

service was brought into use on 2nd July, 1938. During the year a considerable quantity of electrical equipment arrived for and was installed on the Wellington-Paekakariki section. The station-yard rearrangement at Christchurch, work on which was commenced in the previous year, was further advanced during the year. Extensive progress was made during the year on the three large duplication works—namely, Papakura—Horotiu, Plimmerton—Paekakariki, and Sawyer's Bay—St. Leonards. A considerable amount of work was done on the Turakina—Okioia deviation, while satisfactory progress was made on the deviation at Scroggy Hill and on other grade-easement works.

Special attention was paid to the elimination of level crossings, and considerable headway was made during the year, several of the new overbridges being brought into use. Considerable progress was made on other major works. Great activity was displayed in connection with the rolling-stock programme, the construction of standard rail cars for the New Plymouth—Wellington service and the building of electric locomotives for the Wellington-Paekakariki service being special features, while extensive constructional work was carried out on cars, vans, and wagons.

The site of the old station at Auckland was disposed of, and a credit of £111,323 received.

SETTLEMENT AND OTHER ROADS.

I would like to again emphasize the undoubted importance of good roads in the rural development of this country. Honourable members will recollect that early last summer I announced that arrangements had been made for a special additional allocation of £500,000 for the purpose of extending road-metalling activities during the year. These funds were made available purely for the metalling of roads in backblocks areas where settlers in many cases were still working their farms under access conditions which could only be considered as primitive. These people were virtually still pioneering, and I can confidently claim that the plan instituted last year is the first real attempt which has ever been made to deal adequately with the difficulties and hardships of these unfortunate settlers.

In all, an amount of £1,587,360 (gross) was available last financial year for the betterment and metalling of country roads, and of this, a sum of £1,297,781 (gross) was expended. The actual net expenditure, after allowing for credits from other votes, was £1,126,757, as against £913,720 for the previous year. By the close of the season on 30th June, 600 miles of settlement roads were formed, reformed, or widened, and 1,006 miles were newly metalled, the corresponding figures for the preceding period being 465 miles formed and 792 miles metalled.

Having regard to the fact that in practically all instances local authorities had not had an opportunity of budgeting for any extra large expenditure on settlement roads, of which they were, of course, required to find some part, I consider the season's results to be highly satisfactory.

A great deal of bridging and culverting was also done, some 123 new bridges, totalling 10,710 lineal feet, having been erected with grants or subsidies, and 71,570 lineal feet of culverts installed. My own view in connection with the erection of new bridges is that structures should be in reinforced concrete wherever possible, as this form of construction gives greater permanency and better service with comparatively low maintenance-costs. Local bodies have sometimes objected at first to insistence on the use of reinforced concrete, but careful examination of alternative designs has generally shown that, with the advanced methods now being adopted, there is no really great saving in cost by building in timber—that is, having regard to first cost, maintenance-cost, and ultimate replacement. On consideration of these different aspects local authorities have been ready enough to agree in most instances that the reinforced-concrete bridge has definite financial, as well as practical, advantages.

As in previous years, local authorities have continued to approach the Government for grants to assist with the cost of restoring flood damage, and where a full investigation of the circumstances has indicated that the counties concerned could not meet the full cost of repairs without financial embarrassment varying measures of assistance have been granted. Undoubtedly the disastrous floods on the East Coast caused the greatest damage during the year, and in each county it was necessary for the Government to afford some relief by making grants-in-aid.

For the information of honourable members I intend now to make a few brief remarks concerning some of the major works on which construction was proceeding during the year.