

NEW WORKS.

The position in regard to the various new works that are being carried out, and the new rolling-stock that has been constructed during the year or is now on order, is set forth in the report of the Chief Engineer and the Chief Mechanical Engineer attached hereto, and need not be here repeated.

The large works involved in the workshops reorganization, the Auckland-Westfield Deviation, and the Auckland new station and yard are now coming towards completion. The contractors for the erection of the station building at Auckland are well up to time in the progress of their contract, and it is expected that the station will be ready for use towards the end of next year. Goods traffic on a single line is expected to be commenced on the Auckland-Westfield Deviation early in September, 1929, and the double line will be brought into full working at the same time as the new station and yard at Auckland are brought into operation.

The work in connection with the Wellington new station and yard is also proceeding steadily, though some delay in carrying out the necessary reclamation has occurred through difficulties which have been encountered in constructing the storm-water culverts across the reclaimed area. These culverts are now nearing completion, and the work of reclamation will then be resumed and carried to finality. The land is being cleared for the construction of the new goods-shed, and tenders for its erection will be called at an early date. Plans are also in course of preparation for the station building itself. As soon as the new goods-shed is completed the present shed at Lambton will be removed to permit of work being carried on in preparation for the new yard and new station-site.

TRAIN-CONTROL.—TELEGRAPH AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES.

A commencement has already been made in the adoption of the principle of central train-control. Under this system the whole of the working of the trains in the controlled areas is co-ordinated and brought into harmony so as secure the most expeditious handling of the traffic. The utility of the control system is particularly felt in making the rearrangements that inevitably follow—and which have to be made at a moment's notice—whenever a train runs late and gets away from its time-table schedule. Through this method of control the controller has the whole of the train operations immediately under his view, and is able to make such arrangements as will not only do the best possible for the train affected, but will also minimize the ill effects that must result from such circumstances, especially on a single line. This has not only led to a better handling of our trains from the point of view of working them forward, but has also enabled us to effect very considerable economy in that better use is made of the train appliances and the time of the staff. Train-control essentially depends for its efficacy on good means of communication. This is an aspect of our business that opens up very material room for improvement. There seems little doubt that our means of communication have become obsolescent and have not kept pace with the demands of the business. This matter not only affects the extension of the train-control system, but also has a very direct bearing on the general carrying-on of the business of the Department. In a system such as the railways, which extends throughout the length and breadth of the country, good means of communication have a very direct bearing on general efficiency and the capacity of the Department to satisfactorily handle its business. Improvement on our present facilities I regard as absolutely essential, and proposals therefor have been embodied in the programme of works that will require to be undertaken.

COLLECTION AND DELIVERY: CENTRAL BOOKING-OFFICES AND PARCEL-DEPOTS.

One aspect of the problem of increasing the usefulness of the railways to which I have given considerable thought, and regarding which I have had many suggestions from prominent business men, has been that of the collection and delivery of parcels and goods requiring to be transported. The delivery side does not present so great a difficulty as the collection side. So far as parcels are concerned the railways in this country have been able to give a service that has apparently given substantial satisfaction to the public in that it has not given rise to complaint. The difficulty is, however, that the first transporter that obtains possession of the parcels has a definite advantage in the matter of their ultimate carriage to their destination. It is on this point that the motor carrier is placed in a very advantageous position as compared with the railway. Realizing the importance of this factor we have gone very carefully into the question of the collection of parcels for the purpose of transport by rail. Consideration of the various factors with particular reference to the incidence of the traffic has shown that the institution of collection services is, by reason of the sparsity of traffic in any particular locality, not an economic possibility at the present stage. The greatest proportion of the parcels traffic has its origin from the cities outwards, and experience has shown that one of the most potentially operating factors against the transport of the parcels by rail is the necessity of having them carried greater or less distances to a railway-station. It was felt that even if we could not institute a regular parcels-collection service we could go a very considerable distance along the lines of meeting the difficulty. To that end we have established passenger-booking offices and/or parcels-depots at the following localities: Queen Street, Auckland; Karangahape Road, Auckland; Upper Symonds Street, Auckland; and Tennyson Street, Napier. We are about to establish one at Courtenay Place, Wellington. A similar depot had previously been established at Hereford Street, Christchurch. In addition to the places mentioned, we have a passenger-booking office in Wakefield Street, Wellington. In every case we have selected sites where it appeared they would be of most service to the public. Except at Queen Street, Auckland, and Wakefield Street, Wellington, parcels can be consigned at these offices, and there are regular cartage services between the offices and the railway-stations which are so arranged as to fit in with the train services. The volume of traffic which is already flowing through these offices shows that they are meeting a real need, and I do not doubt that they will serve to hold much traffic to the railways that would otherwise have been lost.