

length will traverse a country that is but little known. The little we do know of it, however, leads me to suppose that the construction of a railway in this district may be rather a costly undertaking.

An examination has also been made of the country that would be traversed by the proposed railways from Lovell's Flat to Kaitangata, Wright's Bush to Heddon Bush, and Orepuki (or Waicola) to Waiau. The length of the first-mentioned line would be about eight miles and a quarter, and it would open out large coalfields throughout its entire length, and would shorten the railage-distance between Kaitangata and Lovell's Flat by about a mile and a half. The probable cost of the line according to present standards, but exclusive of rolling-stock, would be about £21,000. The proposed line between Wright's Bush and Heddon Bush would be about $18\frac{1}{4}$ miles long, the country throughout being nearly level, and of excellent quality. The probable cost of construction, exclusive of rolling-stock, would be about £45,000. A line from Orepuki to the Waiau Ferry would be $13\frac{1}{4}$ miles in length. The country after the first two miles or so would be generally easy, and the cost of the line probably about £50,000. The alternative line, from Waicola to Orawia, would be about $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, and would cost about £52,000.

The amount expended on surveys of new lines last year was £1,616, and a vote of £3,600 is proposed for the current year.

TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR RAILWAYS.

The total appropriations proposed for railway-construction works, including surveys, permanent-way materials, &c., is £217,100, and £200,000 for additions to open lines, or a gross total of £417,100. Last year the amount for new construction-works was £217,500, and £150,000 for additions to open lines, or a total of £367,500.

ROADS, ETC.

ROADS, BRIDGES, AND OTHER WORKS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE MINISTER OF LANDS.

As was anticipated in my Statement of last year, the extent of the works required to be done, and the consequent expenditure, have been about one-third greater than in the year 1896-97.

During the present year, 405 miles of dray-roads and 367 miles of horse-roads, with 89 bridges over 30 ft. span, have been constructed, as well as 383 miles of dray-roads and 103 miles of horse-roads widened and improved. The roads maintained for dray traffic aggregate 1,827 miles, and those maintained for horse traffic amount to 982 miles. In all, an extent of 4,067 miles of road and 89 bridges have been dealt with during the year. The cost of these operations was £269,427.

The main roads maintained during the year were about 1,300 miles, those improved about 250 miles, and those constructed about 135 miles, including 28 bridges, and the cost of these works was about £106,000, so that over £160,000 was expended in constructing roads and tracks, and to a great extent for the benefit of newly settled lands.

That this large expenditure every year is a profitable investment is amply proved by the recent valuations made under "The Government Valuation of Land Act, 1896." The counties in which settlement and road-making have advanced show an immense increase in values since the last valuation in 1891, and it may rightly be assumed that a large share of that increase is due to the expenditure on roads. In Auckland, seventeen counties, in which roads have been made to the extent of £174,504, have increased in value by £1,459,987; four counties in Hawke's Bay, in which £44,775 has been spent, have increased by £1,296,949; five counties in Taranaki have increased £2,080,081 by an expenditure on roads of £261,135; eleven counties in Wellington, in which £287,215 was spent on roads, have increased in value