

The through services between Rotorua and Tauranga and between Rotorua and Te Puke have ceased, as Tauranga and Te Puke are now adequately served by rail.

In August the contract service between Wellington (or Lyttelton) and the Chatham Islands for the conveyance of passengers, freight, and mails (a service arranged by the Department of Agriculture) was terminated. Payment for the conveyance of mails for the Islands has since been made on a weight basis.

Following the opening of the new coastal road between Westport and Greymouth a service for the conveyance of mails was established on the 1st December which permits of a more expeditious exchange of mails between Westport on the one hand and Greymouth and Christchurch on the other.

An improved service, making better provision for the transport of passengers and mails, was arranged between Bluff and Half-moon Bay (Stewart Island) from the 1st January.

The reduction by the Railway Department of some of its services necessitated the establishment of road services in order to maintain reasonable mail communication for certain places formerly served by rail. Important in this connection is the twice-weekly road service established between Invercargill and Dunedin. This service operates when the frequency of the express train service between Christchurch and Invercargill is only thrice-weekly. This road service, which provides for letter mails and "express transit" parcels, is performed by departmental vehicle. Other places the reduced train services for which have been replaced or supplemented by road mail-services are Oxford, Wyndham, Waikaka, Waikaia, Whitecliffs, and Greytown.

The Nelson-Reefton-Westport road service which, as a result of the earthquake in June, 1929, was diverted via Maruia, reverted to the original route via Lyell on the 1st November, 1930.

The sea service arranged between Westport and Karamea as a result of the earthquake in that area was terminated on the 22nd January, 1931, on the restoration of the former thrice-weekly service by road.

DESTRUCTION OF POSTAL VAN BY FIRE.

On the 3rd March the postal van attached to the 2 p.m. express train from Wellington to Auckland was destroyed by fire. As the train was approaching Tangiwai, a small settlement situated some miles south of Ohakune, the Mail Agents observed smoke rising from the end of the van nearest the engine-tender adjoining. Immediate action was taken to remove the mail stacked in the affected space, but when this operation was completed there was an outburst of flames. The fire spread quickly, fanned by the draught due to the speed of the train, and it was with some difficulty that communication with the carriage immediately behind the van was obtained, a passage having first to be cleared through the bags at the rear of the van. When the door was reached the officers could not open it, and they had to break the glass panelling to draw the attention of passengers in the adjoining carriage, who immediately operated the emergency apparatus and brought the train to a standstill. By this time the van was full of smoke and the fire had a good hold. Prompt steps were taken to detach the vehicle from the rest of the train, but all efforts to check the flames were without avail. Little time was available in which to salvage mail, and, with the exception of nineteen bags and loose registered articles, the whole of the mail, which comprised 188 receptacles, was destroyed.

Except that one of the agents was singed, the departmental officers escaped scathless. They had a narrow escape, however, and under the conditions obtaining they did well to save a portion of the mails.

The circumstances under which the van caught fire were the subject of a Commission of Inquiry. The Board was unable to determine the origin of the fire.

CARRIAGE OF MAILS BY RAIL.

Payment by the Post Office to the Railway Department for the carriage of mails has for many years been made on the basis of the number of miles of main lines and branch lines open for traffic. Since 1928 the rate of payment under this arrangement has been £21 2s. 6d. per mile for main lines and £16 per mile for branch lines open for traffic. In addition, postal sorting cars were paid for at the rate of 1s. 4d. per mile, and wagons on express trains at the rate of 9d. per mile. On this basis the amount paid to the Railway Department for the year 1930 was £116,563.

The question of the payment for the carriage of mails by rail was investigated in 1930 by the Railways Commission; and the Commission recommended that the Post Office be charged on the following basis for mails carried by the Railway Department:—

Mails carried in guards' vans on any train	..	..	Half railway parcel rates.
Haulage of postal sorting-cars attached to express or mail trains	..	..	1s. 4d. per car-mile.
Haulage of bogie wagons conveying mail-matter on express trains	..	..	9d. per wagon-mile.
Haulage of four-wheeled wagons conveying mail-matter on mixed or goods trains	..	..	6d. per wagon-mile.

The recommendation was adopted by Government; and from the 1st April, 1931, payment is being made on the new basis. To form a basis for arriving at the amount due to the Railway Department for the carriage of mails in guards' vans, all mails carried will be weighed for a period of two weeks in each year.