

advise me that in order to put the railways in a position to cope with the increasing business in a proper manner the equipment of the lines should be added to and improved by carrying out the works enumerated in the following schedule, viz. :—

SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED ADDITIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS TO OPEN LINES.

	£
Additions and improvements to stations	182,250
Rebuilding and strengthening bridges	131,000
Improvements of lines (curves and gradients)	322,400
Signals and telegraphs	60,000
Dwellings—additions and improvements	24,900
Workshops—additions	42,250
Relaying	108,420
Respacing sleepers	46,750
Fencing	35,000
Wharves—additions and improvements	11,000
Ballast-plant and ballast-sidings	38,250
Additional locomotives	170,000
Water-services	7,200
Additional cars, and cost of conversions	82,000
Additional wagons, brake-vans, travelling-cranes, and cost of converting existing four-wheeled brake-vans to bogies	226,000
Additional machinery and electric light for workshops	25,000
Automatic continuous brake for existing stock	275,000
Automatic continuous brake for additional stock to be built	50,000
Contingencies	162,580
Total	<u>£2,000,000</u>

It is estimated that these works will take at least five years to complete.

Before such important undertakings are authorised it will be necessary for the Government to fully consider the whole question prior to the assembling of the new Parliament.

I propose to have surveys made, and plans and estimates prepared, for doubling the lines between Auckland and Penrose, Wellington and Lower Hutt, Dunedin and Port Chalmers, Dunedin and Mosgiel, Milton and Clarkesville, and Invercargill and the junction with Seaward Bush Branch, all of which works will have to be undertaken at no distant date, and will cost approximately between £500,000 and £600,000.

The work of strengthening the existing light lines by relaying with heavier rails (56 lb. steel) and rebuilding the bridges in iron and ironbark is an important one, and this will be realised when I tell you that we still have 556 miles of 40 lb. and sixty-four miles of 30 lb. track. I am advised that 190 miles of railway laid with 40 lb. rails and carrying the heavier traffic, besides 130 miles of 52 lb. iron, and various other weights of rails, should be relaid within the next five years; and 430 miles of 30 lb. and 40 lb. track in the branches during the following five years. Ordinary renewals of the main lines now laid with the heavier weight of rails and relaying as above for next five years will involve relaying at the rate of eighty-four miles a year, rising from sixty-nine miles this year to ninety-five miles in 1903–1904; as against an average of forty-one miles a year during the past five years—last year forty-eight miles, and in 1894–95 thirty-seven miles, were relaid. To provide for relaying, reconstruction of and repairs to bridges and other structures, at present rate of cost, and for ordinary maintenance of the lines, will require an annual expenditure chargeable to working-expenses (Maintenance Branch) of about £400,000 for the next five years.

With a large business such as is carried on by the Railway Department, it is absolutely essential to provide for the future. This cannot be done in the absence of the assurance that the funds will be forthcoming to carry out a scheme of improvement which will necessarily extend over a period of years; and until this is given we have no option but to continue our present method of working.

That the business has been carried on under the greatest pressure will, I am sure, be admitted on a perusal of the following figures, which indicate in a striking manner the increase of business largely consequent upon the substantial reductions in rates made by the present Government;—