind the drive for colonies and the mentalities of the people, governments and organizations of the empire. Studying a small aspect of the empire, such as the railways of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Lagos and Nigeria, not only colours in the picture of that region better but of the entire imperial landscape. So by studying the reasons for building the railways in British West Africa the history of these colonies will be better filled and a greater knowledge of why the British empire expanded can be developed.

The railways of West Africa were conceived in the last decade of the 19th and first decade of the 20th centuries, the first being built in 1895 and the last starting in 1906. They came into existence through the drive and desire of people like Joseph Chamberlain and Frederick Lugard as well as bodies like the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce. The reasons for building these lines, like most if not all railways, were economic, strategic and political. However, the more specific reasons for building these railways were more varied when compared to other railways, like those of the rest of British Africa. For instance, the proponents of the lines wanted to increase trade and create new markets, protect the colonies and their trade from France and Germany, improve administration and defence, and put an end to slavery and inter tribal warfare. The West African railways were also built by the British government and thus did not have the interests of a single firm at heart

¹ The Gambia never had a railway and thus will be excluded from this history.

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unlike those built by Cecil Rhodes in South and Central Africa. These reasons hold true for all of the West African colonies although with some varying degree.

This dissertation is not only important to the study of railways but also to the study of imperialism and more specifically the British Empire. Imperialism features heavily in the study of the railways within the empire and in many ways the two are inseparable. The debate about the causes of imperial expansion is very relevant to the study of imperial railways as these railways are both a cause and result of that expansion. The debate over imperialism has revolved around what caused it, politics, economics, what aspects of those movements were the strongest, such as investors and financiers, and who had the strongest imperial pull the periphery or metropole. Also important is the significance of informal and formal empire, the various interest groups and whether expansion was guided and planned or a reaction to events outside of control, meaning that it just happened.

This dissertation adds to the debate by illustrating the influence that various interest groups had and that the railways of British West Africa were designed to further direct rule in the hinterland of the coastal colonies. This study shows the importance of both economic and political factors in spreading empire, that it was often planned (although one could say that these railways were a reaction to foreign expansion) and that both the periphery and metropole were important in the extension of imperial administration in West Africa.

To illustrate the reasons why the first British West African railways were built this dissertation will analyse the political and economic views in Britain that influenced the railways and then give a case study for each of the colonies. The sources used in this analysis consist of various government, press, and other reports and accounts that discuss railways in West Africa. Colonial reports, Parliamentary debates, Foreign and Colonial Office papers and other accounts comprise the main government sources. Newspaper articles and journal articles compose the bulk of those representing the Press. Accounts and views expressed by interested or other knowledgeable bodies such as the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Lord Frederick Lugard grant insight into yet another aspect of society. These sources all grant knowledge about the desires and concerns of these various

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groups in regards to the railways in British West Africa and allow for a reasonably well rounded and accurate picture to be formed. The collection is not perfect as it is not an exhaustive compilation of all possible sources, yet they do provide evidence for the opinions of a wide range of important contributors to the creation of the railways in British West Africa.

The Chambers of Commerce are cited and mentioned often as they were an influential group widely involved in the lobbying for West African railways. These commercial bodies naturally had trade and improved markets in mind and as the main economic representative bodies within Britain, their opinions and desires carried a lot of weight. The Liverpool Chamber of Commerce in particular is much more prevalent in this study due to its more vocal nature in regards to its desires to see railways built in West Africa than the other major Chambers of Commerce. Liverpool's main industries were shipping related and thus trade to and from the Empire, meaning more goods going to and from West Africa, would benefit them. The prevalence of the manufacturing sector in pressuring for these railways also makes the reasons for building the lines unique. Usually the lines were sought and financed by the financial sector and other influential men, like Cecil Rhodes. However, the East-West expansion across the tropics represented speculative and manufacturing interests. The Chambers of Commerce, which represented the manufacturing interests, were keen to preserve markets for their goods. They were strong proponents of West African expansion and their demands made headway partially because they also conformed with the powerful financial and free trade principles of the times. The financial and political costs were relatively low, so the most promising parts of tropical Africa were retained and staked out and then developed.² This is why the Chambers of Commerce feature so frequently in the various sources used in this study.

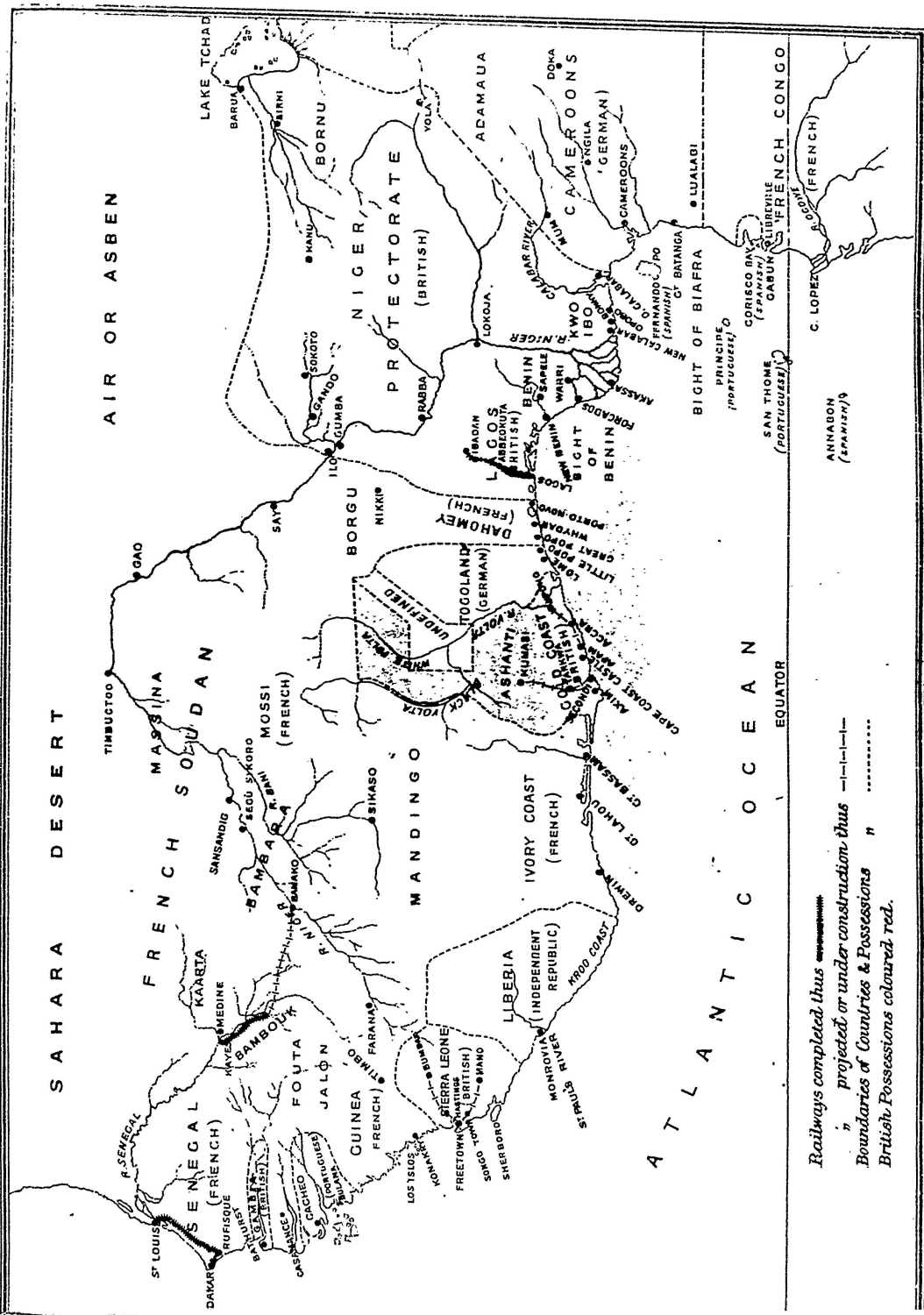
Joseph Chamberlain is also cited often in this dissertation too, due to his prominence in imperial politics and policy during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. As the Colonial Secretary from 1895 to 1903 he had a lot of sway over decisions about the empire and thus railways in West Africa. He was also one of the most

2 P. J., Cain., A. G., Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*, (Longman), London, 1993. p.394

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eager Colonial Secretaries in regards to developing the empire, although not the only Secretary to go about doing so.

BRITISH, FRENCH & GERMAN COLONIES ON THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA.



3

3 Great Britain, *Trade and shipping of Africa*. Reprint, with additions, from the "Board of Trade Journal," of articles dealing with the trade, shipping, railways, and the economic condition generally, of the various

2. **Historiography:**

A work that is very important to the study of how railways and imperialism were mutually shaped is the collection of essays, *Railway Imperialism* edited by Clarence Davis and Kenneth Wilburn.⁴ This volume looks at a variety of locations but does not analyse West Africa. An important theme throughout the book is the many ways in which railways helped to establish and maintain imperial influence in those parts of the world where formal political rule was either out of the question on political, economic or military grounds, or was judged an unnecessary complication. Alongside essays analysing the causes and effects of railways in colonies like Canada, Central Africa and South Africa where imperial rule was explicit, others look at locations like South America where this kind of 'informal empire' was dominant. The railways of colonial West Africa are particularly significant in this regard, for the coastal region was ruled formally while the interior was governed informally, at least until the railways were built.

The railways studied in this dissertation therefore provide an interesting test of whether the factors explored in the Davis volume enjoyed a wider currency. For example, many of the chapters discuss in detail how the various parties shaped the financing and planning of colonial lines. They illustrate how these various interests, such as the imperial government or private investors, wanted different outcomes, and how the negotiations, formal and otherwise, between these parties affected both where the railways went and the subsequent political and economic effects they had. The book also shows how railways could both unite and divide regions, depending on circumstances and in particular what Robinson describes as the 'extra-European factors'.⁵ These considerations need to be borne in mind when studying West Africa's railways. So too does the possibility, extensively treated in several of the essays, that the very planning of a colonial line might either strengthen imperial ties with Britain or further the interests of local elites, whether indigenous or representing the imperial 'master'. The book's analysis of South Africa is particularly relevant to West Africa. In the former territory the Cape settlers and the Boers

divisions of the African continent and of Madagascar., C.9223, London, House of Commons, 1899. p.76

4 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991.

5 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.175

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used railways for, respectively and crudely speaking, their imperialist and republican agenda. Something similar could be seen in places like Nigeria where a centralized imperial elite effected amalgamation of the three colonies of Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria and Lagos once railways had connected them. This dissertation also explores how the West African colonies' dependence on Britain was played out through railway building. In these ways, the study confirms that many of the points discussed in the Davis collection about the importance of railways for imperial integration were applicable to West Africa.

There are a variety of sources that deal with West African railways in varying scope and capacity. Few deal specifically with the genesis of these railways and fewer still deal specifically with their conception. More tend to deal with how they were built with a brief statement of why and this goes for all three of the British West African colonies that had railways built in the late 19th century and the Northern Nigeria railway built in the early 20th. However, there is a vast amount written on imperialism and with many works mentioning the importance of railways in the spread and consolidation of imperial power throughout the world.

The macro histories of West Africa deal with a large portion of the area's history all at once and naturally touch on the railways there as they are significant factors in the history of the region. For instance, the railways allowed trade to expand, administration to spread and what was once informal empire to become formal. Railways allowed nations to put a more secure stamp of control on their colonies. These histories discuss more about how the railways came into existence than why but they do discuss the effects they had on the empire in the region although not the intended effects.

An example of this sort of history is *West Africa* by W. B. Morgan and J. C. Pugh.⁶ This work covers a wide range of social, political and economic topics in West Africa. It deals with the impact of Europeans on the native population and analyses the development of transport across the region in broad detail. *Great Britain in West Africa*, by W. A. Crabtree, is another history that deals with a broad range of topics mostly about various aspects of development within West Africa primarily from a political standpoint.⁷ The

6 W. B., Morgan, & J. C., Pugh, *West Africa*, (Methuen & Co. Ltd.), London 1969.

7 W. A., Crabtree. "Great Britain in West Africa", *Journal of The Royal African Society*. V19, April, 1920.

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work does touch on how the railways have affected the area, mostly Nigeria, but not in great detail and not why they were constructed in the first place.

A work that focuses on the economy of West Africa is Martin Lynn's *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa*.⁸ This study uses the palm oil trade in the nineteenth century as a means of studying the economic and social situation of that region. It discusses the impact the trade had on British life and studies how the trade changed over time. This work is important to the study of why railways were desired in West Africa as the trade in palm products was one of the most significant and important industries of those colonies and enhancing that trade was a major goal. The work deals little with the effects the railways had on the trade or how the trade affected the railways which is not surprising since that may be out of its scope.

An older work that is still reasonably useful that focuses on the economy of the entire area is *An Economic Geography of West Africa*, by H. P. White and M. B. Gleave.⁹ This work gives the history with emphasis on the economy of West Africa from the pre-colonial to the late colonial period. It helps enable one to ascertain the big picture of the region and the economic nature of the colonies.

All of these works help to form an understanding of the wider contexts in which the colonies are acting and the environment that the ideas for railways evolved in. They also grant a sizeable amount of background knowledge in which to study the theoretical side of imperialism and how various political and economic factors interacted and to what end.

On a slightly more focused yet still macro level the histories of the individual colonies provide more detail as to what is going on throughout the time of planning and beyond. These works provide some information and insight into the situation in which the railways emerged in the colonies and the nature of the empire in each. An example for Nigeria is *Nigeria Under British Rule* by Sir William N. M. Geary.¹⁰ This work discusses many aspects of Nigeria up until the mid 1960s and deals briefly with the railways, but

8 Martin, Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa, The palm oil trade in the nineteenth century*, (Cambridge University Press), Cambridge, 1997.

9 H. P., White & M. B., Gleave. *An Economic Geography of West Africa*, (G. Bell & Sons Ltd), London 1971.

10 Sir William N. M., Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, (Frank Cass Publishers), London, 1965.

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little with why they were constructed. *Administration of Nigeria 1900-1960* by Nicolson is another book that deals with the colony of Nigeria.¹¹ This book does not focus much on the railway as it is a political history, but it does give some insight into the political atmosphere that the railway was born in.

A macro history of the Gold Coast, know as Ghana after decolonization, is *Ghana* by Fag.¹² The scope of this work covers the colonial period and touches on the railway lightly. It mentions some of the reasons why the railway was built and a bit on the path it would take but in no great detail. Another is *History of Ghana* by W E F Ward which barely touches on the railway yet covers the history of the colony up to decolonization providing ample background information in which to fit further studies.¹³ *A history of Sierra Leone* by Fyfe does covers the railway in that colony and its impact.¹⁴ This book goes into a bit more detail in regards to the construction of the railway and the thoughts behind it but nevertheless does not dwell there long.

