

RAIL MOTOR UNITS.—One of the modern developments of railway operation is the use of petrol rail-car units over sections of the line to which they are adaptable. The Board has carried out investigations as to the operation of these units abroad, and is now in a position to announce its decision to introduce the petrol car as a passenger unit for trial purposes under actual operating conditions.

The Board has decided to adopt in the meantime the petrol passenger units for use, firstly, between Wellington and Palmerston North, via the Wairarapa route. There will be six purely passenger vehicles each with seating capacity for 49 passengers and space for approximately 1 ton of small parcels and luggage. They will be fitted with 130 h.p. petrol engines and torque converters, and will be capable of adequate speed on flat country and of negotiating the stiff grade of 1 in 15 on the Rimutaka Incline, when fully loaded, at a speed of from 15 to 17 miles per hour. The total loaded weight of each car will be approximately 16 tons. A dual purpose passenger-goods Diesel unit will also be provided for transporting school-children and milk and cream traffic.

A night service between Wellington and New Plymouth, leaving the respective terminal points daily from Sunday to Friday of each week, will also be provided.

The success attaining these experimental services will largely determine the Board's policy in the extension of such services. It is confidently anticipated that they will prove attractive and efficient units for the comfortable and expeditious transport of passengers, while at the same time effecting considerable economies by replacing certain types of steam services.

ABOLITION OF OHAKUNE TRAFFIC AND MAINTENANCE DISTRICTS : NORTH ISLAND.

A change of considerable importance in the organization of the North Island railway districts, involving the closing of the Ohakune Traffic and Maintenance Districts, has been planned and put into operation. The district offices at Ohakune were set up in order to establish under the conditions then existing more direct and efficient control of an important link in the Main Trunk line.

In the early years following the opening of the Main Trunk line the section was a source of anxiety from the point of view of its remoteness and from its liability to slips and subsidences during heavy weather. The standard of communications during that period necessitated maintenance of an administrative organization within the area to ensure expeditious handling of the traffic and effective supervision of a difficult section of track. The recent completion of through departmental telephone circuits, which has greatly simplified the problem of control, and the improvements generally effected by extensive construction work on cuttings and fillings, have rendered the retention of the Ohakune district offices no longer essential. Considerable economy will result from the alteration in the district organization. The Ohakune district has never justified itself in the matter of strengthening the Department's commercial connections. Care has been taken to ensure that the facilities in this direction will in no way be impaired.

The reorganization means the grouping of the North Island Main Line and Branches into three districts instead of four. The new districts will be known as the Northern, Middle, and Southern Districts. The Northern Traffic District, with headquarters at Auckland, will embrace all connected lines north of Okahukura (exclusive of Okahukura Station). The Middle Traffic District, controlled from Wanganui, will embrace all connected lines between Okahukura (including Okahukura Station) and Palmerston North (exclusive of Palmerston North Station). The Southern Traffic District, with headquarters at Wellington, will embrace all connected lines between Wellington and Port Ahuriri, both routes (including Palmerston North Station). The reorganized Maintenance districts will be practically identical with the Traffic districts.

It is anticipated that the economies to be effected by the abolition of the Ohakune district will approximate £6,000 per annum by the better utilization of staff alone, and that other savings of an incidental nature will increase that figure.

TRUCK-RATES.

Encouraging results have attended the provision made in certain localities for the conveyance of general merchandise in truck-loads at a flat rate per truck without reference to the actual tariff classification of the goods of which the loading is comprised. An important feature of the operation of the truck-rate charge has been its effectiveness in bringing about a measure of co-ordination of road and rail services. This result has been achieved to a greater or less degree on the following routes :—

Christchurch—Timaru.
Christchurch—Ashburton.
Wellington—Palmerston North.
Wellington—Napier.

Of the four instances cited, the Wellington—Palmerston North route is, by virtue of the relatively greater volume of traffic involved, of the most importance. Road services had become established on the route and their operations were having an effect on the volume of rail-borne traffic, while the duplication of services represented an economic waste. The institution of the truck-rate, however, has been successful in bringing about almost a complete measure of co-ordination of the rail and road services on the routes involved, with the result that, during the first year of its operation, the tonnage of rail-borne traffic increased by 185 per cent. This increase is being maintained, and competition from road services between the two cities has been almost entirely eliminated.