

For Public Buildings, with liabilities of £10,424, we ask for a vote of £156,518. This includes school buildings, £68,230, as against liabilities at end of March last of £2,230. The vote proposed for Buildings as a whole this year is considerably less than last year, although the gross amount for school buildings is practically the same, and the amount available for school buildings, exclusive of liabilities, some £6,000 more than last year.

For Lighthouses and Harbour Works (including Harbour Defences), with liabilities of £119,220, we ask for a vote of £266,010; thus providing £146,790 for new undertakings. The amount included in this for Harbour Defences is £250,000, as against liabilities at 31st March of £114,700, but the liabilities since that date have been largely increased, and now mount up to close upon the amount of the vote proposed.

For Telegraph Extension, with liabilities of £6,000, we ask for a vote of £25,900.

For Purchase of Native Lands, with estimated liabilities in all of £173,200, we ask for a vote of £70,000, that being sufficient to meet the probable payments which will become due during the current year.

For Charges and Expenses of raising Loans we ask for a vote of £60,000.

The total amount proposed to be voted is thus, £2,602,036, which includes liabilities amounting to £1,202,970. Deducting from these liabilities the sum of £103,200, prospective liabilities on Native land purchases, which are not at present required to be provided for, the amount available for new undertakings would thus be in all £1,502,266; but, as already stated, it is only contemplated to spend this year about £1,250,000, which is very slightly in excess of the liabilities already existing.

In considering the proposed votes, honourable members will be reminded of what has been pointed out by the Government: the inadequate proportion for railway construction compared with that for other works. Roads and bridges have assumed a position in the expenditure charged to loans that calls for the most earnest consideration of Parliament, and, if the borrowing powers of the colony are to be restrained within reasonable and prudent limits, some change will have to be brought about in the way that sums out of loan are voted for these works. With our present land revenue and our probable future returns from the Land Fund, the Roads and Bridges Construction Act, if left unrepealed, will entail such a burden on the colony that either our borrowing will have to be extended, or our loans will not be spent in the constructing of railways. To show how borrowed money has been expended for roads and bridges, I need only quote the following figures:—

1880-81	....	....	....	....	£230,844
1881-82	....	....	....	....	145,948
1882-83	....	....	....	....	210,605
1883-84	....	....	....	....	328,641
1884-85	....	....	....	....	317,043

The Roads and Bridges Construction Act only comes into the amounts of the last two years. The amount I have mentioned for 1883-84 includes for grants under the Roads and Bridges Construction Act £106,398, and for 1884-85 £149,982 is included; and, when we are about to propose its repeal, we have to vote £216,000 to fulfil obligations under it. If this Act remains on the statute-book, I hesitate to hazard an estimate of what the yearly vote out of loan would grow to.

The Government does not under-value the need of such colonizing works as roads and bridges, nor has the House denied their utility; but the question is, Shall the Consolidated Fund, and the districts concerned, bear the main part of the burden, or must we go on increasing the debt of the colony for roads and bridges? This is a matter which requires grave consideration; but meanwhile, without risking the dangers of a too hasty alteration of the present system, we shall strive to bring about a change in the mode of charging such votes to loans. At first we can do little more than stop the tendency to increase the votes; but, notwithstanding the increase under the Act last year, we reduced the expenditure on these works by £11,000. The total vote for roads and bridges, including