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'Railways in Southern Persia. Note by Colonel E.C.S. Williams, R.E., C.I.E.'

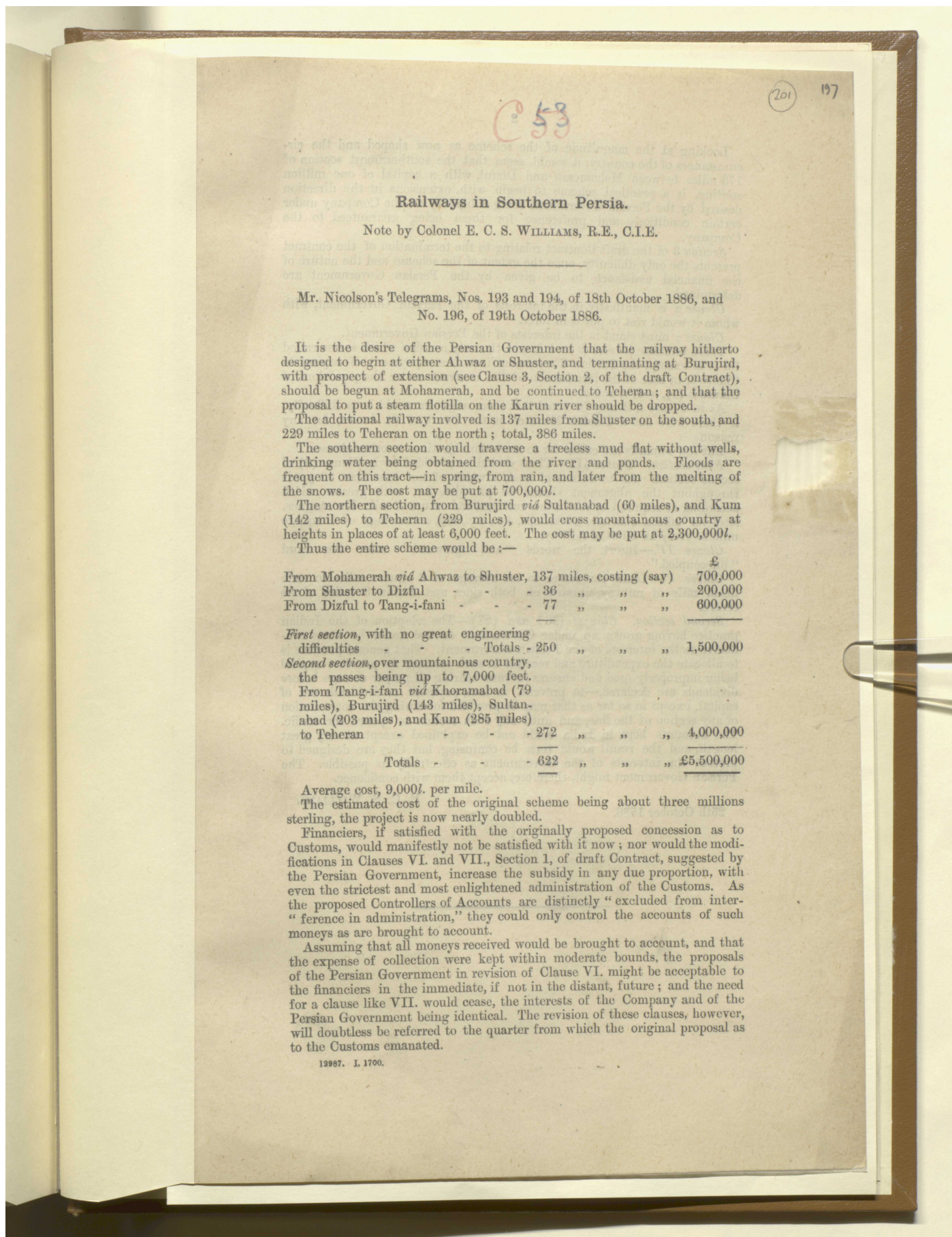
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About this record

This file consists of a note written by Colonel Edward Charles Sparshott Williams, in which the author assesses the new practicalities and costs introduced by the Persian Government's desire to extend the proposed construction of a railway all the way from Mohamerah [Khorramshahr] to Teheran [Tehran]. He also makes specific comments and suggestions relating to clauses in the draft contract for construction of the railway.

'Railways in Southern Persia. Note by Colonel E.C.S. Williams, R.E., C.I.E.'
[201r] (1/2)



Railways in Southern Persia.

Note by Colonel E. C. S. WILLIAMS, R.E., C.I.E.

Mr. Nicolson's Telegrams, Nos. 193 and 194, of 18th October 1886, and
No. 196, of 19th October 1886.