Histories on the railways within the colonies do exist although in no great quantity. These works are almost solely about the railways and deal little with their imperial impact and implications. Examples of such works include *History of the Sierra Leone Railway 1899-1949* by J. R. Best, which focuses solely on the railway yet does not go into great detail as to why it was built.¹⁵ The main focus of this work is the life of the railway, its construction and operation. Other similar and older works are *Gold Coast Railway, British Empire Exhibition 1925* a book put together to illustrate the main crops of the colony and how the railway assisted in their development; and *Railways of the Gold Coast* by Reginald Higham an article which gives a brief account of the history of the line from Secondee to Coomassie.¹⁶ Both deal mostly with the construction and operation of the railway with little about why they were built. All of these studies provide much information on the railways from construction on but little on their conception.

11 I. F., Nicolson, *Administration of Nigeria 1900-1960*, (The Clarendon Press), London, 1969.

12 J. D., Fage, *Ghana*, (University of Wisconsin Press), 1959.

13 W. E. F., Ward, *History of Ghana*, (George Allen & Unwin), London, 1958.

14 Christopher, Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, (Oxford University Press), Oxford, 1962.

15 J. R., Best, *A History of The Sierra Leone Railway 1899-1949*, 1950

16 *Gold Coast Railway, British Empire Exhibition 1925*, (Waterlow), London 1925. Reginald, Higham, "Railways of the Gold Coast", *The Great Central Railway Journal*, Nov. 1910.

In contrast to the relatively small number of works on railways in West Africa, the Uganda railway has had much more attention. A number of works deal with it in various capacities and more touch more heavily on why it was built since the reasons, like cost and other factors, were unlike those in other parts of Africa. The study of this railway is also important to the study of railway imperialism as the reasons for its construction are almost solely of an imperialist nature. Imperial defence and the outmanoeuvring of competitors and the abolition of slavery all played important roles in the construction of the line. *Railways and Development in Uganda* by A. M. O'Connor illustrates the focus well.¹⁷ The book seeks to examine the claim that transport facilities helped increase the prosperity of the Ugandan people. This examination assess the importance of rail facilities as a driving factor in economic growth and the influence on the distribution of economic activities, such as cotton cultivation, in colony. The book naturally deals with the railway after construction as it analyses the effect it had and therefore does little in the way of discussing why it was built in the first place.

The Lunatic Express by Charles Miller is another study of the Uganda railway from construction onward.¹⁸ As a history of the line specifically it does discuss some of the reasons and concerns in regards to its construction but not in tremendous detail or extent. *Permanent Way* by M. F. Hill, an official history of the railway, also goes into some detail in regards to the construction of the railway. The book discusses some of the background of the railway and gives ample detail about its construction and operation. These three books all provide much more information about the railway in East Africa and show that all tropical African railways are not treated equally in historic volume. One reason for the greater study of the Uganda railway may be the greater number of European settlers in East Africa compared to West Africa. The larger number would seem give impetus to the creation of more histories as there would be a greater interest in them since they would be closer to home so to speak.

In regards to the political and economic mindset of the late 19th century, a plethora of books exist on the various actors and situations that played a role in the creation of the

17 A. M., O'Connor, *Railways and Development in Uganda*, (Oxford University Press), London 1965.

18 Charles, Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, (History book club), London, 1971.

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West African railways and affected railway imperialism. One of the main proponents of the railways and the general development of the British Imperial 'estates' was Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary from 1895-1903. A compilation of some of his speeches put together in *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, edited by Charles Boyd, provides some insight into his view and understanding of the topic although few speeches deal explicitly with the West African railways.¹⁹ A biography written by Peter Fraser also provides good insight into the mind and actions of this great proponent of West African railways, but does not dwell much on the topic and more on his other political dealings.²⁰ A history which deals specifically with Chamberlain and West African railways is *Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century* by R. E. Dumett.²¹ This article touches on some of the reasons why the railways were built with the main focus on how they came to be built. Dumett discusses the political manoeuvring and the push that was undertaken in order to secure the finances required to construct these lines seen as vital by Chamberlain and many other pro-imperial politicians and citizens. *The Dual Mandate* by Lord F. Lugard provides excellent insight into the imperialists mind and the motives for developing Africa.²² This book draws on Lugard's vast experience in East and West Africa analyses the many aspects of administering African colonies and what needs to be done in order for them to improve and develop further. His book discusses various economic matters including infrastructure and he illustrates the best means for building railways, some reasons why they were built and reasons why more could be built. The work is designed to aid those who may administer Africa and thus provides a lot of practical knowledge and considerations.

The railways of tropical Africa played a vital role in the development of the colonies there and helped to cement and spread European administration and influence into the interior. The important nature of these lines makes them essential to study due to the impact that they had on the colonies history and due to the role railways had in imperial

19 Charles, Boyd, W. *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, V.2 (London Constable and Company Ltd.), London, 1914.

20 Peter, Fraser, *Joseph Chamberlain Radicalism and Empire, 1868-1914*, (Cassell), London, 1966.

21 R. E. Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 Apr. 1975.

22 F. D., Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (Blackwood), 1922.

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expansion and consolidation. However, it is not only important to study the effects of these railways but also the intentions behind them. These intentions give great insight into the minds of those involved and the ideas that the leaders, both economic and political, had at the time. This insight can help one to understand the mentality for spreading imperial rule or enhancing the presence already in existence. It also can give some insight into the intentions of modern day governments who wish to invest in other countries' infrastructure and the informal imperial implications of doing so. Knowing the why and the effects can grant knowledge as to how intentions and results differ which is very important not only for governmental policy but also for people who have to back or watch that policy unfold. In many ways railway imperialism is still being exercised today to create informal empires in a manner similar to that of the U.S. And Mexico in the Porfirian era of the late 19th century illustrated well in *Railway Imperialism*.²³

When most of the historians mentioned here write on the railways they write about how they were built and run, what they did, when they existed and who operated them and was affected by them. Relatively less thought is given to the statement of why, why were they built, what was the intention and preconceptions before their existence. Often a brief why is given with little elaboration, perhaps because it is often thought that the reasons are a given and therefore not essential to study in depth.

A book which helps to set up the debate about imperialism by comparing the most prominent imperial theorists is *The 'New Imperialism' Analysis of Late Nineteenth Century Expansion* edited by Harrison Wright.²⁴ This work analyses the theories for imperial expansion from people like Vladimir Lenin, A. G. Hopkins and Joseph Schumpeter in an effort to ascertain a better understanding of the problems of the theories and the possible answer to the question. Another book that seeks an answer to the reasons for imperialism through an economic perspective is *The Economic Causes of Imperialism* edited by Martin Wolfe.²⁵ This work analysis various economic determinants to ascertain what the economic

23 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.175

24 Harrison M., Wright, *The 'New Imperialism' Analysis of Late Nineteenth Century Expansion*, D.C. (Heath and Company), Boston 1961.

25 Martin, Wolfe, *The Economic Causes of Imperialism*, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), New York, 1972.

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reasons for imperialism could be. The work discusses other works by prominent theorists, as Wright's work does, but to a slightly more specific end. Some important works on the topic that deal with imperialism and a bit on railway imperialism include Robert Johnson's *British Imperialism*.²⁶ His book seeks to explain some of the histories and controversies about British imperialism. In doing this the book discusses the theoretical side of the British Empire, why it expanded in the ways it did, what the driving forces were, and the attitudes and other factors behind its existence. Some of the topics include race, gender and various other social, political and economic factors. These notions played a role in the decisions to make railways and expand British administration and trade into the interior of West Africa. This work helps to form an idea of the why based on imperialist ideals in general.

A staple for the general understanding of the British Empire and a good source to put things into context is the *Oxford History of the British Empire V.III*.²⁷ This work provides a broad history of all the parts of the empire. It deals with the partition of Africa but does not linger on the West coast for long and deals with the partition mostly from a political standpoint. In contrast to this, Cain and Hopkins's *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion* analyses the empire from an economic standpoint and does so in more detail using specific cases studies.²⁸ This work seeks to illustrate how the various economic entities within Britain influenced the expansion of the empire and how the British empire was an economic creation. The authors look at the relationship between various capitalist bodies, manufacturers, financiers, landed gentry etc. to understand the cause of British expansion. This work is naturally important to the study of any economic aspect of the empire especially railways, as they relied on so many capitalist bodies.

All of these works seek to understand these things and do so by analysing the British empire or imperialism in general in their own way. All of them add to the debate and to one's understanding of imperialism and also illustrate the diversity and complexity of imperialism and highlight that no one theory is substantial enough to cover all

26 Robert, Johnson, *British Imperialism*, (Palgrave Macmillan), Houndmills, 2003.

27 Andrew, Porter, *Oxford History of the British Empire V.III*, (Oxford University Press), Oxford, 1999.

28 P. J., Cain, A. G., Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*, (Longman), London, 1993.

possibilities.

3. Background:

The world of the late 19th and early 20th century in which the West African railways came into existence consisted of a few powerful European states vying for control and trade around the world. Since the 15th century, European states stayed on the coast of West Africa and traded through intermediaries with the interior. The disease environment of this tropical region made it difficult for Europeans to settle there and is the main reason why large colonization movements never occurred. Slaving provided the foundations and life blood of the British West African economy until the 1830s, when the British made illegal. British and French merchants had to change trade goods and began to trade items used in the manufacturing industries of the home market. This often prompted the various explorers of the region to note the economic potential of the interior for both potential export crops and consumers of manufactured goods. Trade and exploration continued to develop throughout the 50s and 60s but was restrained by the notion of the 'White Man's Grave,' a concept developed in the expeditions of the 1830s and 40s where large numbers of explorers and traders died of fever. Eventually, a cash crop based economy emerged, mostly consisting of cotton and palm oil. These products were acquired by African middlemen in the interior and brought to the coast to sell to European traders who shipped it to Europe. Many traders believed colonial rule would open up producing markets and the French took up this idea and set the pace in the 1890s, spreading into the interior at a rapid pace. They used their military to secure as much hinterland territory as they could for their coastal possessions. Tariff barriers were thrown up in order to open a secure trading environment and more markets for French industry. The British had no need for protective tariffs (due to the cheapness and effectiveness of their manufacturing industry) and responded by seizing as much hinterland territory behind the Gold Coast and Nigeria to preserve as much for free trade as possible. The British, although with less territory, were the better off after the scramble for West Africa as they acquired much more populated regions. The British tended to analyse territory for its economic potential first before

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rushing to grab it. The increase in trade and administration led to a cash economy being formed which in turn led to greater growth and growth in government revenue. The higher revenues allowed the colonies to improve their infrastructure by building railways, harbours and roads, which in turn increased trade.²⁹ Expansion into the interior was not always peaceful, and eventually necessitated the British to create frontier forces. Tribal wars and the threat of other powers (France and Germany) necessitated a stronger arm. Many Europeans also believed that Africa would relapse into anarchy if European intervention did not continue to take place. So by the last decade of the 19th century West Africa was becoming more important with various economic and strategic motives at the heart of foreign and colonial policy.³⁰

The resolutions of Berlin West African Conference of 1884-5 played an important role in the development and partition of West Africa and helped lead to railway construction. It did so by stating that a country could only possess a territory through effective occupation of that territory, which could for instance be clearly demonstrated by railways.³¹ The Berlin Conference was a meeting of the European states with African colonial interests in view of the scramble for Africa, to draw up rules for recognizing control of territory. The members declared that they would help improve the moral and material well being of the 'natives', to allow free trade in the region and deemed that only effective occupation on the coast would be regarded as valid. The conference left the issue of the hinterlands or the territory stretching inland from the coast unsettled, which would cause some trouble in the future and resulted in the settling of borders between the European colonial powers who shared a border. By not dealing with the interior the conference allowed the main African colonizers to stake out claims to the hinterland of their coastal possessions through exploration, military conquest or trade. For instance, the French sent many military expeditions into the interior where they claimed large swaths of land which would become French West Africa and comprise of the largest possession in the

29 J. F. A., Aljayi & Michael, Crowder, *History of West Africa VII.*, (Logman Group Ltd), London, 1974. p.393-401

30 J. F. A., Aljayi & Michael, Crowder, *History of West Africa VII.*, (Logman Group Ltd), London, 1974. p.408

31 W. B. Morgan, J. C. Pugh, *West Africa*, (Methuen & Co. Ltd.) London, 1969. p.585

region. Once staked out the powers solidified their claims through the construction of railways and establishment of stronger administration in these areas.³² Another important conference is the Brussels Conference which followed in 1889 and resolved to end the slave trade and slavery. The declaration to do so gave impetus to railway construction as it was seen as an effective way to bring better administration and develop the economy of an area where slavery existed thus ending it.³³

It is evident that railways and imperialism went hand in hand. Railways were seen to provide many benefits to the locations they were built in and aid the empire as a whole. Quick transport, defence, economic development and more effective administration are a few benefits noted by contemporary commentators. However, the high costs and the significant time and effort needed to build them meant that they were limited to areas that could justify them.

Railways served as a means to establish informal empire in many parts of the world as well as to further direct administration. They bound various small countries together and helped to unify or link large areas of the world, bringing them under stronger European control. The dividers of tropical Africa had continental networks in mind and often took a chance on remote possibilities in the interior. Much of the railway work was to connect the lakes and rivers and link the interior with the ports, thus seeking to monopolize the trade there. These constructions were too risky for private investors and of too little strategic importance to attract more than a little imperial subsidies. It took strong-willed and foresighted men like Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Ripon, two colonial secretaries at the end of the 19th century, and Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister Ripon worked for, to project these strategic railway into tropical Africa. An example is Lord Salisbury's order to build the Uganda railway, which was at the expense of the British tax payers, to frustrate French attempts to control the Nile, Egypt and the Suez Canal. Ripon thought of the railway as the main engine of imperialism which in many ways was true.³⁴ In the European-settled parts of the world there were few groups who did not want a railway to bring life to their towns

32 H. R. Fox Bourne, *Blacks and Whites in West Africa*, (P. S. King & Son), London. p.29

33 H. R. Fox Bourne, *Blacks and Whites in West Africa*, (P. S. King & Son), London. p.31

34 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.2-4

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and most governments wanted them to bring development. Many local elites, mainly tribal Chiefs and businessmen, in Asia and Africa wanted railways as they believed that without them modern administration was impossible and the country would remain poor. Railways opened new lands for settlement, attracted more immigrants from Europe and accelerated colonization. Host states wanted lines that would promote development, investors wanted a safe return on investment and the home government was concerned with Imperial strategy. All of this led to the further expansion of railways and in turn the empires.³⁵

The imperial governments followed trade and set up administrations in underdeveloped territories that they found particularly important. The British often tried to rule indirectly and maintain trade relations with as little expense to the metropole as possible. Only when needed would the British impose direct administration. This was usually done to secure safe and developing trade and a return on investments already made, like the vast quantity that Egypt threatened to default on. Direct administration would also often protect against the incursions of other powers who threatened trade with Britain.

