

good deal of work has been done beyond this point. Four out of the six tunnels on this section are finished, and the others are nearing completion. The manufacture of the ironwork for the Patterson's Creek viaduct has made considerable progress, and some of it has been delivered at the site, but no erection-work has yet been done. As soon as the viaduct is out of the contractors' hands the rails can be laid right through to Staircase Gully, and the erection of the viaduct at that point can then be gone on with. Plans for this viaduct are now nearly ready, and tenders for its construction will be invited shortly. The total expenditure on the Midland Railway last year amounted to £66,391, and this year a vote of £100,000 is proposed.

NGAHERE—BLACKBALL.

The construction of a branch line leaving the Midland Railway at Ngahere and running thence to the Blackball collieries was authorised last session. The most important work on the line is the large bridge over the Grey River, for which a tender has recently been accepted. This bridge will take at least eighteen months to erect, and the small amount of formation-work required can easily be carried out while the bridge is in course of erection. The Blackball Coal Company has entered into an agreement with the Crown by which the company undertakes to send traffic over this railway for a period of seven years sufficient to yield a gross freight between Blackball and Ngahere of not less than £1,500 per annum.

A vote of £2,000 was taken for this railway last year, but only £117 was expended. This year a vote of £4,000 is proposed, which will probably be sufficient to meet the charges that will come to book before the 31st March next.

GREYMOUTH—HOKITIKA, EXTENSION TO ROSS.

This line also was authorised in the Railways Authorisation Act of last session. The first and most important work to be undertaken upon it is the erection of a bridge over the Hokitika River, and a tender for its construction has recently been accepted. The contract time for the completion of the structure is the 12th April, 1904.

The survey of the line from the Hokitika Bridge site towards Ross was started in December last, and about ten miles of the permanent survey has now been finished. A trial line has been run over the whole distance. Formation-works have also recently been started between 25 and 27 miles, measuring from Greymouth, or between 1 and 3 miles below Hokitika. A vote of £2000 was taken for this line last year, but only £355 was expended. For the current year an appropriation of £10,000 is asked for.

COAL CREEK.

This is the line which will connect the State colliery with the Port of Greymouth. Its construction was commenced several years ago by the Greymouth-Point Elizabeth Coal Company, from which company the Government acquired it in June last. Since acquiring the railway the Government has been advised by its officers to abandon the terminus proposed by the late company, on the ground that it is not central to the coalfield. A survey of the deviation to the site which is considered best for the coal-bins has lately been made. The work of completing the first three miles and a half of the railway commenced by the company has also been put in hand. The cost of completing this railway will be a charge on the State Coal-mines Account.

OTAGO CENTRAL.

A great deal of work was done on this railway last year, the total expenditure on the line having reached the very large sum of £103,273, which is the largest on record for this line. The Ida Valley section, 12 miles 24 chains in length, was completed and handed over to the Railway Department for regular working in December last. The heavy work in the Poolburn Gorge has made good progress. The formation of the first four miles is nearly finished, and the