

Public Health.—The principal work carried out during the year was the commencement of the new wharf at the Quarantine Station at Wellington. Payments were also made to the local authorities at Auckland and Christchurch for provision of an Infectious Diseases Hospital and a Sanatorium for Consumptives respectively.

The vote for the current year provides for a new wharf at the Quarantine Station at Auckland and for completing the wharf at the similar station at Wellington, and for some other necessary work at the Quarantine Stations at Lyttelton and the Bluff. A considerable vote is also proposed under the head of Subsidies to Local Authorities on the cost of erecting infectious-diseases hospitals and sanatoria and annexes for consumptives.

ROADS, BRIDGES, ETC.

Now to refer to the important question of roads, including bridges and other works essential to their proper construction and maintenance. I may perhaps be pardoned for occupying a little of your time with a few general remarks, for unquestionably roads are one of the most important factors concerned in the settlement of new lands, and their maintenance and improvement in districts where settlement has already taken place is also of great moment to the persons concerned.

It is true that the construction of railways has rendered immense areas of land available for settlement, in comparatively small holdings, which otherwise could only have been profitably occupied in large areas as stock or sheep runs; but for closer settlement, which is what should be aimed at, roads must be supplied, and, as closer settlement involves a denser population and a greater output per acre, it means not only more miles of road, but also, to carry the greater traffic, a better class of road than was necessary when the land was held in larger areas.

Most of the land now available for settlement is of a more or less broken or hilly nature, which entails more circuitous roads, owing to gullies and ridges which have to be crossed, or along the sides of which the roads must be taken to obtain reasonable grades. In hilly country there is also, usually, more hard material to excavate, and more culverts are required than on comparatively flat land. All the foregoing circumstances tend to increase the cost per acre of roading the land.

In view of the great necessity for roads, and their maintenance, both in new and recently settled lands, it is proposed to provide as large a sum as possible this year for their construction and maintenance.

The total net expenditure for the late year by the Roads Department upon road-works, &c., was £415,037.

The work was somewhat restricted, owing to labour being scarce, and to most of it being in places remote from supplies and civilisation, which renders the life of the labourers more arduous than on similar work more conveniently situated; therefore, as other work was plentiful, it was very difficult to obtain labour for the backblocks.

The work done during the year was as under:—

Dray-roads made	637 miles.
Dray-roads maintained	2,722 "
Bridle-roads made	512 "
Bridle-roads maintained	1,891 "
Engineering surveys made	612½ "
Dray-bridges built, over 30 ft. span.	17,800 lineal feet.

The average number of men employed during the year on road-works was 2,392.

The appropriations proposed for the current year are as follows:—

Roads, departmental	£20,850
Roads generally	390,238
Tourist roads	27,463
Loans to Local Bodies Account	50,000
Total	£488,551

This amount is, of course, in addition to the £25,000 voted for the maintenance of roads on the Consolidated Fund estimates.