

with the inadequacy of the facilities at the disposal of the Department for handling the business can fail to realize difficulties of the past and present, and the serious position that will inevitably arise immediately the normal pre-war time-table is established and the restrictions to traffic deliberately imposed as war measures are removed.

During the past ten years the revenue has increased by £1,740,000. It is reasonable to conclude this rate of increase will be maintained. In 1924, therefore, which will be the earliest date that the completion of the 1914 programme can be made, the Department will find itself in the position of having to deal with a business producing a revenue of £7,000,000, with equipment that was inadequate for meeting a business yielding a revenue of £4,000,000 per annum. It is apparent that serious congestion, if not complete disorganization of business, will inevitably result, with the accompaniment of grave complaints from the business community generally.

Having regard to the important issues involved, I feel constrained, therefore, to urge most strongly that no time be lost in putting in hand and pushing on vigorously to completion the scheme of improvement outlined in my report of 1914.

I have, &c.,

E. H. HILEY,

General Manager.

The Hon. the Minister of Railways.

STORES.

Mr. H. Baxter, Comptroller of Stores, reports as follows:—

The value of stores, material, and plant (purchased under the Railway vote) on hand at the 31st March, 1919, at the various stores, depots, and sawmills amounted to £559,984 12s. 9d., as against £437,788 3s. 5d. on the 31st March, 1918.

The value of stores on hand on account of additions to open lines amounted to £19,439 0s. 1d., as against £13,244 1s. 2d. on the 31st March, 1918.

The whole stock is in good order, has been systematically and carefully inspected, and is value for the amounts stated.

MAINTENANCE.

Mr. F. W. MacLean, Chief Engineer, reports as follows:—

The track, buildings, structures, and appliances have been maintained in efficient order and repair.

The difficulties experienced during the previous years of the war owing to the shortage of labour and materials have been more acute during the year, accentuated in the matter of labour by the influenza epidemic, and have caused grave anxiety.

Reference has been made in previous reports to the reduction in relaying. As stated in last report, a contract was entered into for the supply of rails, but none of these have been delivered in New Zealand owing to shipping difficulties. Even the limited stocks on hand could not be used to the extent desired owing to the shortage of labour, and the amount of relaying carried out has had to be still further curtailed in consequence. For similar reasons other work has had to be postponed.

Permanent-way.—The relaying during the year has been as follows:—

Main and branch lines, 52 lb. iron, 53 lb., 56 lb., and 65 lb. steel rails relaid	Miles.
with new 70 lb. steel materials	53
Main line, 100 lb. steel rails relaid with new 100 lb. steel material...	4
Branch lines relaid with second-hand material removed from main line	3

Total relaying for the year 7

Sleepers.—79,485 new sleepers were placed in the track during the year.

Ballasting.—88,918 cubic yards of ballast were placed on the track during the year. In addition to shortage of labour, the curtailment of work-trains due to the same cause in the Locomotive Branch has prevented more of this work being done.

Slips and Floods.—Slips, floods, &c., of a minor character which do not call for special comment occurred throughout the whole system at various times.

Serious trouble was caused in the Ohakune district by slips in June, July, September, October, and November, principally in the Taihape district, resulting in dislocation of traffic, and, unfortunately, in one case loss of life.

In the Canterbury District a heavy fall of snow in July took place, causing serious delays to traffic. During the same storm a portion of the Little River Branch was washed out in the neighbourhood of Lake Forsyth.

Heavy rains in January of this year caused a number of washouts and slips in the Dunedin district, and submerged portions of the main line between Allanton and Stirling.

In April, 1918, a continuance of the wet weather, referred to in last report, in the Gisborne district caused further damage which involved heavy reconstruction work.

4,878 tons of rock were used in protective works on the Midland Railway, and over 2,000 tons of rock were used to protect the foreshore at Oamaru.

Bridges.—These have been maintained in good condition. Considerable renewals and repairs have been effected.

Owing to the difficulty in obtaining materials it has not been possible to carry out bridge-strengthening to any extent.