Britain had to rely on large quantities of natural resources to fuel its industrial system which prompted informal empire in the hinterland of many Africa colonies and eventually formal control. The move to construct railways into them brought formal control, increased security, development and increased involvement of the British. The growth of trade with Africa illustrated its growing importance. Africa was becoming ever more important as a source for cotton goods sales and Africa's (excluding Egypt's) share of British exports grew from 3% in the middle of the 19th century to 8.3% by the beginning of the 20th.³⁶

Another theory of imperialism is that the partition of Africa was due mostly to political rivalry. The powers did not seek to change anything in Europe, so the rivalry spread to the rest of the world. Many parts of Africa were after all unattractive to business due to the lack of resources and the poorness of the people.³⁷ This political rivalry thus resulted in some lines being built by Britain, France and Germany where economic

35 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.5

36 P. J., Cain, A. G., Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*, (Longman, London), 1993. p.359

37 Robert, Johnson, *British Imperialism*, (Palgrave Macmillan), Houndmills, 2003. p.39-58

prosperity was no where near certain. Places like the Sudan, East Africa and into the Sahara by the French are a few good examples. Most of the West African colonies, however, were rich in natural resources and agricultural products and had large populations. The lack of infrastructure, like railways, discouraged many from investing and developing businesses there.³⁸ A statement by White and Gleave in their 1971 book that sums up infrastructure's importance to development is “It is a truism to stress the importance of communications and transport as factors in social and economic development, for the level of development is obviously controlled by the level of investment in these sectors of the infrastructure.” The road and rail networks built in West Africa were entirely new and often did not follow existing ones and they vastly improved on existing forms of communication.³⁹

4. Economic and Political Views in Britain

“I firmly believe that railways will be a good investment, and if you spend this money the working classes of the country and the people in the slums will benefit for the whole of the work will, of course, be done in this country.”⁴⁰ This statement sums up Chamberlain's and other politicians ideology on building railways in the empire. The political and economic mindset and various personal motives in Britain had a tremendous effect on the desire to build railways in West Africa. Much can be gleaned from the pages of news papers, Parliamentary debates, speeches and other contemporary publications. All of these sources reveal much about the reasons why parts of the British government and Britain's economic bodies sought to build railways in West Africa at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Government:

One of the greatest proponents of railway construction and general imperial well-

38 David, Sunderland, “The departmental system of railway construction in British West Africa, 1895-1906”, *Journal of Transport History*, p.87

39 H. P., White & M. B., Gleave. *An Economic Geography of West Africa*, (G. Bell & Sons Ltd), London 1971. p.228

40 R. E., Dumett, “Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century”, *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.298

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being was Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary from 1895-1903. Chamberlain recognized the assets that the Empire held and how neglected some of them had become. To rectify the situation he devised the idea of developing the 'colonial estate'. A term used to aptly describe the empire as Britain's estate which provided and had to be provided for in order to provide more. Joseph Chamberlain's speech to the Royal Colonial Institute at their annual dinner in 1897 on the True Conception of Empire shows the shift in mentality that occurred in some influential and popular circles at the time. Colonies were no longer possessions for the profit of the Mother country but areas to be cared for. He states that it is an honour to make the sacrifices that Britain was making to benefit the colonies, that the empire was legitimate so long as the prosperity and happiness of the people improved, as he thought it did.⁴¹

Chamberlain validated a policy of expansion, especially in Uganda a region similar to the hinterland of the West Coast. He asserted that it was benefiting the population there through protection against violence and massacres which took place often by his account. He stated that it was important to maintain British control of that area and spread administration to the area in order to protect and develop that region. He also asserted that it would not cost more than the taxation that could be raised there to police that territory and thus protect the people and establish peace. Furthermore, he believed that the commerce that could develop in Uganda would be great as it seemed to be a fertile country with a good climate, all that it lacked was British enterprise and transport facilities. To illustrate the poor state of the transport facilities there Chamberlain gave an example of the cost of portage. He stated that portage to the coast, some 600 miles, costs about £200 per ton which of course made goods far too costly to transport. He compared the conditions to India thirty years prior and Western Canada fifty years prior. All of this was very similar to what the state of affairs of the West Coast of Africa were like at the time and the benefits that could be rendered there too.⁴²

The railway would also stop the slave trade. It would provide a legitimate

41 Charles, Boyd, W. *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, V.2 (London Constable and Company Ltd.), London, 1914.

42 Charles, Boyd, W. *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, V.2 (London Constable and Company Ltd.), London, 1914. p.347-350

alternative to earn a livelihood which Chamberlain confidently asserts the Africans would certainly take because of its peaceful and either equally or more lucrative nature. In other words, if one made it in their interest to stop they would. Slaves were used as porters to take goods to the coast and then sold for whatever they fetched. To try and stop this on the East Coast of Africa the British spent £200,000 on a squadron off the coast which was not very effective. Chamberlain wisely said that the money would be better spent on a railway which would have far more benefits along with stopping slavery.⁴³ On this philanthropic note Chamberlain declared that “the provision of railways is the best security for the abolition of slavery.” an issue Britain had a moral and international obligation to suppress. He was also anxious to prevent the excessive introduction of intoxicating liquors, but so long as France and Germany would not associate themselves with the endeavour to limit the trade little could be done to stop it, only limit it, since trade would flow to their colonies instead.⁴⁴ In all, Chamberlain's statement embodied all of the main concerns and hopes of the day in regards to what railways could do for West Africa and the empire.

In a speech on the anti corn law agitations of 1903, Chamberlain mentions increasing colonial trade as a means to expand the British economy and increase peoples well being. He stated that if Britain gave preference to the colonies they would reciprocate and if they took more from them then they would take more from Britain. This would be a mutually beneficial situation. Building the railways had already helped to develop the territories they passed through and would continue to do so. They were a means for making the colonies more prosperous and in turn better consumers of British goods. Chamberlain also stated his opinion that it was the responsibility of the mother country, a sacrifice and a good investment especially because Britain had laid claim to the territories so no other power could claim them.⁴⁵ In essence, the territories were saved for British trade and would in turn help the British citizens at home through that trade.

Shortly after meeting with a deputation from the various Chambers of Commerce in

43 Charles, Boyd, W. *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, V.2 (London Constable and Company Ltd.), London, 1914. p.350-357

44 *The Ipswich Journal*, Colonial Expansion, August 31, 1895.

45 Charles, Boyd, W. *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches*, V.2 (London Constable and Company Ltd.), London, 1914.

Britain, Mr. Chamberlain summed up his views on railways in West Africa. He wanted to focus on the 'uncivilized' markets of the world as he saw it as a way of increasing the employment of manufacturing hands at home. The development wrought in the colonies would be for the benefit of both populations, home and colonial. Besides this, France was proving an active commercial and political rival in the region. British colonies at the time consisted mainly of strips along the sea board with little development in the hinterland. These coastal regions contained an estimated 25 million people and trade worth about £7 million. Chamberlain also pointed out that many producers and consumers only required easy access and communication to largely increase trade and consequently largely increase employment for British labour. The interest of the workers back home were bound with colonial expansion. To this end Chamberlain ushered in a new era in his department with a goal to benefit the working class of Britain.

So, if all of these advantages existed then why were railways not built before the mid 1890s? Other reasons put forward for why Britain shied away from railway construction are fourfold. One, West Africa did not have a significant strategic importance. Two, the lobby of merchants was not strong enough to convince the government of the importance of opening up the palm, lumber and gold deposits of the interior of these colonies until the 1890s. Three, the geographic and engineering problems seemed to stand in the way. These challenges included the dense tropical forests which required heavy labour for clearing, the lack of local hard rock for roadbeds and a lack of good harbours in some places, like the Gold Coast. Four, it was argued that the colonial treasuries could not meet the high costs of railway construction under these conditions. Many, like Sierra Leone, had budgetary difficulties and relied on grants in aid from London to clear their deficits.⁴⁶ This last point is a bit of a catch 22 in that a railway would raise revenue but the colony did not have the initial revenue to invest to get the revenue required. The Treasury and House of Commons had a lot of control over the finances of the crown colonies and it was very difficult for tropical colonies to borrow from the imperial exchequer because it required Treasury approval and an Act of Parliament. Borrowing on the open market was

46 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.289-90

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also difficult due to the high interest rates that would be demanded due to the poor financial state of the colonies and the subsequent risk to the investor. The situation was further compounded by a colonial policy of rigid economizing and colonial self-sufficiency and the opposition to the creation of new imperial responsibilities that prevailed in the pre-Chamberlain era which followed the Gladstonian rubric of 'saving candle ends'.⁴⁷ Chamberlain managed to get around all of the usual financial encumbrances to financing the railways getting the money needed through strong will and clever manoeuvring. To aid his campaign he helped popularize the notion of imperial help for the colonies, that self sufficiency was ineffective, and that it was enterprise's job to work the fields and mines but government's job to build the roads and railways in new countries. Fortunately, Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister, and Hicks Beach, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were for the development and in turn aided tremendously with the funding and general progression of the West African lines.⁴⁸

Obligations in West Africa did begin to expand under the Gladstone administration and the importance of these colonies became greater than at any time since the end of the slave trade. A 'forward' policy developed under the Gladstone-Rosebery ministry which entailed the extension of control into the interior of West Africa and taking the preliminary steps toward the Uganda Railway. The 'Scramble for Africa' also had an effect on this initiative. The prospects of French and German incursion and domination of trade in the region was unpalatable to the British and the members of the West African commercial lobby played upon fears of French and German pre-emption of trade routes in the hinterlands of British colonies to help get railways. The French and Germans had built modern ports and the Senegal railway caused trepidation within British officialdom because it threatened territorial control and commercial interests in the interior not least because it was going as far as the Niger river.⁴⁹ This mounting pressure prompted Lord Ripon to send preliminary feasibility surveys of West Africa, the first significant move

47 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.291-2

48 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.302-7

49 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.294-6

towards construction of the British West African railways.

Chamberlain then entered the scene and more emphasis was placed on the initiative. Building railways fit in well with Chamberlain's ideals of economic imperialism and thus gave great impetus to the projects and assurance that he was for development when he ascended to office. Growing competition from the U.S. and Germany and Chamberlain's background in industry also help to prompt his consolidation and expansionary principles. Securing trade in order to help British industry and growth was a prime concern of his.⁵⁰ He assumed that new economic activity would spring up around the railway and gave little thought to other complications that could arise. This view was not too drastic as experience pointed to it being true. Chamberlain also believed that railways should be constructed ahead of need and that a 'social rate of return' existed from their construction. This meant that even if they were not completely remunerative they would at least aid the population along the line and those affected by the economic gains made through it. The notion also took into account that the passenger transport and the improved communications would help the society it passed through.

Further encouragement for Chamberlain's ideas came from the transcontinental railways of North America which inspired the idea that railways bring development and settlement. These lines stretched into undeveloped territory, like parts of West Africa, and brought in its wake European civilization and commerce. The Gold Coast for instance, had a high priority as it seemed to be the one with the most certainty of quick returns. The gold there would be immediately remunerative and it was estimated that transport costs to the coast would be 1/6 of what they were and transport times 1/10 from where the mines were.⁵¹ In this case the line would not be supplying pre-existing demand.

Chamberlain did question what he stated by wondering if what would be said in response to the statement that if Imperial assistance of the kind he indicated was so essential to the development of colonial possessions, why so many of our colonies have progressed and prospered wondrously without it? He also stated that no certainty existed

50 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.297-8

51 R. E., Dumett, "Joseph Chamberlain, Imperial Finance and Railway Policy in British West Africa in the Late Nineteenth century", *The English Historical Review*, vol.90 (Apr. 1975). p.298-301

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that Britain would be permitted to reap the benefits of their labour. The colonies could demand self-government after construction and then raise duties and kill down the trade they sought with so much expense. Chamberlain wondered why British capital which sought profitable outlets all over the world had not invested in those colonies which according to Chamberlain had so much potential. To further general doubts about railways *The Economist* showed that some of the trade figures that Mr. Chamberlain claimed showed substantial growth in trade were not quite accurate. Trade did not increase that much and was confined to a small number of goods. Despite these misgivings Chamberlain still felt confident that railways in West Africa would develop that region and improve the empire. Speaking on the prospect of giving Imperial assistance to the colonies Chamberlain said “we ought to imitate the Romans by leaving behind them traces of their passage through great public works and means of communication.” He stated that unless the British were prepared to give the colonies assistance he could see no future for them and that it would probably have been better for them if they had never come under British rule.⁵²

Other politicians gave reasons why these railways should be built, or in Winston Churchill's address to the Royal African Society why they were built. Churchill gave one economic reason why railways were built and needed to be built in Africa. That reason was the ever important cotton. Developing a greater supply of cotton in Africa would help to relax dependence on American cotton and make the supply more secure. He also believed that the railways would pay back the investment even though it might take a while.⁵³ In all his views were similar to those of Chamberlain's.

A less economically driven motivation existed as well for these railways. For instance, Sir George Baden-Powell, MP, remarked that the policy of opening West Africa by railways would have the effect of showing that Britain intended to maintain its hold there to the neighbouring powers.⁵⁴ Another is evident in a paper to the Royal Colonial institute. H. H. Johnston, the Vice-Counsel for the Oil Rivers and Cameroons, an area

52 *The Economist*, West African Trade and Colonial Development, Aug. 24, 1895.

53 Winston, Churchill, “Development of Africa”, *Journal of the Royal African society*, April 1907. p.3-5

54 *Daily News*, West African railways, August 24, 1895.

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around Southern Nigeria, discussed a number of more philanthropic intentions of the railways. He stated that “There is no civilizer like the railway, and to build a railway through an uncivilized country is to centuple its existing trade or to create commerce if none exists: the railway saps race prejudices and dissolves fanaticism.”⁵⁵ The later statement is interesting and unique. It is not clear whether he means the native population or everyone because it may have been true at one point but by the end of the 19th century racial stereotypes were quite strong within the European population.⁵⁶ Still, he does put forward a clear idea that it will benefit the population beyond just economically.

Johnston does not believe that it should be a non-remunerative endeavour however. In fact he takes a very practical and realistic point of view when he states “What body of philanthropists would construct a railway without some slight prospect of eventual gain, some sign that their money and labour had not been thrown away? Consequently, it should always be our endeavour to show that we profit by the half unreasoning instinct that urges us as a race to meddle with other peoples' business, and not to rest satisfied with letting rich countries lie idle because the natives, who cumber them often to little purpose and with little right, are too brutish and ignorant to appreciate or make use of the advantages with which their native soil has been naturally endowed.”⁵⁷ He does make a reasonable point that it would develop these areas and that they were not likely to under the system then present even if there are strong racial superiority undertones in his statement which does counter his previous statement again, unless after the railway is built the natives become equal economically and socially to the Europeans.

