

Notwithstanding the somewhat increased funds available, I regret that I have still been unable to make provision this year for all the projected new railways and extensions of existing lines that have been petitioned for from time to time. I have only been able to provide for about one-fourth of these works, being those that are most urgently required, or which will be immediately reproductive. While admitting that there is every probability of some of the lines unprovided for ultimately earning interest on their cost, it would nevertheless not be prudent to commence their construction until some of those now in hand have been completed. Reference is made later on to the more important of these proposals.

AVAILABLE WAYS AND MEANS FOR PUBLIC-WORKS PURPOSES.

On 31st March, 1898, the available balance of ways and means for public-works purposes was £326,492. Further funds were provided last session as follows:—

Under the Aid to Public Works and Land Settlement Acts Amend-	£
ment Act	500,000
Transferred from the Consolidated Fund	425,000
Sinking funds released	43,360
Miscellaneous receipts	2,330

Thus making a gross total of available ways and means of £1,297,182. The expenditure amounted to £916,327, which left a balance of £380,855 at the end of the year. Against this there were liabilities amounting to £446,283. It is now proposed to raise additional funds as under:—

	£
For railway construction	300,000
" additions to open railways	225,000
" roads to Crown and Native lands and main roads	150,000
" roads to back-block settlements	150,000
" permanent works on goldfields	50,000
" public and technical school buildings	50,000
" purchase of Native lands	50,000
" contingent harbour defence	25,000
Total	<u>£1,000,000</u>

It is also proposed to transfer from the Consolidated Fund a further sum of £450,000, making altogether a gross total of available ways and means of £1,830,855.

The estimates of expenditure for the current year total to £1,355,098, of which £1,308,025 will be a charge against the Public Works Fund, and the balance against the Government Loans to Local Bodies Account, leaving an unallocated balance of ways and means for public-works purposes of £522,830.

It must, however, be borne in mind that the date of the appropriations will probably limit the actual expenditure to about the same amount as last year, and the balance available for next year will therefore be greater than the £522,830 unallocated. It is also hoped that there will be a surplus on the Consolidated Fund this year, out of which another grant can be made to the Public Works Fund, which, together with the unexpended balance available under the latter fund, will be sufficient to meet the actual expenditure under that fund to 31st March, 1901. What steps should then be taken to obtain further ways and means for public works purposes must be left for the next parliament to consider.

TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS EXPENDITURE.

The following table shows, in parallel columns, the total expenditure on all works and services throughout the colony out of the Public Works Fund up to 31st December, 1890, and also up to 31st March last:—