

In the Maintenance Branch, which deals with the construction and maintenance of tracks, buildings, and structures, the shortages (497 in the permanent-way staff, and 416 in the works staff) are also causing serious embarrassment, particularly in the permanent-way gangs in some areas. As an example, in the Wellington - Upper Hutt, Wellington-Johnsonville, and Wellington-Paekakariki areas it has become necessary to divert 25 trained employees from the Hutt Valley electrification construction teams to permanent-way gangs on the routes mentioned in order to avoid the imposition of speed restrictions which would have involved a recasting of suburban-train schedules and much inconvenience to the public. Numerous speed restrictions involving delays to trains are already in operation between Wellington and Palmerston North and elsewhere, and some time will necessarily have to elapse before these restrictions can all be removed and the normal speed of trains resumed.

In the workshops the position has worsened rapidly in recent months. At the beginning of January, 1950, the total shortage of workshops personnel was 758, but by 31st March, 1950, the shortage was 925, and in the following eight weeks a further decrease of 52 occurred. These shortages represent only the minimum staff requirements in the workshops. It is estimated that a total of 2,161 additional employees would be required to carry out the normal pre-war functions of the workshops, including the new rolling-stock programme.

The effects of the staff deficiencies in the workshops are that, whereas in order to maintain locomotive stock in reasonably good order 258 locomotives should have received a thorough overhaul during the year, only 162 were so dealt with in the railway workshops and 6 in the workshops of Messrs. A. and G. Price, Ltd., Thames. Out of a total locomotive stock of 652 approximately 14 per cent. are overdue for major overhaul. In a number of cases, locomotives which, because of the mileage run, were due for a major overhaul have been given what is technically termed a "C" class overhaul - i.e., an overhaul of only the bare essentials.

The position in regard to locomotive repairs can be summarized by stating that the locomotive stock is not as mechanically efficient as it should be, and this fact is abundantly clear from the following table of steam locomotive "failures and casualties." These "failures and casualties" represent delays due to mechanical defects and bad driving, but they do not include cases arising from the use of coal of inferior quality. The mileage per engine "failure and casualty" is a fair index of the efficiency of the locomotive stock.

Year Ended 31st March,				Number of Engine Failures and Casualties.	Average Engine- Miles per Failure and Casualty.
1939	..	..	..	506	33,553
1940	..	..	..	606	28,167
1941	..	..	..	600	28,452
1942	..	..	..	575	30,205
1943	..	..	..	604	31,191
1944	..	..	..	680	27,874
1945	..	..	..	531	30,296
1946	..	..	..	639	26,297
1947	..	..	..	877	18,740
1948	..	..	..	1,006	17,025
1949	..	..	..	1,043	16,415
1950	..	..	..	1,204	14,520

The progressive deterioration after 1945 is outstanding.