Philanthropic reasons are also evident in an address to the International Congress on Colonial Sociology in Paris in 1900. This essay deals with the rights of native populations and the duties of civilized Europeans to them. It has paternalistic overtones and states a strong sense of duty, morality and ethics and a desire to aid and not abuse natives and their rights such as to land. These ideals come across strongly in the statement that “It may be

55 Great Britain, Hamilton, Johnston Harry, *British West Africa and the Trade with the Interior*, Foreign and Commonwealth office collection, 1889. p.4

56 Johnson, Robert, *British Imperialism*, (Palgrave Macmillan), New York, 2003, p107.

57 Great Britain, Hamilton, Johnston Harry, *British West Africa and the Trade with the Interior*, Foreign and Commonwealth office collection, 1889. p.4

true not only that enlightened Europeans have a right, but that it is also their duty, to aim at the overthrow of barbarism and at the improvement of regions which have hitherto been insufficiently or improperly used, as well as of people who have hitherto been the victims of their own or others' faults."⁵⁸ One way to improve the condition and in some cases rectify the faults of others was to build a railway, an instrument of paternalism. All of these reasons fit in well with Chamberlain's and others ideas of developing the colonial estate and continues to illustrate the idea that a railway would be mutually beneficial and would not just benefit those in contact with it economically.

Other social issues arose during debates in the Commons. The biggest fear or the only downside to building railways in West Africa, besides cost, was the liquor trade. Sir Charles Dilke put forward the concern that the railways may increase the trade in liquor into the interior and that those that conduct the trade were pushing for a railway. He was also concerned about labour and land for its construction although it was reckoned forced labour would not be necessary. A reply that the liquor trade would continue through French and German agents and the colony would loss revenue if it were stopped or taxed heavily emerged. Instead it was thought that it will have to be monitored and controlled so that it did not become excessive.

Mr. T. R. Buchanan also noted that slavery still existed in the interior of Lagos and a railway would have an effect on it. The reduction of profitability and need for slaves due to a better transport system would occur. In another answer to this concern, Sir. G. Baden-Powell stated that railways in West Africa would be the best instruments for putting down slavery and suppressing the liquor trade. He declared "it was a disgrace to our civilization to find that we had made no impression whatever beyond the mere coastline. If we could once establish a sound and strong administration over the territories we occupy in West Africa, we might succeed in putting down the liquor traffic; and the corollary to that was that we could not establish that strong and sound administration unless railways were made into the interior. Until rapid means of communication are established, a sound administration can not be set up." These sentiments show the social conscious of the

58 Great Britain, *The claims of uncivilized races: a paper submitted to the International Congress on Colonial Sociology, Paris, August 1900*, Foreign and Commonwealth office collection, 1900. p.7

British government in regards to their West African colonies, not only was the trade important but the well-being of the people too.

To sum up the debate Chamberlain described the growing trade with West Africa and how he regarded these colonies as estates and estates that cannot be developed without Imperial assistance. Developing them would benefit the people there and at home, that the railways would get rid of slavery and that efforts to reduce, although not abolish, the liquor trade should be made as it would come from somewhere else and would hurt trade. Chamberlain also claimed that the liquor trade was not as bad as most made it out to be and that the railway would help.⁵⁹ The members of Parliament concurred that railways in West Africa would assist with a policy of enlarged markets and would help to establish firm administration and allow for the social, political and economic well being of the people to improve, so long and the liquor trade was regulated.

Press:

The views that presented themselves in the press give great insight into the reasons, hopes, intentions and apprehensions for building railways in West Africa. Many newspapers and journals expressed their opinions and views of commercial, government and social issues relating to railways in West Africa.

The economic reasons are expressed widely within the press. One of the most important observations is the consensus of the various Chambers of Commerce who urged that state facilities should be afforded for the construction of railways on the West Coast of Africa. They lobbied Chamberlain and the government to do this which illustrates how important to them and their interests these lines were.⁶⁰ *The Liverpool Mercury* believed that the railways would soon pay and be a benefit to both Government and traders by increasing trade and revenue from duties. They also thought it would be a benefit to the iron industry of Britain and that the West Coast had prior and better claims to railways than East Africa and that the region had better prospects for success.⁶¹ This last point is important on account that the Uganda railway was being constructed at this time at high

59 Great Britain, *House of Commons Debate*, House of Commons, 22 August 1895. p.581-652

60 *The Morning Post*, The Government and West African railways, August 20, 1895.

61 *Liverpool Mercury*, Liverpool and its African Trade, April 30, 1895.

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cost and after great debate. *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* concurred with the previous points of view and stated that when the work on the Lagos railway is accomplished one may look for a paying outlet for a good deal of British manufactures and the establishment of plantations for the growth of coffee.⁶² The sentiment that the time was ripe for building railways in West Africa were also expressed in *the Leeds Mercury*. Here they claim that building a railway two hundred miles behind Lagos would put the British in communication with the dense populations of Zomba and would open a new route to the Western Soudan. The Gold Coast also needed railways to develop the trade and mining industries of that colony and Sierra Leone would develop new trade if it had one too.⁶³

A slight bit of dissent in the notion that railways were necessary arose in *the Liverpool Mercury* where an author believed that the waterways needed to be mapped and used extensively and should be done before railways were built as the cost would be lower and it would be an advantageous undertaking. The author still believed that railways needed to be built in order for the colonies to be properly developed, that without a railway it would be difficult and slow for the colony to develop its commercial resources and come into closer interaction with its hinterland and neighbouring territories. To this end the author suggested a survey for a light railway be conducted but should not be built until the waterways were better utilized.⁶⁴

The authors of *The Economist* made it clear that the improvement of the waterways, roads, enforcing improved sanitary conditions in the interior as on the coast and altogether improving the transportation of the country, the colonies would become healthier and more worthy of European investment. They stated that “the greatest hindrance to the rapid development of trade is the want of proper means of transport.” So long as goods had to be carried by human portorage to and from the interior the amount of trade would narrow and be confined to the goods that could be transported in such a manner and bear the cost of such transport. The building of roads and laying of railways could open up the country, increase the colonies wealth, increase commerce, help 'civilize' the natives and implant in

62 *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, Multiple News Items, January 23, 1895.

63 *The Leeds Mercury*, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and the African Trade, Sept. 22, 1894.

64 *Liverpool Mercury*, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, Dec. 30, 1892.

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their minds new wants for the gratification of which they would be aroused to industry.⁶⁵ These were the hopes behind building the railways and what the authors saw as highly probable to happen.

The benefits were thought to not only occur in West Africa but also in Britain. A journalist with *the Daily News* concurred with Chamberlain who when speaking to a deputation from the various Chambers of Commerce stated that there was no better way of securing plenty of employment for the people of the United Kingdom except by developing old markets and creating new ones. The author recognized that a distinct responsibility lay upon the country in connection with the vast populations under their control. This included concern about the drink trade, as he put it “a scandal to the country and a detriment to its material interests”. The notion that an international agreement would be necessary to prevent the trade since the native Africans would go to the trader selling the liquor he wanted prevailed. A cash economy might also help this and the trade brought by a railway would assist in bringing it about.⁶⁶ The deputation to Chamberlain of the Chambers of Commerce wanted trade with the colonies to increase, especially in rubber. The cost of portage was high and territories rich in natural products remained undeveloped. They urged the need for railway facilities which were a 'civilizing', defensive and pacific agency and creators of employment.⁶⁷

The railway would play an important role in foreign relations. By very clearly demonstrating control of the hinterland behind the coast, securing trade, checking the advance of other powers and improving defence a railway would vastly strengthen the British position in West Africa. This view emerged in *the Pall Mall Gazette*. The journalist expressed the view that the French were pursuing a policy of cutting off the British from the hinterland and securing the trade for themselves. They were developing Dahomey colony and constructing a wharf at Porto Nove and a pier at Kotonou which would greatly improve their trade while shifting some away from the British colonies near by. In answer to this concern the author states that “no time should be lost in laying the foundations of the

65 *The Economist*, Trade Notes, Jan 13, 1894.

66 *Daily News*, West African railways, August 24, 1895.

67 *Liverpool Mercury*, West African Railways, August 24, 1895.

much talked of Lagos railway if we wish what is perhaps our most flourishing West African colony to continue in a prosperous condition.”⁶⁸ These sentiments are also expressed in the *Liverpool Mercury*. The author points out that the French railway in Senegal is prospering and the Congo railway is progressing well and how he is at a loss for why Britain is the last to consider railways in West Africa a necessity. By this point France had gained the territory North of Sierra Leone through delimitation thus Sierra Leone could not expand so the only thing left to do was develop what already existed. Fortunately for the British, the Gold Coast was spared the same limitation after an agreement with France that France would not interfere in Ashantee. A journalist at *The Mercury* made the point that the claim to the colonies was no good without some means of extending power and influence to the region and bringing the civilizing influence of commerce and religion.⁶⁹ To him a railway fit the bill perfectly.

Peacefully resolving boundary issues was ideal and this led to boarder negotiations. For instance those between the Chief Clerk of the African Department of the Colonial Office and the French Foreign and Colonial Offices to discuss boarders in West Africa. Both sides wanted to work them out in a peaceful manner.⁷⁰ This surely provided another reason for building the railways as it could put greater claim on the territory and would do so peacefully and remuneratively. Trading rights also caused concern which sparked negotiations with France in regards to such rights. The process worked out well but tensions rose during the talks and preparations were taken to defend the territories if need be. Again a railway was mentioned as a solution to help solidify control and improve defence.⁷¹ Much of the concern arose over trading rights and commerce within unclaimed territory. The British wanted to ensure that if the French claims became recognized in the hinterland of West Africa, British trade would not be hindered.⁷² The manufacturing prowess of Britain ensured that British goods would be competitive and thus a protectionist French or German policy would hurt British merchants, an unacceptable scenario.

68 *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Occasional Notes, May 17, 1894.

69 *Liverpool Mercury*, Liverpool and its African Trade, April 30, 1895.

70 *Birmingham Daily Post*, The Partition of Africa, January 11, 1895.

71 *The Belfast New-letter*, The Colonies in 1898, January 6, 1899.

72 *Liverpool Mercury*, Liverpool and the African Trade, Jan. 19, 1895.

Social concerns were also mentioned in the press, mainly the liquor trade and slavery. Slavery and the drinks trade caused concern well before the railways were around. The newsmen recognized the importance of railway development in West Africa and that the question of the Africans' consumption of liquor was one that required careful attention.

The writer in *the Glasgow Herald* agreed with Joseph Chamberlain's statement that the development of the resources of West Africa could bring a solution for many of the social problems of the day.⁷³ Social well-being and trade went hand in hand. For instance, no trade was possible so long as peace did not exist in the interior. This was a reason for some of the punitive expeditions. The British were trying to stop the various tribes from fighting one another so that peace and prosperity could exist. Furthermore, in regards to the liquor trade, it was thought that Britain, so long as France and Germany would not associate themselves with the endeavour to limit the liquor trade, could do little to stop it, only limit it, since trade would flow to rival colonies instead.⁷⁴ Other issues arose when the British ran into trouble with the Illoin tribe in Lagos. They obstructed the road through their district and were determined to maintain the slave trade. Naturally this went against the tastes of the British and the government sought to prevent this in the future, a railway being noted as an ideal way to solve these problems.⁷⁵

Other Publications/Points of View

A variety of other publications commented on railways in West Africa. These came from a variety of sources most notably the Royal African Society and Lord Frederick Lugard. Lugard was a staunch supporter and executer of imperial expansion when he was the Governor of Northern Nigeria and Uganda. His publications espouse the reasons for and desired effects of railways in West Africa. Another interesting group is The Royal African Society, which comprised of those interested in the contemporary issues of Africa. Their journal often had articles written by those who specialized in or had specific knowledge or experience of some African subject. Both of these sources shed light on other aspects of society that cared about British West Africa and its railway potential.

⁷³ *Glasgow Herald*, Imperial Parliament, August 23, 1895.

⁷⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, Imperial Parliament, August 23, 1895.

⁷⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, Lagos and the Ilorins, Nov. 19, 1896.

Lord Lugard in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* gave many reasons why railways should be built in that portion of the world. This book gives advice on many aspect of colonial administration and discusses many issues that arise with that administration. Even though it was written a couple of decades after the first railways were constructed it still embodies the same principles and sentiments that existed earlier and as he worked to bring about a railway in Northern Nigeria his opinion seems vital to this study. Lugard makes many points on railways and there role. To begin with, he states that cheap transport is a vital necessity for the development of trade and commerce, especially in Africa where the distances from the interior to the coast are so great. The cost of transport was so high it was often not profitable to transport any more than 200 miles inland. No trade meant the native population made no money so they could not buy imports or pay a tax which meant the administration would have less money and therefore could not spend on development works.⁷⁶ Chamberlain would concur with this sentiment and it was why the British home government had to fund the railways. Lugard noted that railways decreased the cost of administration by reducing the cost of goods transport, getting officials around and by preserving the health and lives of officials in tropical areas. Railways also reduce the number and cost of troops, rendered direct taxation possible and increased the wealth of the people.

On top of these benefits Lugard believed railways would help provide markets for British trade, liberate labour engaged in transport for productive work and kill the slave trade. Lugard so favoured railways that he stated the “development of the African continent is impossible without railways, and has awaited their advent.”⁷⁷ He later states that “A railway develops the trade of a district more rapidly than any other method.” and “As an indirect agency in increasing trade, they [railways] are the greatest of revenue earners.”⁷⁸ He is very optimistic and praising of the railways and the benefits they could bring in his writings. This may be in part due to his observance of their past success and of the alternative in West Africa, the paths the Africans used. The paths used by the native

76 Frederick. D., Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (Blackwood), 1922. p.461-2

77 Frederick. D., Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (Blackwood), 1922. p.462

78 Frederick. D., Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (Blackwood), 1922. p.470-1

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population, even when pack animals were involved, were inefficient because no effort was made to remove obstacles making them slow and costly.⁷⁹

Lord Lugard also notes the construction of lines and territorial grabbing by the other European powers prompted Britain to respond and necessitated the occupation of areas that could otherwise have been developed gradually. But like he said “The products of the tropics are becoming more indispensable to the white races, forming as they do the raw material for our most important industries.” These commodities could not just be gradually developed especially as economic and industrial competition became more acute. It became more and more important to safeguard and organize the supplies necessary for smooth industrial function. France and Germany had begun developing their West African territories through transport by the time Britain was finally getting around to it.⁸⁰ India and other colonies may have made it less necessary for the British to do so earlier as a large amount of products came from them. Germany and France did not have access to such large and lucrative markets and thus pursued West African colonies much more vigorously before the British.

The *Journal of the Royal African Society* put forward many points and concerns in regards to railways in British West Africa. Some concerns were raised about the effects railways could have in Africa a few years after the initial three railways were built. Some disliked the spread of railways within tropical Africa for a plethora of reasons including the spoliation of the land and the influence it had on the native populations. Others felt that the sudden changes the railways brought destroyed the “innocent and healthy nudity of the unspoilt savage, and his moral and physical downfall when clothed in ugly and unhealthy European garments and supplied with the seductive luxuries of an exotic civilization.”

