

As there is a certain amount of discussion now going on about the zone-ticket system which has been adopted in some European countries, and some confusion of ideas exists about it, it is desirable to remark upon it.

It is generally supposed that there is some gain to the travelling public in the system itself. This, however, is doubtful. The advantage in most cases which has accompanied the zone system, but which is independent of it, consists in the reduction of fares.

The reduction of fares in most cases is made with a diminishing charge for increasing distances, which is effected generally by adopting a fixed charge per zone, the zones increasing in length the further they are from the initial starting-point. In one instance the zone-lengths are based on the square roots of the distances from the starting-point.

A fare-table may be made with a diminishing rate as the distance increases, either by adopting gradually increasing lengths of zones, with a fixed charge per zone, or by adopting a gradually diminishing charge per zone, with a fixed length of zone. The same object can be gained by either plan. If we adopted a diminishing rate per mile to compute our passenger-fares we should be following the latter plan.

The zone system is merely the mechanical part of dealing with ticket issues and fares, and we should not gain by its adoption. The subject which has been confused with it is the amount of the fares charged, and the question of whether this should be uniform or diminishing according to distance.

It would be of no practical moment to the public whether the lowered fares are computed on the mileage system or on an irregular zone system, or on one based on square roots, or on a complex one.

The reasonableness of passenger-fares from various points of view must depend mainly upon the population, and their location in relation to the railways, and the current wages of the country.

Those countries where experiments are being tried with lower fares computed on such systems have a large population. The Austrian Empire has 3,000, Belgium 2,000, Sweden 1,000 people per mile of railway, and the rate of wages is only a fraction of what it is here.

A further reduction in fares made without regard to our present population, or to the current wages which are paid for working the railway services, would involve a reduced profit.

In conclusion, it may be added that the zone systems are not similar to the stage system which has been proposed in New Zealand, the proposed fares for which in many instances are very much lower than those in operation in Europe or elsewhere.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servants,

JAMES MCKERROW,

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The New Zealand Railway Commissioners.