

Truck-loads.
(5-ton lots.)

Class A (Covered Trucks).	Class B (Open Trucks).	Class C (Open Trucks).	Kilometres.
Francs.	Francs.	Francs.	
1-80	1-60	1-20	10
3-10	2-70	1-90	20
4-40	3-80	2-60	30
5-70	4-90	3-30	40
7-00	6-00	4-00	50
8-30	7-10	4-70	60
10-90	9-30	6-10	80
13-50	11-50	7-50	100

Many special articles have special treatment, and generally it will be seen that the rates are much lower than in New Zealand. Take, as an instance, Class A, for 100 km.: this costs, in Belgium, 11s., and in New Zealand 37s. Another instance of low rates: Coal, same distance, in Belgium, 3s. 8d.; in New Zealand, 8s. 6d. The cheap, non-perishable cargoes, such as gravel, coal, bricks, &c., mostly carried under Class Q, New Zealand's cheapest rate, are carried at specially cheap rates—about three-fifths of Belgian Class C.

During my stay in Belgium I examined the vicinal railways in every province, and took every opportunity of conversing with the people, and I found that amongst all classes—the city business men, the railway head officials and employees, and the country farmers and workmen—there was an opinion that the vicinal railways were, if not the foundation of, at least a very necessary factor in, the welfare of the country as a whole. I attribute this very largely to the fact that the people themselves, either individually or through their local Councils, are financially connected with the promotion of the lines, and consequently feel themselves part-owners in a way that does not apply to lines constructed entirely by the State and operated by the Railways Department. Having their dividends to look to, and knowing also that a private party, possibly a fellow-townsmen and friend, has undertaken to run the line they use for a term of years, they are not likely to make unreasonable demands on the management or to agitate for improvements in the convenience, time-table, and general style of working which were not anticipated at the first inception of the scheme, and are probably not warranted by the traffic.

It appears to me that there is room in many parts of New Zealand for the application of the principle of vicinal railways, and I trust that the information herein contained may assist in bringing many isolated communities into closer touch with existing railways or ports, to the mutual advantage of themselves and the State.

The Administrative Council of the National Society consists of the following members:—President—M. Fris, Senator: Vice-President—M. Lagasse de Loch, Director-General of Public Works: members—M. the Chevalier de Borman, President of the Provincial Council of Limbourg, and permanent Deputy; M. Ramaeckers, Honorary General Secretary to the Minister of Railways, Posts and Telegraphs; M. Vanderlinden, Inspector-General of Public Works; M. Colaert, solicitor, member of the House of Representatives, and Mayor of the Town of Ypres; M. Chevalier, permanent Deputy for the Province of Hainaut.

In closing I must place on record the assistance I received from the High Commissioner, who furnished me with introductions through the Foreign Office; from M. H. Caufriez, the Director-General of the National Society; and more particularly from M. E. Belpaire, Chief Engineer, who personally conducted me over some of the lines and provided me with the greater part of the detail information herein contained, and generally assisted me in my inquiries.

As appendices hereto I have made a translation of the laws and regulations governing the construction and working of the vicinal railways, and also a translation of a preliminary report upon an actual line.

On my travels I looked into the question of light railways, in a more or less degree, in Australia, Ceylon and India, Egypt, France, Italy, Norway, and England, and, if desired, can make a further report. The figures showing how much cheaper the narrow-gauge lines are to operate than the standard-gauge are interesting.

I have, &c.,

F. W. FURKERT,
Inspecting Engineer.

The Engineer-in-Chief, Public Works, Wellington.