Doubts also existed in regards the commercial possibilities of Africa's interior and some wondered if it justified the great initial expenditure. In order to prevent the potential down sides of the railways the sceptics stated that game laws, forestation regulation and the prohibition of the sale of liquor and guns must follow railways to prevent the spoiling of the land and native populations. They thought that the destruction of the environment

79 Frederick. D., Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, (Blackwood), 1922. p.474

80 Great Britain, Lugard, F., *The Administration of Tropical Colonies*, House of Commons, 1905

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and human populations occurred when unscrupulous European pioneers became beyond the reach of supervision and control. In some ways railways help to both foster and prevent this as did good administration to prevent. Still the author concedes “As for the economic and political justification for railways in tropical Africa, those who know how costly in time and health and money the porter transport is in countries where beasts of burden do not thrive, will not think it worth while to discuss the point; nor is it necessary to point out how transport facilities create commerce which did not exist before, and are the means of discovering and exploiting natural resources whose existence was formerly unsuspecting.”⁸¹ Even though in some parts of Africa the economic potential of the railways was iffy there was still a strong tendency to favour the spread of railways as a means of economic development that would otherwise not be possible.

The Journal also discussed the reasons behind building and colonizing West Africa. For instance, they state that there is no reason to possess West Africa other than for trade. It is not a suitable place for settlement and possessed no strategic value like Egypt. Although there was a strong religious and philanthropic interest in Britain, it would not have been very practical to spend tons of money on that with nothing else to work for. Economically West Africa was only a small part of the imperial economy. The statement that Britain would be more inconvenienced than distressed if the goods from West Africa were cut off tomorrow sums up the point well.⁸² By building the railways West Africa could become more important and a more prosperous region within the empire. This view does support the other reasons given by the various proponents of railways for the region. Settlement is never given as a reason for building the railways, only economic development and the improvement of the African's condition. The scramble for West Africa had more to do with securing an outlet for excess products rather than excess population. The products of the region were valuable because they helped fuel industries in Europe but Britain exported more to the colonies than import from them. A railway would boost demand for goods like steel and iron thus the construction of these lines would benefit the home

81 Alex, Johnston, “Fresh Fields for African Railways”, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Apr. 1904. p.271-276

82 J.W., Root, “British Trade with West Africa”, *Journal of the Royal African society*, 1901 p.41

economy.⁸³

Trade used to rely on rivers and other trade routes into the interior before more effort was made to develop the region. Once a greater rivalry between European states emerged governments had to ensure the trading rights of their merchants, thus Africa was divided into recognized administrative zones. Governments also became concerned with keeping the peace and communication not only for administrative reasons but also to help facilitate trade growth. Rivers only tapped a small portion of trade so when more attention was given to West Africa more emphasis on railway development emerged as it would increase the area and population accessible to trade and administration, improving the condition of the colonies.⁸⁴ These views as one may notice are very similar to those put forward by other interested members of British society at the time. These sources believed that railways would help render West Africa more economically developed and assist in raising the native population to a higher level of European style civilization.

5. Sierra Leone:

The first colony in West Africa to have a railway built was probably the one that was least likely to pay off the costs in the future. Sierra Leone's 2ft. 6in. gauge line's construction commenced in January 1896 after being authorized by the government in London in 1895 and went from Freetown to Songo town, a distance of 32 miles.⁸⁵ The surveys for the line occurred in 1893-4 through an expedition, led by W. Shelford a prominent railway authority of the time. The surveys went from Freetown to Bumban, a distance of 120 miles, along with an expedition examining a route for a light railway from Bonthe to Scmbahan, near the Liberian frontier. The first section of the line was completed in March 1898, the first of many sections in what would be a 222 mile line by 1905.⁸⁶ The

83 J.W., Root, "British Trade with West Africa", *Journal of the Royal African society*, 1901 p.47-57

84 C. W. J., Orr, "Light Railways for Tropical Africa", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1911.

85 Great Britain, Cardew, Frederick, *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895.p.4

86 Great Britain, Cardew, Frederick, *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895.

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motivations and intentions that led to its construction go back a few years before the first piece of track was laid and the first major survey was conducted. In Sierra Leone's case, the railway was meant by the British to develop the colony's economy and preserve the North of the colony from further French encroachment.

A railway was first proposed by a few businessmen in 1872 to Falaba and then again during the 1880s when a few speculators approached the colonial office for a railway subsidy. They were all refused, as the colonial office disliked subsidies as the officials there thought they led to waste and inefficiency. Then the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce asked for a railway in 1892 and William Shelford, an experienced railway consultant, went to the colony as the Crown Agent to make a survey. The government and railway consultants decided on Freetown as the starting point as it was the capital and main hub for economic activity and Kanrelahun as the terminus taking the line on a parallel route with the coast. No private firm would take on the job, so the British government had to, the risks being to high. The idea met with some tough criticism especially from the colonial under secretary who was against Sierra Leone, which was recently insolvent, spending that much money. Joseph Chamberlain, however, came into office as the Colonial Secretary with a mindset of advancing the 'colonial estate' or in Sierra Leone's case making it a productive member of the imperial economy. To meet that end he sanctioned the first British railway in West Africa.⁸⁷

'Civilizing' Effects

A variety of motives exist explaining why the Sierra Leone railway was built. Governor Col. Frederick Cardew, the governor of Sierra Leone, gave a talk to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and an address to the legislative council of Sierra Leone about railways in Sierra Leone in which he outlined many reasons for a railway. These two speeches given in mid 1895 grant insight into the reasons put forward and cover both economic and legal audiences who had significant interest in Sierra Leone. Firstly, he believed that a railway was not just needed but urgently needed. He stated that good prospects of ultimate success as an investment existed but, also cautioned that one must not

87 Christopher, Fyfe, *History of Sierra Leone*, (Oxford University Press), Oxford, 1962.

forget that few railways anywhere in the world pay or rather do not pay directly but indirectly through increased trade and revenue and they have a great civilizing power especially in a place like Africa.⁸⁸ He argued that some of these 'civilizing' effects derived from increased political influence, which he suggested could put an end to the many petty wars that occurred in the interior. He expected that peace would exist except near Liberia, where petty wars across the border hampered the trade and tranquillity of the region. The railway would also solidify the end of the slave trade which had generally ceased within the protectorate.⁸⁹ The intercourse between the interior and metropolis would be hugely beneficial and Cardew stated that this would also encourage the settlement of 'civilized' Africans in the interior. They would teach the others their crafts and agricultural techniques thus improving the country as a whole. Colonization by Europeans was not the goal, mainly due to the climate, but bringing people from the West Indies as colonists to help advance the native population was considered by the colonial authorities.⁹⁰ One of the motives for this came from the possible need to import the skilled labour required to run the railway for the first years of operation, but also out of a long term vision of economic growth.⁹¹ A railway could bring about all of these economic effects.

Economic Development

Economically, the proponents of the railway predicted it to do much. It would increase British trade with Africa due to the larger market available and thus benefit many manufacturers and industries in Britain. A railway would grant access to more consumers as well as new crops. The Sierra Leone government encouraged the growth of crops like cocoa, coffee and other tropical goods and a railway would be needed in order to get these goods in mass to the ports. Governor Cardew believed that there was every reason to expect traffic to increase in quantity once the railway was in place, but still wondered if the

88 Great Britain, *Railway schemes for the colony of Sierra Leone: Address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, August 1st, 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.3

89 Great Britain, *Railway schemes for the colony of Sierra Leone: Address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, August 1st, 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.4

90 *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone*, Freetown, May 1st, 1895 Cardew, Frederick, Foreign and commonwealth office collection 1895 p.20

91 *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone*, Freetown, May 1st, 1895 Cardew, Frederick, Foreign and commonwealth office collection 1895 p.13

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products would be of sufficient value and quantity to give a remunerative return. From interviews with various European and indigenous traders the Governor believed that products existed in sufficient quantity and only required cheap means of transport to reach the ports and markets at Freetown. However, the values of such goods was uncertain; fluctuation in palm product prices for instance recently had a 25% drop in price which had to be considered as it posed a serious risk to the colony's finances as it was the main export. Cardew thought that the railway would bring greater prosperity to the colony unless a sustained low palm product price existed. He also proposed that other industries should be created, like ginger and coffee which could take the place of palm products if prices dropped, otherwise the colonies' finances would be in trouble. These products could thus take the place of palm products travelling down the railway to Freetown thus maintaining the development of the interior.⁹²

Despite this risk, he maintained that even if the line turned out to be unremunerative it would undoubtedly develop the resources of the colony. Cardew predicted that the bulk of goods like palm products would make them profitable to carry and that the railway would allow those in the interior to acquire machinery that would greatly assist in the processing of products like palm kernels which would further enhance the quantity and quality of the goods transported on the railway.⁹³ On top of this, both the author of the railway survey, who discusses the crops and agricultural possibilities of the colony, and the members of the Colonial Office were optimistic about the commercial viability of the railway.

This was good news for the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce's African Division, which stated that the line must be built with some commercial intentions and that those who were familiar with the trade routes should look at the proposal. They wanted the first British line in the region to be a success, or rather, a commercial success.⁹⁴ The Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce also favoured the line and also wanted to make sure it went

92 *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st, 1895* Cardew, Frederick, Foreign and commonwealth office collection 1895 p.13-15

93 Great Britain, *Railway schemes for the colony of Sierra Leone: Address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, August 1st, 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.11

94 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.3-9

through productive areas. Its members believed that it was important to develop the country to help not just commerce but government revenues as the needs of the colony grew. These commercial motives helped to spur the debate about the route of the railway, leading to different options based on the various products and quantities in the regions it could pass through.⁹⁵ These commercial desires made sense as many people from the native population to the merchants and administration had something to gain from the success a railway could bring.

The Gauge and Path of the Railway

The final destination of the line, Cardew stated, should be the Eastern portion of the colony. He gave four factors that must be considered for where the railway should go. First, the characteristics of the natives and population density. In this case Cardew considered the natives in the North to be more industrious and intelligent while the population was denser in the South. Second, nature and fertility of the country and existing products and trade routes. He pronounced the Southern portion of the colony to be more fertile, with palm products being the largest export coming from the region. Third, capability of the country for development. Sierra Leone had little mineral wealth and the population was not as great as other West African colonies, but it was thought that there was still great opportunity for growth. Fourth, the prospects of trade from countries outside the colony. At the time this mainly consisted of Britain and other Imperial possessions trading through Freetown which was a good port and thus a good pick for the terminus of the railway.⁹⁶

There is no point in a railway that does not go to somewhere productive unless there are military concerns that must be met. In Sierra Leone there were few defence threats so the railway would have to take the most remunerative path which led to the hunt to find a reasonable route for the railway in order for it to tap the resources of the colony.⁹⁷ Still,

95 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.16-9

96 Great Britain, *Railway schemes for the colony of Sierra Leone: Address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, August 1st, 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.7-13

97 Great Britain, Cardew, Frederick, *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.10

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Governor Cardew also stated that the railway would greatly assist in the administrative and military control of the country and that it was a necessity of the times. The Intelligence Division of the British military commented on the railway plans too. The Division believed that the increase in commerce and civilization would be very beneficial. They also did not think that French aggression posed much of a threat because it would cause war elsewhere too and thus not be worth the effort and potential French gain. The Division thought the line should be built as soon as possible even though it had no great strategic imperial importance since it would not protect the coaling station of Freetown, but instead would increase control over the country and therefore still an important asset to possess.⁹⁸

The choice of railway track gauge also grants insight into the reasoning behind the railway or more precisely the apprehensions. The 2ft. 6in. gauge was chosen for the line as it was thought the best adapted to the requirements of the colony. The uncertain nature of trade growth, reactions of the native population and other economic aspects made the smaller gauge a safer choice since it would cost less and thus not put as much pressure on the colony's finances. To try to estimate how the Africans would react to the railway the administration used the Senegal railway as a point of reference for possible future use for passenger and goods transport which turned out to be favourable. The Manchester Chamber of Commerce, which was eager for a railway in Sierra Leone, concurred with the gauge out of concern with costs and a desire for savings to be made. These apprehensions were confirmed by Cardew's doubts as to whether a private enterprise would have the confidence in the prospects of the colony to invest its capital in a railway there, especially without a substantial guarantee from the government. He thought it better that the government manage the whole thing from a political and economic point of view because there would be less friction with the native Africans and it would be more efficiently managed (although he acknowledge the debate over the truth of the later statement).⁹⁹ In all, the commercial prospects of the colony were favourable but by no means guaranteed.

98 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.12-3

99 Great Britain, Cardew, Frederick, *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.12

This in turn led to the desire for savings to be made and a smaller gauge to be chosen. A railway was still desired but one that was wisely suited for the colony.

The proponents of the line thought that the railway would bring other benefits to the colony besides primary financial returns and Cardew stated that this could not be lost sight of. For instance, he stated that “the lands in the immediate vicinity of the railroad would become valuable. Merchants and capitalists would be attracted to the neighbourhood and would require labourers, who in their turn would become capitalists, and thus our Colony might, in a few years, make such progress as under present conditions would be impossible in half a century.”¹⁰⁰ He thought there existed a great opportunity for development, but that wealth of the country would probably not increase dramatically or rapidly. He argued that the key to development was to increase the wants of the native Africans. Cardew thought that although this might not be the most ethical thing to do it may be necessary and would increase their standard of living.¹⁰¹ In essence, the railway proponents thought that the railway would bring economic, social and administrative progress along with better security to one of Britain's smallest West African colonies or in other words the Sierra Leone railway would develop the 'colonial estate' as Chamberlain had desired.

6. Gold Coast:

The experience of the Gold Coast was similar to Sierra Leone's in many ways, but unique in West Africa because of its mineral wealth. Unlike in Sierra Leone, the British expected the Gold Coast railway to pay much sooner and still have just as important a developmental impact. The majority of the reasons for wanting to build the Gold Coast railway were economic in nature with some strategic concerns about unrest in the Ashanti region and the French emerging on occasion. The Gold Coast had more resources than gold, such as timber and palm products, but the gold was known and most expected to allow the railway to cover its costs and even make a profit.

100Great Britain, Cardew, Frederick, *Railway schemes: Sierra Leone: address given at the meeting of the legislative council of Sierra Leone, Freetown, May 1st 1895*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1895. p.19

101Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.18

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Construction of the Gold Coast railway commenced in 1898 from Sekondi to the interior, reaching Tarquah in April 1901.¹⁰² Much debate erupted amongst those seeking a railway over the starting point of the railway on the coast due the lack of a naturally suitable harbour. Many towns on the coast wanted the railway to start at their location as it would bring in large sums of money. This debate stalled the construction of the railway but illustrates the great desire elicited by the colony and its mercantile and administrative population.