It is the desire of the Persian Government that the railway hitherto designed to begin at either Ahwaz or Shuster, and terminating at Burujird, with prospect of extension (see Clause 3, Section 2, of the draft Contract), should be begun at Mohamerah, and be continued to Teheran; and that the proposal to put a steam flotilla on the Karun river should be dropped.

The additional railway involved is 137 miles from Shuster on the south, and 229 miles to Teheran on the north; total, 386 miles.

The southern section would traverse a treeless mud flat without wells, drinking water being obtained from the river and ponds. Floods are frequent on this tract—in spring, from rain, and later from the melting of the snows. The cost may be put at 700,000.

The northern section, from Burujird *via* Sultanabad (60 miles), and Kum (142 miles) to Teheran (229 miles), would cross mountainous country at heights in places of at least 6,000 feet. The cost may be put at 2,300,000.

Thus the entire scheme would be:—

	£
From Mohamerah <i>via</i> Ahwaz to Shuster, 137 miles, costing (say)	700,000
From Shuster to Dizful - - - 36 " " "	200,000
From Dizful to Tang-i-fani - - - 77 " " "	600,000
<hr/>	
First section, with no great engineering difficulties - Totals - 250 " " "	1,500,000
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Second section, over mountainous country, the passes being up to 7,000 feet.	
From Tang-i-fani <i>via</i> Khoramabad (79 miles), Burujird (143 miles), Sultanabad (203 miles), and Kum (285 miles) to Teheran - - - 272 " " "	4,000,000
Totals - - - 622 " " "	£5,500,000

Average cost, 9,000% per mile.

The estimated cost of the original scheme being about three millions sterling, the project is now nearly doubled.

Financiers, if satisfied with the originally proposed concession as to Customs, would manifestly not be satisfied with it now; nor would the modifications in Clauses VI. and VII., Section 1, of draft Contract, suggested by the Persian Government, increase the subsidy in any due proportion, with even the strictest and most enlightened administration of the Customs. As the proposed Controllers of Accounts are distinctly "excluded from interference in administration," they could only control the accounts of such moneys as are brought to account.

Assuming that all moneys received would be brought to account, and that the expense of collection were kept within moderate bounds, the proposals of the Persian Government in revision of Clause VI. might be acceptable to the financiers in the immediate, if not in the distant, future; and the need for a clause like VII. would cease, the interests of the Company and of the Persian Government being identical. The revision of these clauses, however, will doubtless be referred to the quarter from which the original proposal as to the Customs emanated.

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Looking at the magnitude of the scheme as now shaped and the circumstances of the country, it would seem that the southernmost section of 173 miles between Mohamerah and Dizful, with a capital of one million sterling, is a practical scheme to begin with, extensions in the direction desired by the Persian Government being obligatory on the Company under certain conditions and preference for them being guaranteed to the Company.

Section 3 of the draft Contract relating to the termination of the contract presents the only difficulty, once the extent of the scheme and the nature of the financial assistance to be given by the Persian Government are determined.

Clause *a* is manifestly in the interests of the Persian Government, with whom it would rest to put it in force.

Clause *γ* must stand in the interests of the Persian Government.

There remains Clauses *β* and *δ*, and the only revision which seems called for is to exempt the Persian Government from the repayment of capital in Clause *δ*, in case of the termination of the contract under the provisions of Clause *β* (1), *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*.

As to Clause *ε*, it may be noted that there might or would be a difficulty, if there were not a Persian Minister at the Court of St. James, for any reason.

But few remarks are called for to meet the objections to other clauses.

First section. Clause III.—Plans should be provided for in Clause (9) of second section. As to extent of land, a width of not less than 50 yards throughout the alignment should be provided for, with greater width according as required by the banks, cuttings, and nature of soil. For stations, sites for offices, quarters, workshops, &c., &c., say, an average of 1 square mile to every 10 miles of railway.

Clause IV.—Insert the words "and unowned" after the word "unoccupied."

Clause V.—Limit the leases to an average of 3 square miles to each lineal mile of railway, situated on both sides and within 3 miles of its centre.

Second section. Clauses (26) and (27).—The adoption of the Indian practice having grown up under Government control would be more conducive to the interests of the Persian Government. That general practice is to allocate the expenditure and receipts in such manner as prevents capital being improperly used and ensures revenue bearing all proper charges before dividends are declared,—to prevent, in fact, payment of dividends out of capital, except in so far as that may be provided for during the construction of any section of the line, and until any such section is opened for traffic. The accounts kept in India could not be explained except at very great length, and the result would then be confusing, but they are designed to protect the interests of the Government as effectually as possible. The Persian Government might, therefore, accept them with confidence.

E. C. S. WILLIAMS.

25th October 1886.