

	£
1st July, 1870, to 30th June, 1875	3,575,362
1st July, 1875, to 31st March, 1880	4,919,712
1st April, 1880, to 31st March, 1885	3,120,680
1st April, 1885, to 31st March, 1890	2,308,319
1st April, 1890, to 31st March, 1895	978,498
And for the year ended 31st March last	197,105
Total	<u>£15,099,676</u>

This great diminution in expenditure has necessarily involved proceeding with our railways at a very much slower rate. So slowly, indeed, have we been proceeding during the last six years, as compared with our neighbours, that New Zealand's expenditure on railways is now the lowest per head of the population of any of the Australasian or South African colonies. The following table shows the cost of railway-works, the mileage, the average cost per mile, the population, and the cost per head of the population in the several colonies referred to:—

Colonies.	Cost of Railway-works.	Mileage.	Average Cost per Mile.	Population.	Cost per Head of Population.	Year ending
	£		£		£ s. d.	
Natal	6,117,211	401	15,255	46,788	130 14 10	31st Dec., 1895
Cape of Good Hope ...	20,487,072	2,253	9,093	510,000	40 3 5	31st Dec., 1895
South Australia ...	13,665,945	1,867	7,320	348,539	39 4 2	30th June, 1895
Queensland ...	16,522,293	2,379	6,945	454,234	36 7 6	30th June, 1895
Victoria ...	37,922,207	3,103	12,221	1,179,103	32 3 2	30th June, 1895
New South Wales ...	36,611,366	2,531	14,464	1,268,150	28 17 5	30th June, 1895
Western Australia ...	2,092,372	573	3,652	89,550	23 7 3	30th June, 1895
Tasmania ...	3,518,595	420	8,378	157,456	22 6 11	31st Dec., 1894
New Zealand ...	15,425,532	2,014	7,659	703,008	21 18 10	31st Mar., 1896

From the above table it will be apparent that, in order to place ourselves upon a footing of equality with New South Wales as regards our expenditure on railways per head of the population, we should have to expend £4,870,895 in addition to the amount expended already; while an expenditure of £7,182,033 would be required to place us on an equal footing with Victoria, and £12,138,240 to enable us to equal South Australia, and a still larger outlay would be required to equalise our expenditure with that of the South African Colonies.

LIGHT RAILWAYS.

The Government has already taken into consideration the subject of light railways, and further information will be obtained during the ensuing recess, and the result of our inquiries will be laid before Parliament next session. Some very successful narrow-gauge light railways have been constructed in France and other countries during recent years. A well-constructed line in Normandy, twenty-four miles long, cost only £2,258 per mile, and the station-buildings are far handsomer structures than generally prevail in New Zealand. The line is also provided with a telephone throughout its entire length, and with rolling-stock sufficient for twenty-four trains per day. The gauge is 2ft., the sharpest curve 65ft. radius, and the rails weigh 30lb. per lineal yard. The receipts per train-mile on this line in 1895 were 2s. 1d. only, and yet it yielded a profit of nearly 7½ per cent. on the capital invested. The average receipts per train-mile in New Zealand at present are 7s. 1½d., so that there would seem to be abundance of scope for the construction of light, cheaply-worked railways of this class in this colony.

I have no doubt, however, that the working-expenses in New Zealand would largely exceed those in France; but if lines of this description can be constructed in New Zealand at anything approaching the cost of this one, there should be room in this colony for the construction of a considerable mileage of such railways, as the cost is not materially in excess of the cost of constructing a good road, and there are many districts in New Zealand where such railways could, if constructed, earn a much larger rate per train-mile than the railway referred to.