To Develop Mining and Other Goods

There were many economic reasons for building the railway and economic reasoning was by far the largest motivating factor for building one. One of the most obvious reasons for building the railway was the gold deposits in parts of the colony. The importance of railways to the mining industry emerged in a colonial report which stated “The one thing absolutely necessary to develop the country is railways...until railway communication is established it will be impossible for the different mines to open up their works in a satisfactory manner.” A large number of mining companies awaited the completion of the Secondee-Tarquah railway so they could transport their machinery which was too heavy to transport by the various other means available.¹⁰³ Some dissent in regards to the route arose due in part to the mines. The railway surveyors proposed that the railway should take an Easterly route which a journalist at *The Railway Times*, a railway focused newspaper, thought was in an area that seemed to be well furnished with water transport. The author noted that it seemed to be going that way only for the gold mines. The author also pointed out that he came across many others who thought that it would be better to build it in the Western portion of the colony as that region could furnish it well with palm products, mahogany, cedar, gums, rubber, skins, and ivory and possibly more gold. But the British and colonial government recognized that mines needed the railway in order to develop. Building further West would also have the added advantage of protection against the French as the journalist noted in the article “The urgency of supplying this want

102 J. D., Fage, *Ghana*, (University of Wisconsin Press), 1959. p.396

103 Great Britain, *Colonial reports--annual. No. 271. Gold Coast. Annual report for 1898*. C.9498-5, House of Commons, 1899. p.32

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is insisted upon strongly, particularly in view of the fact that the western province is being 'hemmed in' by French aggression."¹⁰⁴ The gold mining industry had a powerful influence yet there were still others that advocated for development in other areas of the colonial economy. Still, those engaged by the newspaper believed that a railway would develop the economy and be beneficial to the economic, defensive and administrative interests of the Gold Coast.

The products of the Gold Coast consisted of mostly agricultural goods, with gold as the main mineral export. The main products included rubber, palm oil, palm kernels, timber and Kola nuts, with cocoa, coffee and copra comprised the minor products. Rubber was seen as an important industry, as it was growing, however this was limited because the trees existed in areas unhealthy for Europeans and it cost so much to transport to the ports that it was not always profitable. The same situation, as mentioned before, existed for the gold mining industry which had been hampered by an inability to transport the heavy machinery to the mines. This is why the railway was expected to bring a boost to the industry leading to new mines being opened and more goods in general being exported.¹⁰⁵

For the Population

The Gold Coast had a large population which could be served by a railway and a large amount of agricultural and forest goods which could travel on the route.¹⁰⁶ This meant that the line had potential for good cargo traffic, from products like palm oil and kernels, rubber, timber and gold if found in large quantities. The surveys the Colonial Office commissioned made special notes on the size of the population, the difficulty of building the route and the kinds of products that could be transported on it. This led to a conclusion that a railway would significantly decrease the costs of moving goods within the colony and a new railway and harbour in the Eastern portion would pay quickly, a very important consideration in a portion of the world that had met with so much scepticism

104 *The Railway Times*, Railways in West Africa, June 20, 1896.

105 Great Britain, *Trade and shipping of Africa*, C.9223, House of Commons, 1899. p.77-9

106 Great Britain, Shelford Frederick, *Address on West African Railways*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1900. p.11

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about its financial prospects.¹⁰⁷ The Gold Coast had many economically viable products which had been traded for some time and which the British thought would make the line profitable and aid economic development. These thoughts motivated the Gold Coast government to desire a railway to secure the Ashanti region and to increase gold production. The railroad would make possible the opening up of the forest regions and help cocoa production to expand.^{108 109} Cocoa was introduced into the country in 1879 with the first exports in 1891. It was entirely a peasant industry which meant that prices affected a large number of people but it still provided an excellent means of improving the economic state of a large swathe of the population as it was altogether profitable.¹¹⁰

Passenger traffic was also considered in the various reports made by the Crown Agents. Passenger transport would be accommodated by attaching passenger cars to the freight trains as freight would be where the majority of revenue would come from. The West Coast railways were not made primarily to transport people around; instead, they focused mainly on trade goods with passenger transport as a secondary consideration.¹¹¹

Economic Concerns

Another source of insight into the expected economic impact is given by the Crown Agent for the colony R. G. Rogerson, an advisor to the Colonial Office on the railway affairs of a colony. He gives estimates as to the cost of building the railway and expected returns for both 3ft 6in and 2ft 6in gauge railways and settled on the former. This is after the surveyors made careful estimates about the potential traffic which not only showed economic concern but confidence that a larger gauge would pay for itself and was warranted by future growth.¹¹² The Agent often mentions the railway's need to be as cheap as possible but not be so cheap that it would hinder carrying capacity and future growth. It

107Great Britain, Shelford Frederick, *Address on West African Railways*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1900. p.14-6

108Cocoa became the most important export of the colony, it grew to provided more than half the worlds cocoa

109J. D., Fage, *Ghana*, (University of Wisconsin Press), 1959. p.65

110W. E. F., Ward, *History of Ghana*, (George Allen & Unwin), London, 1958. p.396

111Great Britain, *Crown Agents to Colonial Office, August 24, 1897*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1898. p.4

112Great Britain, *Crown Agents to Colonial Office, Gold Coast, Tarquah Railway survey*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office collection, 1897. p.1

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was recognized that lighter rails or a 2ft. 6in. gauge could reduce initial costs but could hamper the line in the future which would ultimately make it less profitable and less beneficial. A risk was still being taken, as timber, coal and gold were all important exports, but it was hard for the British to predict where new gold fields could emerge which could make the line more profitable or if the crops of the colony would pay well enough.¹¹³

The proposed routes give insight into the motives behind the railway. One of the proposed routes was between Sekondi and Takoradi via Mansu to Tarquah. This route followed an existing trade route closely, was said to be the shortest, cheapest and most easily maintained route for reaching Tarquah and was less exposed to floods than alternatives.¹¹⁴ In other words, it had good terrain and a pre-existing trade route, both of which would lessen costs and could make the line more profitable in the future. The surveyors and agents tried to estimate income and expenses as best they could but the Crown Agent stated that it was hard to do in a country with no railway experience. Still, many traders, chiefs, mining companies and those with lumber concessions along the line began looking forward to it being built.¹¹⁵

Some contentious issues and concerns arose in regards to building a railway in the Gold Coast. In an address to the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, the governor of the Gold Coast Sir William Maxwell outlined some of the concerns and hopes he had for the railway. He was anxious that improvements should be made to the harbours and infrastructure of the colony, stating that “Until we make a reasonably good port, multiply our roads, and establish a railway we cannot look for much solid improvement in trade at the Gold Coast.”¹¹⁶ The colony needed a good harbour before construction of a railway could begin, unlike Sierra Leone or Lagos where natural or convenient harbours already existed. Railway construction also brought up the issue of labour difficulties. He stated

113Great Britain, *Crown Agents to Colonial Office, Gold Coast, Tarquah Railway survey*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office collection, 1897.p.5-7

114Great Britain, *Crown Agents to Colonial Office, August 24, 1897*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1898. p.1

115Great Britain, *Crown Agents to Colonial Office, August 24, 1897*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1898. p.5, 10

116Great Britain, *Affairs of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: address delivered to the section in the banqueting hall of the exchange station hotel Liverpool*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1896. p.5

that the native Africans would leave their country to work in the Niger and Congo but do not stay close and work near home. The labour force posed serious obstacles and was taken into consideration.¹¹⁷

As to the benefit of and where the railway should go, Sir Maxwell stated that “A railway is wanted in the central or in the Western part of the colony in order to give ready access to the interior which is not furnished by the Volta river on the East. It would be advantageous to establish collecting and distributing centres which would answer the purpose of the trading towns found on the Volta. At present, trade is too much confined to the Coast. British traders have established themselves at the various ports of entry, and the field influenced by their operations ceases at the point inland at which the cost of transport is felt to be prohibitive. A railway to the interior would furnish a succession of new trading centres, each commanding a radius for fresh commercial activity.”¹¹⁸ A railway would allow traders to move into the interior and thus be able to trade with more people and if the railway passed through a palm producing region one of the principal resources of the colony would be developed. A railway would also help encourage financiers to invest in the Gold Coast and develop the gold mines which in turn would increase revenue and economic development.¹¹⁹

Hatton Richards, an assistant colonial secretary of the Gold Coast, gave a paper to the Royal Colonial Institute in which he expressed his confidence and desire for a railway and confirmed the near unanimous nature of the support for a railway in that colony from the Colonial Office. He stated that multiple railways would need to be built, that only one would be of no use for the colony, something few others mention. He confirmed that timber, mainly mahogany, and gold were the two industries that would pay for the railway and he predicted that the railway would be remunerative immediately. He was also confident that plenty of gold existed because the colony had produced so much over the past few centuries and only from the native population scratching the ground. However,

117Great Britain, *Affairs of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: address delivered to the section in the banqueting hall of the exchange station hotel Liverpool*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1896. p.14

118Great Britain, *Affairs of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: address delivered to the section in the banqueting hall of the exchange station hotel Liverpool*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1896. p.17

119Great Britain, *Affairs of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: address delivered to the section in the banqueting hall of the exchange station hotel Liverpool*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1896. p.35

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the use of machinery would be necessary to yield much more and this required a railway. Richards also thought that the harbour could be made into a coaling station and a light railway could connect it with Accra, the capital. This would make it more useful and more prosperous. He did differ from other commentators in that he did not expect labour to be much of an issue.¹²⁰

Interest Groups

Special interest groups also played an important role instigating for a railway in the Gold Coast. Insight into some of these interests can be gleaned from the communications about the railway sent to and from the Colonial Office. Many of these communications went from the Office to the various Chambers of Commerce as well as between the railway surveyors and other political bodies concerned. The motives for a railway are again very similar to those already discussed which shows the general consensus within the political and economic community of the time as to which imperial priorities should be serviced. Within these groups consensus existed about most points, like a railway would grant access to large amounts of products and population in the interior which meant more trade and revenue, but there were still some differences in regards to others. For instance, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce thought that more roads should be built as they were cheaper and still improved access to markets.¹²¹ Yet others, like the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, still urged the Colonial Office to construct railways in the Gold Coast as the primary means of improving transport. These bodies pointed out that France had built one in Senegal and the Congo had one too. They did not mind if it was public or privately built they just wanted one, as it would enhance trade as well as British prestige in the region.¹²²

The Chambers of Commerce were naturally concerned with improving trade. Liverpool was a large shipping centre and dealt with much of the imports and exports within the British empire, while Manchester and other such cities manufactured the goods that could be sold in places like West Africa and who needed the raw materials to do such

120 Great Britain, Hatton Richards, *The Gold Coast Colony: paper read at the Royal Colonial Institute on 23rd Nov. 1897.*, Foreign and commonwealth office collection, 1897.

121 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies.* CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.61

122 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies.* CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.68

things. At the time of discussing the railway, Jan. 1895, a depression in trade existed. A future solution and a source for increased trade lay within the potential results of railways in West Africa. After all, the British needed tropical goods and the colonists needed manufactures.¹²³ The Gold Coast had better prospects than Sierra Leone with its larger population, more resources and a large existing trade. The colony would thus benefit the businesses of Britain.¹²⁴ The Accra Chamber of Commerce also yearned for a railway and concurred with the views of the various British Chambers of Commerce. They expressed their hopes and concerns about the railway, that it would increase trade, but also that it would need feeder lines in order to be successful. They also expressed concern about the Germans who they stated as making determined efforts in the region economically and politically.¹²⁵ All of these concerns were voiced to the British government who was happy to receive the opinions of the mercantile groups as they want to ensure things were done right and these groups knew the trade routes and potential of the colony best.

Many of the hoped for benefits that a railway would bring the the Gold Coast were expressed in a large deputation of members from the Chambers of Commerce and some politicians led by Sir. Baden Powell to the then Colonial Secretary Lord Ripon. They believed the railways would bring peace, better administration and more trade like the French line in Senegal. The deputation thought that Britain was falling behind the competition in the area (the French and Germans) and that the merchants had done all they could to develop trade but needed better transportation to do more.

The deputation point out that the colony's products were wasted and more could be sold for the benefit of all if it could get to market cheaply and quickly. Railways were preferred to roads because the tsetse fly devastated transport animals and because a large amount of goods were wasted during the slow human transport. These forms of transport were also very expensive and time consuming. Besides this, they found it hard to train the Africans properly in the production of goods like palm oil due to a lack of access to the

123 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.72

124 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.76

125 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.85-7

interior. On top of these concerns they hoped that Railways would increase 'civility' by removing inter-tribal tariffs and enhance the prestige of the nation along with improving organization. The railway would connect the people of the coast with what the deputation deemed the more intelligent and industrious population in the North. These people would supposedly work harder and contribute more to the economic growth of the colony. The railway could also improve the health of the European population there and allow those that felt sick to be moved to higher and healthier places, an ever-present concern in West Africa.¹²⁶

The deputation to press Lord Ripon to commence these lines was successful in illustrating the support that existed for the railways in West Africa within the economic community. However, it had limited effect due to the changing of the government which forced him to resign as the deputation arrived thus he had little ability to do anything, but said he would communicate their position to his successor. In this instance the deputation were fortunate as Chamberlain, who wanted these lines already, replaced Ripon at the Colonial Office. In essence Ripon got things moving and Chamberlain continued the momentum and sealed the deal. Ripon felt the importance of the railways and advanced the issue while in office. He stated that it was the feeling of the ministers of government that trade should be developed and railways were an effective means of accomplishing that task.¹²⁷

Other Non-Trade Reasons

An Intelligence Report on the topic of a railway in the Gold Coast stated that little threat existed from the French militarily in the Gold Coast. This meant that the railway only embodied economic strategic value and would only be of defensive value domestically.¹²⁸ Perpetual concern existed in regards to Ashanti but it was thought that the railway would bring about more direct communication and allow for the pacification and 'civilization' of the native populations including those of Ashanti. The line would also fulfil

126 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.94-8

127 *The Railway Times*, Railways on the Gold Coast, June 29, 1895.

128 Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.77-8

a desire to prevent any further alienation of trade. Goods were bought and sold by the merchants in one territory which meant that trade needed to occur in British territory or else the trade would be lost to the French or Germans. A railway also had preference as the roads that existed were very poor and it would be quicker and more efficient in its purposes. The authors of the report also thought that a railway could prevent conflict because the tribes would know they could not win, and any conflicts that did arise would be cheaper due to lower transport costs and attrition from illness.¹²⁹

Another social element for wanting a railway is given by Governor Maxwell who made a statement that “the conviction that the construction of railway works will be a most important and valuable object lesson for all classes of natives in the country and a great civilizing agency, that make those who are interested in the future of the Gold Coast warm advocates of a railway policy.”¹³⁰ He believed not only in the economic need for but a philanthropic advantage of the railway and thought that it would help spread British civilization and administration into the interior.

