

The attached table hereto gives a complete statement of the work now in progress and the extent to which it is anticipated it can be completed during the next two years, assuming, of course, that sufficient financial provision will be available.

I propose now to sketch the programme of operations during the next two years and indicate the programme which I consider it will be possible to put in hand thereafter. Certain works are now being pushed to completion. As these are wholly or partially completed the expenditure thereon naturally diminishes and enables other works to be taken in hand and pushed to completion. The position is a simple one. The amount of money available annually for railway-construction is limited. It is obvious, therefore, that the soundest policy is to concentrate that expenditure on the most urgent works, complete them, and thus enable them to earn interest on their construction-cost.

During the present year it is anticipated that expenditure by the Public Works Department will cease on the Whangarei Branch connection to the North Auckland Main Trunk, and also on the Huarau-Waiotira Section of the North Auckland Main Trunk. Passenger and goods traffic is actually being run over these lines at the present time, but there still remains the necessity of a considerable expenditure on ballasting, station-yard, and buildings work. Portion of the country through which this line runs is of an extraordinarily unstable nature, and will require close attention during the next few months.

The main line departs from the Whangarei Branch line at Waiotira Junction. The main line objective is Kirikopuni, on the Wairoa River. It is estimated that this section can be completed in two years.

With respect to the North Auckland Main Trunk Railway, now under construction to Okaihau, and which section is now almost completed, the objective of this railway has been considered for some years as at Mangamuka, or, at any rate, as far as Te Tio, on the Hokianga Harbour. The very extensive bridging and other heavy work which would be necessary between Rangiahua and Te Tio leads me to think that it would be sufficient at the present to look upon Rangiahua as the objective. Representations have been made vigorously of late to the effect that if the railway is extended to Okaihau, and a good road is made from there to navigable water on the Hokianga, this is all that is required. The question whether country beyond Okaihau can be adequately or better served by good roads fit for heavy traffic will be carefully gone into in the immediate future, and on the receipt of the results of these investigations the Government will definitely consider the position and decide whether or not they will carry the line to the Hokianga Harbour. In any case it will not be possible to concentrate on this work until the work farther south is more advanced.

Coming now to the East Coast Main Trunk line, which from a construction point of view runs east from Tauranga to Taneatua, a distance of 63 miles, and west from Tauranga to Waihi, a distance of 41 miles, it is estimated that the Tauranga-Taneatua Section can be completed in two years. On the Tauranga westwards section to Waihi a certain amount of work has already been done by the Department, mainly at the Waihi end. Tenders are being invited for the construction of the intervening section of 18 miles 18 chains. The time allowed for completion of this section is three years from the end of this financial year, within which time the Department will have completed the work which it has in hand.

On the Napier-Gisborne line the section to Eskdale has already been completed and opened for traffic. It is intended to extend the construction programme this year, and to concentrate next year to enable connection to be made at as early a date as possible with the main Napier-Gisborne Road at Tutira.

On the Wairoa-Waikokopu line, which is a branch of the eventual Napier-Gisborne line, traffic is already being run by the Public Works Department, but ballasting, station-yards, and buildings will probably take eighteen months to complete. In addition, it has become necessary for the Department to build the wharf at Waikokopu. This latter work should be completed by the end of next summer, and thus provide a satisfactory outlet from the Wairoa district.

On the Stratford-Main Trunk connection at Okahukura traffic is being run as far as Matiere, and from the Stratford end as far as Tahora. Lying between these points is a section of heavy construction and tunnel country. It is intended to