

SUMMARY.

To state in brief the operations of the Department, I would point out that in the past seven years £7,486,719 has been expended on railway-construction, and during that period a length of 317 miles of railway has been brought under traffic, of which 153 miles have been handed over to the Railways Department for working, while 164 miles are being operated by the Public Works Department for the carriage of goods and passengers. The cost of the lengths handed over to the Railways Department was, including Otira Tunnel, £5,423,149, a considerable portion of which was expended prior to 1919.

On the various classes of roads, including main highways, a total of £4,673,570 was expended, and during the seven years considerable improvements in road-construction methods have been introduced. Further extensive work has been done in the direction of additional construction and improved surfacing of roads.

In the sphere of hydro-electric development, 66,233 horse-power has been developed and transmitted to centres of demand, at a capital cost of approximately £3,900,000, an average cost of £59 per horse-power. 20,000 additional horse-power has just been brought into operation at Lake Coleridge.

An area of 28,114 acres has been irrigated, the expenditure during the past seven years amounting to £509,961. This sum includes expenditure for supply of water to further areas when construction operations are sufficiently advanced.

Another activity involving considerable expenditure from the Public Works Fund is telegraph extension, the expenditure on which during the last seven years has been £4,284,767, distributed annually as follows: 1919-20, £249,379; 1920-21, £336,468; 1921-22, £590,981; 1922-23, £501,575; 1923-24, £717,409; 1924-25, £957,294; 1925-26, £931,661.

Mechanical plant has been largely availed of, and has proved satisfactory on works where such can be advantageously used; at the same time the Department has been able to employ more manual labour than in earlier years. The introduction of mechanical plant and labour-saving appliances has been advantageous, allowing of large operations being entered upon without reducing the number of men required.

The housing of the workers still continues to receive the same attention as hitherto from the Department: the provision of huts in place of tents has proved economical in places where camps for workmen were established.

The Department's main operations consist in providing increased transport both by rail and road, aiding the producer and distributor alike.

The development of water-power resources, thereby making electricity available in many areas, has been a very prominent feature in the Department's operations over a decade. Further development works in this connection are still in hand, the major operation being the harnessing of the Waikato River at Arapuni, while the large undertaking for the utilization of power from Lake Waikaremoana has been commenced on a substantial scale. The advantages accruing to settlers in the backblocks as a result of improved roads, telephonic communication, and electric lighting and power, cannot be overestimated, and these benefits have been brought about in a comparatively short period.

The provision of suitable buildings for the operations of State Departments must continue to be made as the population increases and the activities of the State expand. The erection of buildings to accommodate many Departments has been aimed at in all large centres, enabling a concentration of offices which have been distributed over wide areas with a corresponding disadvantage to the general public.

The provision of adequate water-supplies for irrigation purposes in areas where the rainfall is small and the production affected thereby is a development of recent years. Central Otago has received attention hitherto, but there are other districts in the Dominion where similar conditions are found, and the Government, when the occasion arises, will extend its operations to meet the demand.

As appendices to this Statement honourable members will find full details of the principal works carried out by the Department, in the reports of the Engineer-in-Chief, Government Architect, Chief Electrical Engineer, and Main Highways Board, respectively.