There were many reasons for wanting a railway in the Gold Coast, after all, the trade of the colony was increasing, with imports and exports rising to both Britain and foreign countries. Much would need to be imported for public works construction and mining which would help British exports and the colony's other products would rise in quantity, this including lumber, palm products, coffee, cocoa and kola nuts. The author of an article in the *Economist* in March 1896 also thought that the natives population would began to prove reliable in regards to labour, and begin “to feel and appreciate the benefits of civilization” and that “with better means of communication a steady development of trade and commerce in the colony will it is believed take place”.¹³¹

7. **Lagos**

The why behind the Lagos railway is similar to that of the other West African

129Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.95-8

130Great Britain, *Affairs of the Gold Coast and Ashanti: address delivered to the section in the banqueting hall of the exchange station hotel Liverpool*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1896.p.17

131 *The Economist*, Trade in the Gold Coast, March 21, 1896.

colonies. Economic factors played the most prominent role and it seemed that the potential for success was less in question than in other colonies like Sierra Leone. Lagos was the principal seat of trade on the West Coast in palm oil and kernels. Lagos city laid at the mouth of an extensive lagoon with rivers connected to it creating a favourable means for inland communication and conveyance of goods. However, the entrance was shallow and could not be used by heavy steam ships which necessitated the use of smaller boats to transport goods across the bar, a costly and often dangerous process. Still, it was the only harbour for 1,500 miles of coast and thus remained an important trading centre.¹³² It was this trading importance that made the British want to improve its economic prospects through a railway. The first section of the Lagos railway, from Lagos to Otta covered 20 miles and was built on the 3ft. 6in. gauge. It was authorized by the British government in December 1895 with construction beginning in March, 1896 finishing in September, 1897.

Development

It was thought a railway would develop the interior so long as more merchants came along and set up establishments along the line. Lagos had similar products to the other West African colonies, mainly palm products and other tropical goods.¹³³ The railway was thought of early in the 1890s as a potential source of improvement. For instance, Governor Sir Gilbert Carter made an expedition through the interior of Lagos in early 1893 for political reasons but paid special attention to the surrounding area for railway purposes stating that there was ample room for a railway through the country.¹³⁴ The colonial and British governments both thought that railways were necessary if the West African colonies were to be opened up for trade with Britain, which would increase trade in West Africa thus benefiting both the manufacturers in Britain and the Africans in the colonies.¹³⁵ It was stated in the annual colonial report for 1895 that “The facilities offered by a railway, both

132 Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.2

133 Great Britain, Shelford, Frederick, *Address on West African Railways, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1900*. p.18

134 Great Britain, *West Africa. Papers relating to the construction of railways in Sierra Leone, Lagos, and the Gold Coast*, Cd. 2325, House of Commons, 1905. p.5.

135 Great Britain, Shelford, Frederick, *Address on West African Railways, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, 1900*. p.21-3

for the development of trade and for Government purposes, can hardly be overrated in such a Colony as Lagos, where carts and cart roads are unknown, rivers are open for a few months in the year only, and the rich produce of the interior must still be carried to the coast in 40 or 50 lb. loads on the heads of natives, a method of transport as costly as it is primitive.”¹³⁶ It is clear from this description that the proponents of a railway thought that it would immensely develop the country by tremendously improving the mode of transportation. A railway could carry more goods more cheaply and more quickly than any means available in the colony at the time. A railway would also fit well into Lagos as it was a relatively narrow colony from coast to interior which meant that a larger percentage of the territory could be serviced by a trunk line with less reliance on subsequent branch lines to feed it.

Interest Groups

Other interested parties also sought a railway for economic reasons. The Liverpool and Manchester Chambers of Commerce considered the most advantageous routes for the proposed railway from Lagos to the populous interior towns. Both Chambers wanted to be unanimous in their considerations and recommendations for the line as they were the two that would be most involved in the trade and were the most interested non-political participants. They wanted this pioneering line to be a success for economic and political reasons and for its prestige value.¹³⁷ The Colonial Office made some notes on the railway although far fewer about the reasons for wanting it in the first place than the other West African lines. Much time is spent discussing the harbour and bridges that were proposed and not much on the viability or desirability of the railway. It seems that it had already been acknowledged that it had good economic potential and that its strategic implications were limited outside economic development and internal order.¹³⁸ In other words, talk of threats like the French rarely emerged or any concern that the railway would not pay for itself in the future.

¹³⁶Great Britain, *Colonial reports, Annual. No. 185. Lagos. Annual report for 1895*, C.8279-9, House of Commons, 1897. p.5

¹³⁷*The Railway Times*, Lagos Railway Project, Jan. 11, 1896.

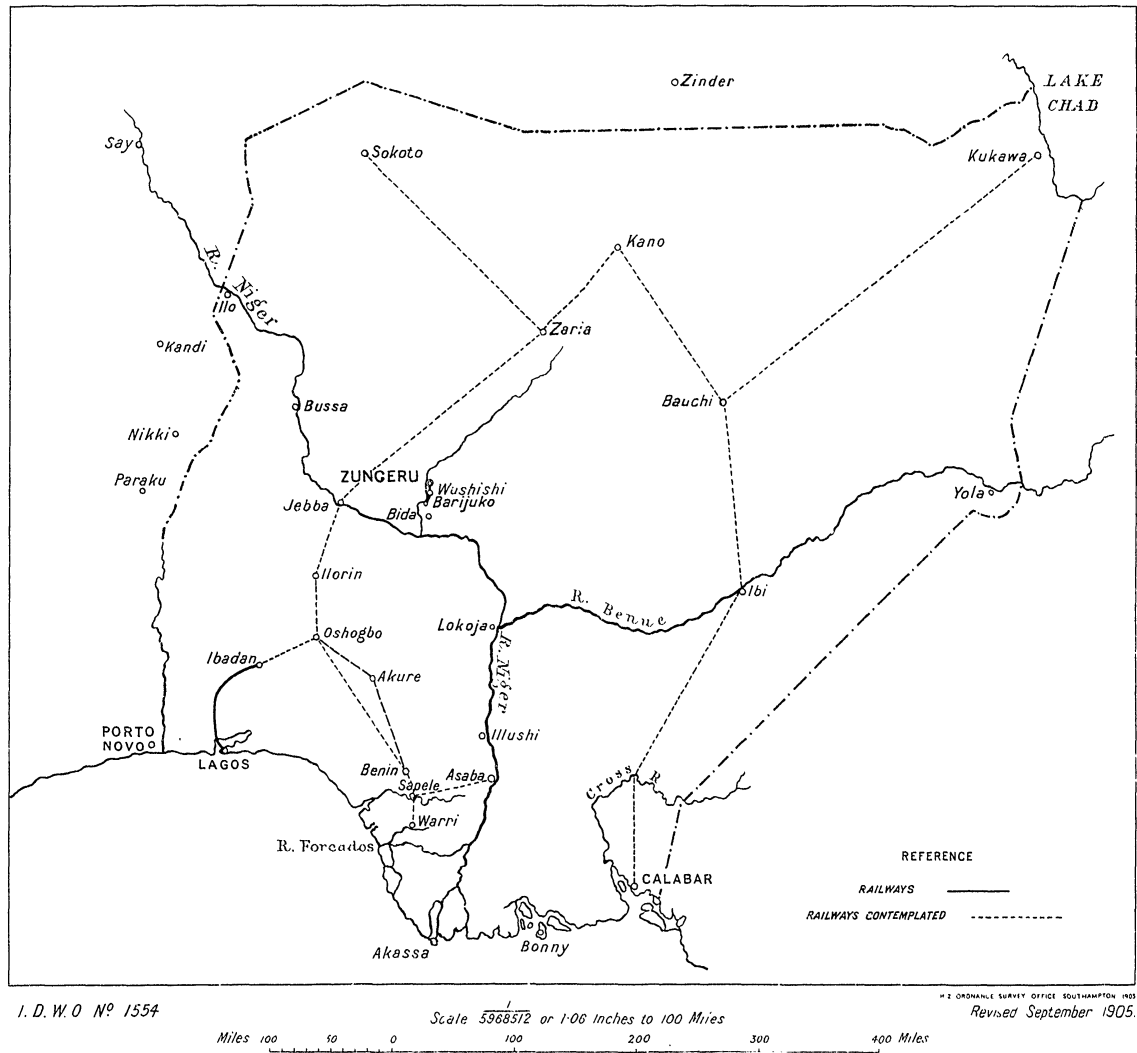
¹³⁸Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.127-161

The expectations behind the railway consisted of it increasing trade, servicing the people and causing some marauding tribes to cease their violent activities.¹³⁹ The British commentators also noted that the line could only be successful if it went to the major towns and terminated on Lagos Island, the later point causing a large debate due to costs because of the necessary bridge and harbour works. The railway would have to compete with some river traffic and thus it could not cost too much and had to do a much more proficient job getting goods to port and back cheaply and quickly.¹⁴⁰ It already had the benefit as mentioned before of being able to work all year and it would be a much more direct means of transportation than by river. In all, the debate over the Lagos railway was the smallest yet still revolved around mainly trade development like the other three lines in the region. Internal order was another motive but protection against other powers like the French or Germans did not play a significant role in the desire for a railway by those agitating for one.

¹³⁹Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.126

¹⁴⁰Great Britain, *West Africa, Further Correspondence respecting the proposed construction of railway in the West African Colonies*. CO 879/40/4 Colonial Office, 1898. p.163-4

9. Nigeria



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Nigeria's first railway was built last amongst the West African colonies. Nigeria was split between Southern and Northern Nigeria until amalgamation in 1914. They were brought under Colonial Office supervision as separate protectorates in 1900 and Southern Nigeria acquired the status of colony and protectorate in 1906. Before this time the area was administered by the Royal Niger Company, a chartered company with a monopoly on trade up the Niger river. The first railway built in this region stretched across Northern Nigeria from the Niger river inland and connected with the Lagos railway. It was not as pressing to build a railway in Nigeria because of the Niger, a mostly navigable river that ran through the colony North-South. This river provided a lot of transport for trade within the colony and would provide competition for any railway. It did have shallow portions that hindered some steamers but altogether was very useful for getting goods in and out of the region.¹⁴² The Baro-Kano railway, the line in Northern Nigeria which commenced in 1906, afford cheaper and more direct communication via the Niger. This combined with the Lagos railway after being pushed to the frontier made the country more suited for amalgamation of all three colonies, a process that formed the third most populous territory within the British Empire.¹⁴³

The railway started with the suggestion of the governor of Northern Nigeria the ardent imperialist Lord Frederick Lugard and planned by Sir Percy Girouard. Construction took place under local administration directed by Mr. Eaglesome. It would join the line from Lagos at Minna on the Niger river and be financed by Parliament who granted the funds. The words of an author of the Royal African Society sum up some of the confidence and main reasons for building the railway. "Railways will revolutionize the conditions of the Protectorate, and we can safely look forward to the day when the development of trade, brought about by the advent of the iron horse, will render the territory self-supporting and independent of the financial aid which it now has to receive form the Imperial Government."¹⁴⁴ Unlike the other lines in West Africa it had a greater role as a defensive

142Sir William N. M., Geary, *Nigeria Under British Rule*, (Frank Cass Publishers), London, 1965. p.144

143W. A., Crabtree. "Great Britain in West Africa", *Journal of The Royal African Society*. V19, April, 1920. p.199

144Bell, H. Hesketh, "Recent Progress in Northern Nigeria", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 1911. p.390

line too.

Opening Up the Territory for Development

It was thought during the time that the other railways were being authorized and began construction that the Niger Coast did not need a railway within the protectorate. It was stated that excellent waterways which tap the principal producing centres existed and that roads or established trade routes should be opened especially because the rivers were only navigable by small boats during the dry season.¹⁴⁵ A few good roads existed in the protectorate, but the principal means of transport remained water carriage on the rivers and creeks which formed a network to a distance of about 60 miles inland. This is the main reason why Southern Nigeria did not get a railway before Northern Nigeria, it had much better natural means of transportation.

As the North became more widely administered railways came to the forefront as the key to development. They would help to increase trade, spread the use of cash and help stabilize the colony allowing for a reduction in military expenditure. Nigeria was a rich country in natural resources and it was thought needed railway investment to realize its potential.¹⁴⁶ Lugard, talking to a group of the royal geographical society, stated that Northern Nigeria had had some tough times, like fighting with agitated tribes like Ashanti, but was developing well. It required a grant in aid for a few years as it was the newest colony and that “The one thing needed is a cheap form of transport to bring the produce of the country to the great waterways, and thus to open up a new and great market. This meant investment of capital in a great and productive 'estate' of the Empire.”¹⁴⁷ Emphasis is put on the economic development of the colony as that is the main point in its administration. It is also interesting to note the use of Chamberlain's idea of the colonial estate which illustrates the like mindedness of these two imperial proponents.

From the beginning the Nigerian railway was envisaged connecting to the Lagos railway. This would create a continuous link by rail to the sea and drive an efficient mode

145Great Britain, *Report on the administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate, 1894-95.*, C.7916 House of Commons, 1895. p.20

146Frederick D. Lugard, & Hesketh, Bell, “Northern Nigeria-Discussion”, *The Geographical Journal*, 1912.p.166

147*The Times*, Sir F. Lugard on Northern Nigeria, Nov 5, 1903.

of transport further into the interior. Lugard favoured this and believed it would be worth the expense creating a good harbour at Lagos and continuing the line into Northern Nigeria rather than creating another harbour and starting a railway from there which would cost just as much or more and would not travel through as dense a population or start from such a commercial centre as Lagos. As for where it should cross the Niger it remained a matter of cost of an easier crossing versus expected gain from hitting all of the major population centres.¹⁴⁸

On the debate of where the railway should start from, a report in 1900 made the observation that the British had an opportunity to start fresh in Nigeria and lay tracks only where they were best suited. It pointed out that the West of the country had received most of the 'civilizing' attention and now the East should receive some. It was expected that the territory was rich in rubber and other native products and would pay just as well. It was mooted that a railway could go as far as lake Chad and run close to the German border which could take some trade from their colony. It would also give Eastern Nigeria great access to the sea, although it could not be too close to the Lagos line as that would foster too much competition.¹⁴⁹ Another reason for pushing the Lagos line North was the uncertainty of water transport by the Niger and the thought that it would make trade more profitable and pay for itself. The debate whether a railway should be continued from Lagos or built from Southern Nigeria North continued for some time. Sir R. Moor, one of the governors of Southern Nigeria, said to Chamberlain that it would take at least two main railways to open up the territory with any degree of success.¹⁵⁰ This illustrated the long term goal, but limited money was going to be spent on the prospects of this relatively new territory so only one could be built at the time. Lugard concurred with the sentiment that two railways needed to be built and stated so in a letter to Chamberlain saying "So vast an area rich in vegetable products cannot be served by a single railway in the extreme West." and that the Lagos railway should be extended but another should be built from Old Calabar to the

148Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.21-22

149Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.27-9

150Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.35

North end of Lake Chad. These two railways would strategically protect the two frontiers and help develop the economy of the colony. Further extending the Lagos railway to another port in the South would open up even more of the country there which was rich with a large population. Lugard also stated that the railway warranted assistance from the Imperial Treasury due to the strategic value and protection granted to a vulnerable part of the Empire. Plus, he had confidence that it would open up more of the country which would help it pay back.¹⁵¹

Economic Development

Most of the revenue for the line would come from agricultural goods unless some minerals were found. The estimates of the possibilities of Northern Nigeria could not be done accurately due to a lack of precise knowledge but observers still predicted trade would be great. As with elsewhere in British West Africa it was noted that the native population did not cultivate their agricultural and tropical goods very well. This meant that a lot of potential for growth in the market of producing such goods for export existed, it was also thought that much of the goods arriving at the current stop of the Lagos railway came from Northern Nigeria.

