

progress and is now well in hand. Mr. J. H. Dobson started the work in December, 1898, and has made considerable progress with it. A vote of £4,000 is proposed for the survey of new lines during the year.

TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR RAILWAYS.

In addition to the appropriations already mentioned, a vote of £1,500 is proposed to meet old land-claims and other liabilities on railways in respect of which no specific votes are taken; also a vote of £46,000 for permanent-way and other materials, thus making the total appropriations proposed for railway-construction purposes £336,500.

WELLINGTON-MANAWATU RAILWAY.

Honourable members are aware of the conditions under which this line can be compulsorily taken. As there are diverse opinions as to the Government taking it over, a complete investigation should be made by experts as to the position, valuation, and outlook; and also as to the effect the acquisition of the line would have upon the working of the railway system of the North Island. Parliament would then be able to decide what should be done in the matter.

ROADS, ETC.

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

The report of the Department of Lands and Survey gives in detail the nature and extent of the road and other works done by that department mainly in the interests of advancing settlement. It shows that during the past year 312 miles of dray-roads and 399 miles of bridle-roads have been constructed, 350 miles of roads have been widened from bridle- to dray-roads, 139 miles of bridle-roads have been improved, 96 bridges over 30 ft. span were built, and 575 miles of new road were surveyed for construction. These works, together with the maintenance of 2,879 miles of roads already constructed, have cost for the year £282,352.

Settlement on the back-lying Crown lands has now reached the stage at which settlers require roads passable by vehicles. The 6 ft. tracks were eagerly applied for at first to get into the farms. Now, when the bush is felled and the land in grass, they require roads to enable them to remove their produce, and also for the other purposes of life.

The back lands are difficult to provide with such roads, and the construction is expensive, but, having settled these Crown lands, the Government is bound to forward to the utmost of the country's ability their future development.

For the current year the House is asked to authorise works to the extent of £455,280, and to vote for their payment during the year a sum of £330,000, also £47,073 under the Government Loans to Local Bodies Account.

The number of separate roads or items in the estimates is this year greater than in those of last year, and the amounts are, many of them, small. These small amounts are probably as valuable to the districts affected as are the larger sums for the opening of new lands, or for the maintenance of existing means of communication, and they are, therefore, not to be despised on that account. As far as practicable the machinery of the local bodies will be taken advantage of in the expenditure of the smaller votes.

ROADS ON GOLDFIELDS.—MINES DEPARTMENT.

The vote last year for these purposes amounted to £62,625, the expenditure being £46,549, with liabilities at the end of the financial year amounting to £45,740.

The sum proposed to be authorised for the current year is £101,228, on account of which a vote of £70,000 is asked for.