

at the Glenbervie Cutting, Tinakori Road, Glenmore Street, and Chaytor Street to Karori Cemetery, at present being carried out at a cost of over £74,000.

What are you asking for in connection with that? What revenues are affected that this Bill proposes to take away from you?—I want to show how infinitesimal towards the cost of our works is the petrol-tax and heavy-traffic fees which the motorists and owners of heavy vehicles say is their contribution. Another work that is being carried out is a new access way to the eastern suburbs, at a huge cost of over £200,000. The cost of tramway-tracks is not included in this sum. These are only two works, and there are scores of other smaller ones. Apart from that, during the last three years the Council has raised in loans £401,000 for laying down many miles of bitumen, and the whole of the interest and sinking-fund charges on this sum, amounting to £33,400, have to be met. This year our expenditure in maintaining and improving 244 miles of streets in the city is over £130,000, so that with interest charges and costs of maintenance and improvements this year's bill will not be far short of £200,000. What proportion of this annual expenditure on our roadways do the heavy-traffic fees and the petrol-tax contribute? The heavy-traffic fees this year supplied us with a revenue of £17,500, and the petrol-tax £10,500, a total of £28,000 out of the £200,000, leaving the Wellington City Council to find £172,000; and it will have to contribute, in addition, if this Transport Bill is passed, in petrol-tax and heavy-traffic fees on its own lorries, buses, and trackless cars, the sum I have previously stated—£3,567—to run on its own roads, constructed by itself at this very huge expenditure, and maintained and improved this year at an additional cost, over and above the amount provided by petrol-tax and heavy-traffic fees, of £172,000, towards which sum bus-proprietors or service cars do not contribute one shilling. You can see from these figures what a serious matter it is to a city like Wellington. I wish this Committee to specially consider whether it is fair to charge the local body that confines its operations within the limits of its own boundaries—if we go outside it is a different matter altogether—any heavy-traffic fees or any petrol-tax or to place any restriction on their running where they like upon their own roads. If we wish to run any heavy vehicles on any particular road, then we are bound to put down a surface that will carry them, and the whole obligation and cost of that is upon ourselves. Why, then, should any outside Board come and say to us, "You can only run where we give you the right to run?" It is taking powers away from local bodies, with a vengeance. Now I want to say just a word or two in regard to cheap transport. There has been a great deal of criticism in the past, but, notwithstanding that, the fact stands out pre-eminently, and is, I think, a monument of economic and efficient service on the part of the local bodies, that tramway carriage in point of cost of running will challenge comparison with any service that is run—even with the railway service. What better could be done than 1d. per section, as is charged in Dunedin?

I cannot see where you can draw comparisons of cost with tramways working right in the midst of a big population with those working where there is only a sparse population. It must necessarily be cheaper?—Just to show that the tramways should be protected, and that the buses cannot stand up alongside them for cost of running, let me state that in Wellington we carry a passenger up to seven miles for 3d.—less than $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a mile. That is, of course, by concession tickets.

Mr. Mason.] And yet you charge more for the shorter trips?—Yes, in proportion; but it shows that for the long-distance trips we can carry the people cheaply, and at a rate the buses cannot compete with.

You have found that a success?—We have had a profit every year. It was in operation before I became Mayor, so that it has been working for over three years.

It has had a good trial, then?—Yes. Now, the question of the trackless car is assailed in this Bill. It is true that in New Zealand there are very few of them indeed at the present time, but there is a likelihood that in future the trackless car will come into more general use. In older countries, where the tram-track has fallen into disrepair, and when great expense was involved in re-laying it, resort has been made to the trackless system, with excellent results. Track-repairs make, as you can well understand, great demands on the finances of a tramway system. If these can be put out, what may be a losing concern can be turned into a profitable transaction.

Mr. Sullivan.] Bradford has tried them, has it not?—Quite a number of cities in England have done so. We have heard a great deal of trams being supplanted by buses, but in many cases these have been electric buses or trackless cars. There are great advantages in the establishment of those trackless cars, because they can be introduced as a first instalment of what will eventually, as the population increases, become a complete system with track. We have a case in point now, but are being held up pending this Bill. We may extend to a certain part of Wellington, but we want to know first if the trackless cars are to be subject to this heavy-traffic fee. The overhead electric wires installed for the trackless car will serve for the completed system with practically no alteration when tracks are laid at some subsequent time. But the greatest argument in favour of encouraging trackless cars is that they consume electricity, a New Zealand product, as against petrol, a foreign product. The more electricity is used the better and quicker will be the returns to the New Zealand Government for the sale of the product from their many hydro-electric stations. In the opinion of my association, this matter of the encouragement of the use of electricity as against the use of petrol is one that no Government can well ignore. In answer to the query often raised, "Can electricity compete with petrol?" I think, from the figures I have quoted in regard to charges in Dunedin and Wellington, there can be no question on that score; and might I just further draw attention to this outstanding fact: In America, on the western coast, where petrol is only 6d., 6½d., or 7d. a gallon, and electricity is roughly 1d. per unit, electric cars are able to compete with the buses. In New Zealand we have cheaper electricity—for in Wellington we are only paying 0·85d. per unit—while the cost of petrol is roughly four times what it is in America. If, then, electric cars can compete with buses in America, everything in New Zealand must be in favour of the use of electricity and electric tram-cars as against buses. Now I come to the question of the axle-loads of trackless cars. It may be said that they