A large amount of trade in cotton and other native goods existed that could not be transported profitably adding to the potential trade along the line. This trade would help to introduce cash into the economy which would allow Africans to be able to buy more, including railway fares.¹⁵² The surveyors paid attention to cotton cultivation as they considered it an important crop and industry which could affect the decisions in London due to cotton's importance to industry in Britain. In discussing the potential trade in the report one member stated that "I see no prospect of any great increase in the present traffic unless a railway is built." The security of British rule had helped to facilitate trade but the abolition of slavery had hindered it since it made transport more expensive for the African middlemen who partook in the business. Thus the increase in facilities and decrease in cost of transport would result in immediate expansion of trade resulting in Shea butter and

151 Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.40

152 Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.107

cotton becoming big exports.¹⁵³ It was also thought by those who wanted a railway that trade would increase as costs would come down the further North the railway went.¹⁵⁴

Chamberlain wanted the territories of Lagos and the two Nigerias to be self supporting as early as possible. He believed advancing their economies with railways could do this quickest. It would for instance open up the Hausa markets through Kano, a major market town in the North, bringing its produce to the coast. He also believed that a large portion of this trade would be diverted away from Lagos and the Niger Delta into French or German territories where railways were being pushed ahead, if the British did not respond.¹⁵⁵ This is possibly fear mongering, yet it still seems to be a plausible scenario and one the British merchants and politicians cared about and took seriously.

Servicing the largest number of people possible also played a role in the decision process. Sir W. MacGregor, the Lagos governor, stated that the objective of the railway is to serve the people of the country. This is one reason why Sir MacGregor disagreed with extending the Lagos railway North through a Western route to Illorin, a Northern city in Lagos, because the Eastern one would serve more people even though it would be slightly more costly. He thought that the areas that a railway would pass through were thriving centres of industry and trade. The Eastern route was eventually settled on which illustrates that the development of the economy and the servicing of more people was more important than initial costs. This is probably due to the probability that it would pay more, showing that long-term finances play a significant role in the decision making process.¹⁵⁶

Defence

Strategic consideration came into play with the discussion about where to build the Nigerian railway too. The French were considering building a railway from Algeria to Lake Chad which would undermine some of the political and commercial security in the

153Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.177-8

154Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.53-4

155Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.43-9

156Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.58-62

region. Nigeria had to take this into consideration and build accordingly, and it was thought that extending the railway afforded the best protection in peace and war. Commercially it did not matter which line carried the goods to market but defensively it mattered where men and equipment could go. Besides this, the Niger could not be counted on to transport troops North and railways were much quicker and more reliable.¹⁵⁷

Lugard also pointed out the extraordinary efforts made by France to extend their railways in West Africa. He stated this forced upon the British the need for similar effort “as a measure of defence, even though it might have been considered premature from the point of view of development only. It is, therefore, chiefly from the former standpoint that the urgency of railway construction should, in my view, be considered.” The French were building or extending railways or conducting surveys in all of their West African colonies and setting aside money for it continuously. This hardened Lugard's view that it was “No less imperative in West Africa than it was in Uganda to connect our far distant territories with the sea by means of the two main trunk lines.” He thought the trunk lines were important for Imperial defence and should be aided by Imperial money but also that the branch lines and feeders should be developed by the country's resources after the completion of the trunk lines.¹⁵⁸ For Lugard the necessity of a railway was urgent since the French continued pushing forward their line from Dahomey to Saye with the intention of capturing the trade of the Haussa States, a land within the sphere of Nigeria. He reckoned that if the railway was begun soon then it would defend British trade from being deflected to French territory, but if it was delayed until the Lagos railway reached the Niger it could be many years away and much trade would be lost.

The railway would also fill the necessary role as a means for transporting supplies to garrisons and administrative staff. It would also be an effective means for the rapid concentration of troops, increased mobility being equal to numerical increase and thus a savings on expenditure on troops. The railway would be a more certain method especially as carriers became more difficult to hire as the economy grew with the increase in

157Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.30-1

158Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.40-1

agriculture and trade that had been allowed by the peace and end to slavery the British brought.¹⁵⁹

Improved Administration

Other factors taken into account consisted of the cost to the government of providing essential transport which was enormous and increasing. A railway could decrease these costs. The increase in exports would increase revenue which would render the protectorate self supporting, a desire shared by both Chamberlain and Lugard. The railway would also improve administration of the colony by decreasing the time it took administrators to reach and return from their posts which at the time increased costs and crippled the administration a bit as it slowed down its work. To hasten this process Lugard states that the line should be 2ft. 6in. Instead of a 3ft. 6in. gauge so that it would be cheaper and could be built sooner. He stated that it would take many years and the French line would be completed in a few. He also thought that it would not be worth the investment of the larger gauge railway until the country was better known and more developed. The later statement differs from most of the other proponents of a railway as they thought the territory would be capable of producing large quantities of goods quite quickly.

The surveyors for instance expected rapid development in traffic and planned for the eventual extension to the sea. The surveyors suggested the railway should be 3ft. 6in. gauge. although a smaller gauge or of lighter type could effect a savings in the first instance the future prospects of the line and the possible connection with the Lagos railway did not warrant it. Either way both would concur that “The immediate construction of a railway from the Niger to Kano is essential to the agricultural and commercial development of Northern Nigeria, and would enable the Government to reduce the cost of administration while increasing its efficiency.”¹⁶⁰ Another reason why they protested against Lugard's suggestion of a 2ft. 6in. gauge line was that it would sacrifice the future of Nigeria for initial savings and they did not want to repeat the mistakes of India and Australia where

159Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.93-4

160Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.141

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two gauges existed and caused problems.¹⁶¹

The Path of the Railway

Whether a new railway should be built to the North or whether the Lagos railway should be continued North first also stirred some debate as did the path it should take. Both of these debates illustrate some of the main reasons for why the railway should be built. Lugard, for instance, thought that another railway in Nigeria would better serve the territory and that the Lagos extension would serve more administrative and defensive purposes. He began to think that the expenditure on Lagos not worth it. He thought the line from Old Calabar should go further East than what others were saying because he thought it would be more profitable, plus it could tap some of the Kameruns hinterland and form a strong strategic line on the Eastern frontier. Northern Nigeria would be served by either line and the river so either would work in that regard.¹⁶²

The paramount urgency was to build a line from an accessible port on the Niger that traversed the main lines of trade and centres of population. This would allow the produce of Northern Nigeria to get from the interior to the ports. It was not necessary for the railway to connect with Lagos or the East in order for it to be a success. In many ways the Nigerian railway was regarded as a separate issue from the extension of the Lagos railway, although the direction the railway should go did matter. Regardless of where the railway would go an argument existed for early commencement of the railway because the surplus products of the country needed an outlet and the population began to move towards the banks of the Niger because of the better transport facilities there thus draining the lands that would be likely to repay cultivation.

In all, the Nigerian railway had a more significant defensive role than the other West African colonies yet its proponents still wanted it for economic reasons. It would allow goods from the North get to the Niger more easily and it could help the Lagos railway be more remunerative thus helping that colony too.

¹⁶¹Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.198

¹⁶²Great Britain, *Nigeria. Correspondence relating to railway construction in Nigeria*, Cd. 2787, House of Commons, 1906. p.95-99

10. The Railways of West Africa in the Context of British sub-Saharan Africa:

The reasons for building the railways in other parts of British Sub-Saharan Africa were slightly different from those in West Africa. This difference illustrates the importance of studying more than a small selection of colonial railways; all were built for broadly the same strategic, economic and political reasons, but the balance between these factors might vary considerably from location to location.

The railways of South Africa for instance were built to develop control over the region, either independence for the Boers or control of the diamond and gold fields and Boers for the Cape. The railways were desired to increase military mobility and it was hoped that trunk line profits would help subsidize local lines which would develop industries like agriculture. The railways of the South were constantly caught up in the struggle to further republicanism or imperialism. They were often political in nature although they provided a large sum to the revenue of the colony and the trade between Britain and South Africa. The South African railways are most similar to the Gold Coast in that gold was involved and Nigeria in that they helped lead to amalgamation, a goal behind the construction of both lines. The South African lines were in most other ways not similar to West Africa in their primary purposes on account of the political struggle between the Boers and British and the fact that a large amount of the trade and industry of the area was already much more developed thanks to the large number of European immigrants.¹⁶³

The railways of Central Africa grew out of those in South Africa. These lines were built mainly by the British South African Company, owned by Cecil Rhodes. The railways this company built in Bechuanaland and up into Rhodesia were political as well as economic. The British South Africa Company wanted to put pressure on the Boer republics and desired a lucrative gold field for itself. The search for mineral success did not come in the form of gold or diamonds but copper. The copper mines in Rhodesia demanded railways in order for them to be developed and for them to get the ore to market. Again, the only West African colony with some similarity is the Gold Coast where the gold mines

¹⁶³ Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.175

required a railway in order for the machinery to get to the mines and the ore to market. Beyond that, the political and economic nature of the Central African lines differed them from West Africa, most likely because a chartered company built most of the railways there. The company needed profits and there was little other than mining to develop at the time. Cecil Rhodes's Cape to Cairo idea also played a role, although the lines being built North had to pay their way.¹⁶⁴

The East African railway, or the Uganda railway, had the most in common with those of Central Africa. The arguments principally in favour of a British Protectorate over East Africa and later a railway, were philanthropic, strategic, and commercial. The British wanted to finish off and prevent the slave trade, prevent German supremacy in the area, secure the source of the Nile and develop a somewhat promising region. Far sighted strategy and speculation led the way. It was thought that controlling the source of the Nile would secure Egypt and thus the Suez Canal and help to secure a North-South continuum of British territory. The British had a naval squadron posted off the coast of East Africa to prevent the slave trade, but it was recognized that a railway would be the best means of ceasing the trade and more remunerative than a naval squadron.¹⁶⁵ The anti slavery nature of the line, the lack of a white colonist population agitating for one and the uncertainty of its future were the most similar characteristic it had with West Africa. The speculative nature of the economic worth of the region was similar to that of Central Africa as well, as the railways of the later region sought a lucrative source of valuable ore. The strategic purpose was somewhat unique as it was made to protect another colony and secure a new territory for the British unlike West Africa where existing influence was being protected and imperial strategy did not come into play much.

The somewhat unique nature of the railways in British tropical and West Africa make them important to study. The study of these lines illustrates how various local and imperial conditions played into the reasons for building railways. Analysing these lines fills in the picture of railway and imperial history more fully and fits in well with existing

164 Clarence B., Davis, Kenneth E., Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*, (Greenwood Press), London, 1991. p.175

165 Alex, Johnston, "Fresh Fields for African Railways", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Apr. 1904. p.28

historiography. One direction one could further the history of the empire and railway imperialism is a comparative study between all of the various regions of Africa and the empire. Much light could be shed on the mentalities of the people, regions, political and strategic nature and economic conditions of the British empire.

11. Conclusion:

As illustrated in this dissertation, the reasons for building railways in West Africa are four fold; economic development; the betterment of the native population; more effective administration; and improved defence. Of these, economic issues were the most significant. The various members of society that commented on or had an interest in West African railways concurred with these four points although to varying degrees. The economic bodies, mainly the various Chambers of Commerce, held improved trade as the greatest goal with defence of that trade coming second. They also had an interest in Africans and the administrations being better off financially and materially because that in turn would increase trade with them. The British and colonial governments wanted the increased revenue that the railways would bring through increased trade and desired better communications in order to facilitate improved administrative capabilities.

Politicians like Chamberlain also saw railways in West Africa as a means of aiding Britain's manufacturing industries. Railways in West Africa would also further enhance the prestige of Britain in these colonies, or at least helped the imperial power catch up with its main rivals who were already constructing railways. Such considerations were the subject of considerable public interest, and witnessed by discussion in the press. Although the evidence is limited by a lack of time to search more widely, there is little sign that newspapers took up much of an independent opinion; although they too clearly supported the policy of colonial improvement through railway construction.

The various colonies themselves differed little in their primary reasons for building the railways. All wanted them for the above mentioned four reasons. Nigeria was by far the most unusual of the four; it built its railways later than elsewhere, and had a greater interest in using them as a form of self defence. Nonetheless, economic development was

the primary reason throughout the region for wanting railways. The colonies wanted to tap the resources and population of the interior thus increasing trade and revenue. The prevention of French and German incursions into British territory or more likely British trading area had a profound if secondary effect. Of course such consideration ultimately referred back to economic imperatives, as the British did not want to lose the benefits of exporting manufactures and importing raw materials. Thirdly, like any wise administration the imperial elite in each colony cared about the well-being of their populations and, no doubt sincerely, stated that railways would be of benefit to indigenous populations by finishing slavery, limiting the liquor trade and improving standards of living through better economic prospects. Thus although any railway would cost a large sum of money almost all parties involved thought that it would be worth the expense and that in time the railways would pay for themselves. The only colony that elicited any scepticism was Sierra Leone; but even there many thought the railway would pay as the colony developed more. Even if the railways did not pay, most believed that the expense and effort would be worth it through the indirect gains from other forms of revenue or from the overall betterment of the economy, society and the defensive gains rendered by the railways.

All of this ties together the historiography of West Africa, the British empire and the study of railways. It illustrates the main motives for building the railways and how historical actors' discussions about colonial railways shaped policies intended to improve various aspects of the colonies beyond the narrowly economic. Nevertheless, this study suggests that those historians who highlight the fundamentally economic nature of the British Empire are right, at least as far as the motivations for railway construction were concerned. It complements works like Clarence Davis's *Railway Imperialism* by examining the motivations behind constructing railways in an area the book does not examine. It also fits in well with the study of economic imperialism and the shift from informal to formal imperialism. Further work can be done on other colonial areas to see how motives changed or did not and the effect time had on the reasons for building railways. Studying the effects of the railways and seeing how those effects matched the original intentions is another area of potential further study. One could also further study

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the relation various interest groups, like the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, had with colonial railways. All of these potential works would enhance the understanding of railway and imperial history.

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