

Increased and Improved Rolling-stock provided.—In pursuance of my general policy, there has been a steady advance during the last five years in the provision of rolling-stock to meet the requirements of farmers and the business community. The supply of sheep and cattle trucks was largely augmented to overcome the delays previously experienced in handling freezing-stock. An extensive building programme is now in hand.

CARRIAGES.

The improvement of the passenger rolling-stock was part of my programme for securing better service for the public.

The steam heating of important trains has been pushed ahead, and this service on the main express trains in both Islands has been completed.

Electric lighting of carriages is being extended. A new design of a day car for use on the principal expresses is now under way. It will be an up-to-date vehicle, with every modern facility for the travelling public. New type sleeping-cars have been introduced, and improvements made in the older type in service.

These added facilities are mentioned to indicate that during the period of my administration the Department has been keeping pace with this side of modern developments in the transport world.

ELECTRIFICATION.

The question of the electrification of suburban areas of line in New Zealand has received consideration, and a comprehensive report on this matter is included in my Statement for 1926.

The estimate for the electrification of the Christchurch-Lyttelton Section, in accordance with the approved plan, is £193,440. I am pleased to state that the electric service will be running on this section by the end of January, 1929, thus removing a long-standing discomfort to the travelling public on this important line. All the indications are that the expenditure will be well within the estimate.

A comprehensive investigation is now in hand for the electrification of the Wellington and Auckland suburban areas, and, in view of the provision of new terminal stations at these two centres, I am satisfied that serious consideration must be given to the proposals submitted by the experts.

LOCOMOTIVE POWER.

In order to make the best use of locomotive power the whole field has been surveyed, and certain changes introduced.

Three "Garratt" locomotives are being imported from England, and when these engines arrive a material reduction will be made in the number of engines required over the heavy grades between Taihape and Te Kuiti. A new type of shunting-engine is being designed to meet the varied requirements of shunting-work at important termini. Obsolete locomotives are being scrapped, and every effort is being made to bring our engine-power up to modern requirements. The efficient use of available locomotive power is receiving careful study by a special Committee, and decided improvements have been made in working which will result in further economies being effected.

USE OF NEW ZEALAND COAL ON THE RAILWAYS.

The coal requirements of the railways approximate 400,000 tons annually. In the post-war period the Department was subjected to a considerable degree of criticism because of the large importations of bituminous coal from Newcastle, and it was contended that New Zealand should be self-supporting so far as coal was concerned, and that preference should be given to the local product. The uncertainty of the local supplies was responsible to a large degree for the increased importations necessary in the period referred to.

As the result of comprehensive investigation by a Board of inquiry which I set up in 1925, it was found that, in general, the types of New Zealand coals the use of which was advocated were not by themselves suitable for present-day conditions, but that various mixtures of New Zealand coals could be obtained which would satisfactorily meet requirements. It was also obvious that the utilization of New Zealand coal in place of the imported article would result in a general improvement of the labour and financial situation within the Dominion. This was the objective of the Government, provided it could be obtained without a loss on the operation of the railways.

I am pleased to be able to state that now as large a proportion of New Zealand coal as is warranted by the general economies of the fuel situation is being used.

The following figures supply convincing proof that the Government has succeeded in its efforts to make New Zealand coal the principal fuel used on the New Zealand Railways :—

Year.			New Zealand.	Imported.	Total.	Percentage of New Zealand coal to Total.
			Tons.	Tons.	Tons.	
1924-25	..	..	94,351	313,107	407,458	23
1925-26	..	..	85,393	278,076	363,469	23
1926-27	..	..	187,793	193,161	380,954	49
1927-28	..	..	288,646	152,025	440,671	65.5