

along the first two miles. Plans of the projected tunnel are being prepared, with a view to inviting tenders for its construction.

During the financial year the expenditure on the works at both ends of this line amounted to £81,806, and for the current year a vote of £90,000 is proposed.

MOUNT EGMONT BRANCH.

A small amount of formation-work was carried out during the year, timber for bridges procured, and investigations made as to the best means of working the stone-quarry which the line is to serve.

Expenditure during the last financial year amounted to £2,653, and for the current year a vote of £10,000 is asked for.

OPUNAKE BRANCH.

In April last a commission was appointed to inquire and report as to the best means of serving by railway the fertile and closely settled portion of Taranaki lying to the westward of the existing main line. The Commission made a thorough investigation throughout the district, and in its report, which has already been laid before Parliament, recommended the construction of a line from New Plymouth in a south-westerly direction between Mount Egmont and the sea, passing close to Opunake, traversing the rich Waimate Plains, and joining the existing line near Te Roti Station.

A short branch from Kapuni to Kaponga was also recommended, capable of extension to Stratford, and also a second branch from the same place (Kapuni) to Manaia.

The total length of construction recommended by the Commission was 72½ miles, estimated to cost £539,000.

The programme outlined is more comprehensive and costly than appears necessary to serve the present requirements of the district; but railway facilities are undoubtedly required for the transport of the large and increasing output from the dairy factories between the existing main line and the western sea-coast. After mature consideration the Government has decided to ask Parliament to authorize the construction of a branch railway from the main line to Opunake. The line will be twenty-three miles in length, and, the country along the route being for the most part favourable, the cost of construction will probably be below the average of recent years.

OHAKUNE-RAETIHI BRANCH.

Construction-work was formally commenced at Ohakune Station in February, but further investigation disclosed a more suitable route than that originally selected, and the line has now been relocated on the new route. Some clearing-work has been carried out near Ohakune Township, two miles distant, where the route is not affected by the change in the junction-point.

The expenditure during the late financial year was very small—namely, £104; but for the current year a vote of £10,000 is proposed.

MANAWAPOU DEVIATION.

A deviation of one mile and a quarter of the line between Manutahi and Mokoia (Wellington - New Plymouth main line) in connection with the renewal of the Manawapou Viaduct is in hand under the Railway Department.

The old timber viaduct is being replaced by a modern steel structure on concrete and steel piers at a level 28 ft. above that of the old bridge.

The whole cost of the new bridge (about £8,000) is being charged to railway maintenance.

The deviation, for which funds have been provided by the Public Works Department, comprises heavy earthworks, farm overbridges, &c., on the new alignment.

The gradient approaching the bridge is improved from 1 in 50 to 1 in 70.]

The works on the deviation are nearly finished.

A small proportion of earthwork which cannot be done till the new bridge is erected will complete the job.

The expenditure out of last year's vote amounted to £10,993, and for the current year an amount of £4,000 is asked for.