

TRACK IMPROVEMENTS.

An extensive programme of track improvements has been carried out during the year, and further improvements have been authorized and are to be carried out during the year upon which we are entered.

These include bridge-strengthening to carry the heavier types of locomotives, and the replacement, by steel structures of the most modern kind, of certain wooden structures which have reached a stage of obsolescence. A heavy programme of relaying, with numerous deviations to secure easier grades and curves which will make for the smoother running of trains and assist in speeding up both passenger and goods services, while at the same time reducing haulage costs, is also in hand. With the same object in view, it has been decided to adopt a heavier rail for use on the Department's busy main lines, and in future the standard rail for such lines will be 85 lb. per lineal yard instead of 70 lb. as at present.

As a matter of policy, the services of men on unemployment relief have been utilized wherever possible in connection with grade easement and similar works.

WORKSHOPS ACTIVITIES.

It is pleasing to be able to record that very full use has been made during the year of the Workshops organization in meeting the heavy demands not only of the Department itself, but also in the manufacture of articles of various descriptions for other Government Departments. Illustrative of the scope of the work undertaken on behalf of other Departments, it may be mentioned that two steel radio masts 170 ft. and 210 ft. long have recently been constructed at Addington and Hillside for the Commercial Broadcasting Stations at Christchurch and Dunedin.

During the year the Government undertook to have fabricated in the Railway Workshops at Addington two large dredges to be used in gold-mining on the West Coast of the South Island, and of a total weight approximating 6,000 tons. The fabrication of these dredges would have been lost to the Dominion had it not been for the fact that the work could be carried out in its entirety in the Railway Workshops. That alone was the reason which prompted the Government to make a departure from the usual policy of not undertaking work of a private nature in the Railway Workshops. The work involved in the fabrication of the dredges at Addington has provided a very useful quota of employment for tradesmen and others and the building of additional dredges is likely to eventuate.

ADDITIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS TO ROLLING-STOCK.

During the year a total of seven "K" class locomotives were completed at the Hutt Valley Workshops and placed in service, making the total number of these locomotives now in operation thirty. Provision is made in the current year's programme for the commencement of a further twenty locomotives of this class in the North Island and six in the South Island.

Another locomotive development has been the conversion of the "G" class locomotive to a type more suitable for the class of work required, and a number of these will be brought into use in the South Island at an early date.

In order to obtain a definite indication as to the effect the use of speed-recorders will have on train operation in New Zealand, arrangements have been made to equip twenty-five "AB" class locomotives with apparatus of this kind. The twenty-five speed-recorders are in the first place being fitted for purposes of test, and the further extension of their use will depend upon the nature of the results obtained.

As a means of increasing the safety-factor to a point where track conditions will not readily disturb the equilibrium of four-wheeled vehicles, a programme for the purpose of fitting laminated springs to those vehicles at present equipped with coil bearing springs has been decided upon. Approximately 12,000 goods wagons will be so equipped.