

NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK.

The construction of the Ohinemoa Section at the north end of this line has proceeded throughout the year, but some of the cuttings where the ground was of a treacherous nature had to be allowed to rest during the worst of the winter weather. The work on the other portions of this section that have been in hand during the year has progressed satisfactorily, and about four miles of the line will be ready for platelaying as soon as the cuttings above referred to are completed. Additional formation has also been taken in hand on the lower part of the section, so that construction-works now extend as far as the Ongarue Valley, a distance of 54 miles from Te Awamutu and 154 from Auckland, and the line to the junction with the East Road at Kawakawa should be completed within two years.

At the southern end of the line the grading now extends to Taihape, a distance of twenty-two miles from the terminus of the open line at Mangaonoho, and forty-four miles from the junction with the main West Coast line at Marton, and the felling and clearing is in hand for a further distance of five miles. The formation on this length is of a particularly heavy character, but good progress has been made with it. Simultaneously with the construction of the Makohine Viaduct, platelaying will be proceeded with to Mangaweka, thus enabling the line, on the completion of the viaduct, to be opened to that township.

The preparation of the ironwork for the Makohine Viaduct has been proceeded with as vigorously as possible throughout the year. During the long days of last summer the machinery was kept going for sixteen hours a day, and when the days commenced to shorten the electric light was installed in the workshop, since which time three shifts have been employed, and the drilling and other operations kept going continuously. The preparation of the ironwork for the structure is now well advanced, and a start will shortly be made with the erection.

Last year a vote of £50,000 was granted for this railway: this year we propose a vote of £70,000.

RIMUTAKA DEVIATION.

The trial surveys to avoid the Rimutaka Incline and the steep grades and sharp curves between the Upper Hutt and the Summit, which were made by Mr. J. H. Dobson, and were in progress when my last Statement was delivered, have since been completed. The results of these surveys, and of subsequent personal examinations of the ground by the Superintending Engineer (Mr. P. S. Hay, M.A., M.Inst.C.E.), are embodied in the report by that gentleman, which will be found attached to this Statement. A report is also appended on a further examination of the Wainui-o-mata route, by Mr. R. W. Holmes, M.Inst.C.E. The Government now proposes to have accurate detailed surveys undertaken in order to determine with certainty which route offers the greatest advantages, and the work will be started as early as possible. A vote of £6,000 has been placed on the estimates to cover the expenditure this year. Appended to the Statement will also be found several illustrations of the Incline as it exists at present.

BLENHEIM-AWATERE.

Construction-work on this railway was resumed in September last, and has proceeded satisfactorily since. The formation has already been put in repair and the rails laid on a part of the line, and a further length will be ready for rail-laying shortly, and the balance of the grading as far as the Awatere bridge-site is in hand. In April last a contract was let to Messrs. Scott Brothers, of Christchurch, for the construction of a combined road-and railway-bridge over the Awatere River. The contractors have already commenced the manufacture of the ironwork in Christchurch, and expect to begin operations at the site shortly. The vote taken for this railway last year was £8,000. This year a larger vote is necessary, as construction-works will extend over the whole year instead of only over half the year, and progress-payments are also expected to fall due on the bridge-contract: we therefore ask for an appropriation of £15,000.