The work connected with the duplication of the Dunedin–Mosgiel line is being pushed on as fast as practicable. Double track has been opened as far as Abbotsford, but the difficult nature of the ground through which the Chain Hills Tunnel is being pierced has retarded the operations somewhat.

The expenditure last year on railway duplications and contingent works was £59,133, made up as follows:—

	£
Wellington–Hutt duplication-work	1,635
New Hutt Road (including land for same)	6,070
Dunedin–Mosgiel duplication and deviation of line ..	51,428
	£59,133

For the current year provision has been made on the estimates to the extent of £47,300 for,—

	£
Wellington–Hutt duplication-work	2,000
New Hutt Road	5,300
Dunedin–Mosgiel duplication and deviation	40,000
Total	£47,300

The amount proposed to be voted for the current year for "Additions to Open Lines" is £457,000, of which sum £270,000 is for new rolling-stock and workshops machinery, &c.; £7,000 for Lake Wakatipu new steamer; and £180,000 for various new works.

Light Railways.

Railway-construction throughout the Dominion has, during the last ten years, been proceeded with at a rate as rapid as can be considered warrantable by any one having regard to the financial obligations which we, as trustees for posterity, are justified in incurring. Each year witnesses an appreciable increase in the mileage of lines completed and opened for traffic; nevertheless the applications received from all parts of the country for new railways and for extensions of existing lines—in many cases with every prospect of returning a profit sufficient to pay interest on the cost of construction—are more than the Government can see its way with prudent financial administration to entertain. A moderate calculation places the length of railways still required to give an efficient service throughout the Dominion at 1,500 to 2,000 miles, the cost of which, calculated at £8,000 per mile (which is a fair average under prevailing conditions), will amount to £12,000,000 to £16,000,000. Hitherto all our railways have been constructed in accordance with a high standard as regards stability of formation, weight of rails, and quality of permanent-way generally, but I suggest to honourable members that the time has arrived when we should consider the question of providing lighter and cheaper railways to serve the districts where settlement is advancing and where the maintenance of roads, in fit condition to carry produce to the main lines throughout the year, is likely to prove a heavy burden to the settlers. In the interior of the North Island, particularly, road-construction is an expensive undertaking, and the maintenance under heavy and regular traffic is in many instances likely to be a continuous burden owing to the absence of metal and the rapid deterioration of the formation through broken country in wet weather. If the bulk of the produce could be carried on rails to the main lines, or to an outlet to the markets, the roads would be relieved of the worst of the traffic, and the settlers would not be exposed to the heavy charges, and sometimes long delays, now incurred in bringing their produce to a distant railway.

It is not proposed to depart from the standard 3 ft. 6 in. gauge, but considerable saving can be effected by decreasing the width of banks, avoiding tunnels and heavy cuttings by adopting a steeper maximum grade and sharper curves, constructing bridges of light design, using lighter rails than the present minimum of 55 lb., reducing the standard depth of ballasting, and greatly curtailing the expenditure on station buildings. The retention of the 3 ft. 6 in. gauge is important, as the experience of countries where a gauge as narrow as 2 ft. has been adopted is that rolling-stock has still to be provided of standard height with greatly reduced width, which renders the passenger-carriages and covered vans less capable