

On the 13th December, 1897, this district was, by the opening of the section between Pahiatua and Woodville, connected with the Wellington-Wairarapa line. Of 12,439 passengers booked to Wellington during the year, 777 travelled by the Government line *via* Wairarapa, and 11,662 by the Manawatu Company's line. About three-fifths of the live-stock traffic is to the Wellington markets and freezing-works; but owing to the longer journey *via* Wairarapa advantage has not been taken of that route to any extent.

Although the season was not altogether favourable, there was an increase of 15 per cent. in the quantity of dairy produce carried; 2,945 tons of butter and 1,307 tons of cheese were forwarded.

On Good Friday, 16th April, 1897, traffic south of Wanganui was interrupted by floods. In consequence of the extensive damage to line and bridges, trains could not be run over that portion of the line for two days. By means of coach and ferry services communication between Wanganui and Palmerston was then restored, but through goods traffic could not be resumed until the 17th May, when a temporary bridge across the Rangitikei River was completed. The disorganization of the Easter holiday traffic and the suspension of through goods traffic caused a considerable loss of revenue, apart altogether from the extra cost of working.

With the exception of the diversion at Woodville of the Napier-Palmerston passenger-trains to the Wairarapa route in December last, there has been no material alteration in the train-services of the district.

The insufficiency of the supply of rolling-stock has been the subject of considerable complaint from the customers of the department.

The revenue prospects for the ensuing year are, on the whole, good. If the present fares and rates are maintained, an increase of 10 per cent. upon last year's total may be expected.

I have, &c.,

H. Buxton.

The General Manager, New Zealand Railways, Wellington.

District Traffic Manager.

SIR,—

District Traffic Manager's Office, Wellington, 6th June, 1898.

The following is a condensed report on the traffic of the Wellington-Napier district during the year ended the 31st March, 1898:—

The volume and value of the business have been most satisfactory, there having been, compared with last year, an increase of about 40,100 passengers, 1,700 season tickets, 9,800 parcels, 71,500 head of live-stock, and 36,700 tons of goods, the most important contributors to the last-mentioned increase being wool, timber, and general merchandise. This large access of traffic has caused a substantial increase of revenue, the gross amount for this year being £196,793, as compared with £171,705 for last year, an improvement of £25,088.

The cheap excursion rates inaugurated in 1895 have become very popular, especially with the residents of the country districts, and there is abundant evidence that the adoption of these rates has very considerably increased the number of travellers.

No doubt the increase in the number of parcels carried is also largely due to the introduction of reduced rates for this branch of the traffic.

Dairy farming has been steadily extended during the year, and there has been a satisfactory improvement in the quantity of milk, butter, cheese, and eggs handled.

There has been a very material increase in the number of live-stock conveyed—particularly sheep. This is due largely to the great decrease in the rates of railage, but it is attributable partly to the fact that the production has increased owing to a greater area of land having been placed under pasture in consequence of increased settlement.

The connection of the Wellington line with the Wanganui and Napier lines caused a considerable quantity of wool, which has formerly been sent by other routes, to be forwarded *via* the Wairarapa, and this, in conjunction with a considerable natural increase in the districts contiguous to the Wellington and Napier lines, resulted in the carriage of 10,000 bales in excess of the quantity dealt with last year.

Activity in the building trade, and the export of timber to Australia, are responsible for an improvement of over eight and a quarter million superficial feet in the timber traffic.

The increase of general merchandise, &c., carried, amounts to over 16,000 tons, and is due partly to the greater prosperity of the district, and partly to the connection of the Wellington, Napier, and Wanganui lines. Since the connection of these lines there has been a considerable exchange of commodities between the Wairarapa, the Manawatu, and the bush districts (Hawke's Bay), and I have no doubt that this trade will greatly develop in the future.

Satisfactory as the business has been, it would have been still greater but for three important interruptions to traffic which occurred during the year. The most important of these was that occasioned by the disastrous flood of Easter, 1897, which temporarily devastated a large part of Hawke's Bay. This flood caused extensive damage to the line, and entailed great trouble and expense on the department in the maintenance of passenger and goods services by rail, coach, ferry, and steamer. The second of these interruptions was caused by a large quantity of rock slipping into and completely filling a deep cutting between Kaitoke and Summit. This caused a complete suspension of goods traffic for a week, passenger traffic being maintained by exchanging trains at the slip. The third interruption also necessitated the entire suspension of goods traffic for several days; it was due to the burning of a bridge near Mauriceville during the progress of the extensive series of bush fires that swept the country from Kaitoke to Takapau last summer. Another unfortunate result of these fires was the destruction of a large area of magnificent bush scenery in the neighbourhood of the Pukuratahi Valley, Summit, and Cross Creek. As this bush was one of the chief scenic attractions of the Wairarapa route, the loss of a large part of it is greatly to be regretted.