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6201 on the Inter City leaving Dinmore Tunnel.

Photograph: C. Rose

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taken for granted. Then a year ago, the Transport Commission broke the news that it was to be closed. If the Mighty Commission had imagined that the apathy in Wirral would remain unstirred they were wrong. Angry passengers prepared for action. Businessmen bound for the city on the 8-25 am out of West Kirby discussed plans to fight the closure. As they boarded the train at Neston, Parkgate and Hadlow Road, the passengers realised that they were few in number and their case would have to be good. So, with the little urban councils who sat at Neston, Hoylake and Heswall, strong cases were drawn up to take into battle. Mainly the arguments were: The line is an essential service. It is not a good service, but with re-timing of trains it could attract more custom. Abolish six coach steam trains and substitute diesels. Treat the line as a business, increase its efficiency and make it pay.

By the end of October last year, Wirral was ready. Hoylake and Neston Councils were united in opposition to the Transport Commission. Councillors at Heswall could not support their neighbours because they felt their case was not strong enough but at Willaston a fighting city merchant Mr T.S. Bigland, had roused his friends on whose behalf counsel was briefed to speak.

Meanwhile, at railway H.Q. in London, the Transport Commission prepared a meeting place for the objectors to state their case. On December 8, 1955, the scene was set. A body with the helpful title of "North West Area Transport Users Consultative Committee" met in a sedate hotel in Manchester (owned, like the Hooton line, by British Railways) and over tea and plain biscuits, the fate of the Hooton line was discussed. Unlike a prisoner in British law, the Hooton line was unhappily, guilty before trial, and it was left to the objectors to show the "Court of Appeal" reasons why it should not be closed. The objectors did, it seems, tell the committee things which were new to them.

The committee met again in January and decided "the line should not be closed". A Ministry of Transport inquiry is urged as soon as possible". The men on the 8-25 the next day were gleeful smiles. But they should have waited. Bad news came four months later when a Very Important Body sat in secret in London.

The Central Transport Users Consultative Committee - with powers superior to the North-West Committee - sent the following message to Manchester: "We have decided to ask the North-West Committee to reconsider their recommendation in the light of new circumstances. We think the line should be closed." On June 14, in Manchester hotel, the North-Western area committee withdrew from the fight. They decided that they could not, in the light

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of "further information" reaffirm their recommendation. They joined with the Central Committee. So the Hooton line was doomed

Tomorrow, after a bitter struggle, the travelling public of Wirral bid farewell to the line.

Many harsh words have been spoken during the battle. Cllr. K.E.O. Griffiths of Willaston, a Neston councillor, said this: "The meeting between our officials and myself and the Consultative Committee was a mock trial".

The further information which confronted the Central Committee when they decided to disagree with the Northern Committee's recommendation was not balanced by new representations from the objectors. The objectors were not invited! It is felt that British Railways had what might be called the "drop" on the objectors in that the Railways were represented at all Manchester meetings and at the London meetings and most important at all stages of the meetings. It seemed that the Transport Users consultative committees were not as generous as they might have been with the facilities they allotted to transport users.

However, when the shouting and the tumult died the local authorities applied themselves to the job of seeking better alternative transport facilities, both by road and on the Seacombe-Wrexham passenger train service which passes through Central Wirral. They have met with partial success only. Nothing has been done to improve the Seacombe line although arrangements have been made to take parcels at new points when the Hooton line closes. Buses will be available from Neston for early morning workmen, for boys of Calday School, West Kirby and girls attending West Kirby High School. Businessmen in south-west Wirral will have to use existing buses. So, until there is proof of additional demand, will casual passengers during the day.

Crosville Motor Services Ltd. promise to "Watch the position" Ghost Line - Goods trains will still ply between Hooton and West Kirby. R.A.F. men will continue to start their leaves and their training through the ancient portals of West Kirby joint station, but beyond that, it will be a ghost line.

Parkgate and Hadlow Road (Willaston) stations will close, so will Neston South, Heswall and Thurston; Kirby Park and Caldy saw their last passengers a long time ago.

There will be no redundancy of personnel or stock. This will be absorbed elsewhere in the area. But there are still many, many regrets. Mr Bigland has this to say: "We have tried to save what could have been a national asset. Properly run this line could have made money for the nation. We have tried and failed.