

STRATFORD—KAWAKAWA.

This is one of the new railways authorised last session. The survey was put in hand soon after Parliament rose, and construction-work started in April. Such good progress has been made that a large part of the first section to Toko, six miles and a half in length, is now ready for platelaying, and the rails, which have recently arrived, are now being sent up to the work. I have every confidence that this section of the railway will be opened for traffic by Christmas next.

Survey-work is in progress on the next section of the line, so that by the time the formation to Toko is completed we shall be in a position to determine the best route to be taken beyond that township. The vote taken for this railway last year was £10,000, but scarcely any expenditure took place prior to the 31st March. For the current year an authority for £12,000 will be necessary. Honourable members are aware that in my last year's Statement it was suggested that this railway should be constructed as a narrow-gauge line; but an examination of the country showed that this was inadvisable, and, having in view the probable traffic as the line is extended, it was decided to construct it as a light railway, but without departing from the New Zealand standard gauge.

NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK.

A very large amount of work has been performed on this railway during the year. At the northern end especially, the engineering staff employed upon the line has fully realised the desire of the Government that the work should be pushed to completion with reasonable expedition, and every effort has been made, despite sundry adverse circumstances, to forward the work as rapidly as possible. Regular traffic is carried on by the Railway Department as far as the Poro-o-tarao Tunnel—the watershed between the Waikato and Wanganui River systems—and from that point to Kawakawa or Ongarue the rails are already laid, and the ballasting and erection of station-buildings is in progress. The platelaying party is still at work, extending its operations towards Taumaranui, to which point the formation-work already extends, and bushfelling is in hand beyond the crossing of the Wanganui River. The railway at the northern end, therefore, has now commenced to tap the celebrated Waimarino Forest. A contract was let in May last for a steel and timber bridge, 465 ft. long, over the Wanganui River at Taumaranui, and contracts have also been let for the steel girders for the three bridges over the Ongarue River. The majority of the piers of these latter bridges will be of timber, and a contract has been let for the supply of the iron cylinders for the remaining piers.

At the southern end of the line the earthworks now extend nearly to Turangarere, a distance of thirty-nine miles from the terminus of the opened line at Mangaonoho, and sixty-one miles from the commencement of the railway at Marton. Considerable progress has been made with these works during the year, but still greater progress would have resulted if the roads in the district had been in sufficiently good order to admit of heavy carting being done in the winter. As much carting as possible was done during the summer and autumn, but it was impossible for the whole of the plant and supplies required during the winter months to be carried up in advance. Advantage will be taken as the weather improves and the roads are again fit for carting to send forward the necessary plant and material for the work.

The Makohine Viaduct is now nearing completion. A view of the structure appended to this Statement will show the position of the work at a tolerably recent date. Platelaying between Makohine and Mangaweka is about to be proceeded with: practically all the rails and sleepers required for this section are now on the further side of the Makohine Ravine. A locomotive and a train of ballast-wagons have also been arranged for, and are now in process of being conveyed to Pauerawera. I fully expect to have engines running over the Makohine Viaduct by 31st March next, and hope to have the whole section to Mangaweka ready for traffic about the same time.