

And there are now in hand, exclusive of main trunk lines, several short sections totalling to about 50 miles, most of them near completion.

Honourable members will, I think, admit that in nearly every case the work done will increase the earning-power of the portions of the lines completed up to January, 1891.

STATE OF THE PUBLIC WORKS FUND.

On the 31st March, 1896, the available ways and means for public-works purposes amounted to £134,418. Under the legislation of last session the following additional sums were made available, viz. :—

Public Works Fund—			
Railways	£250,000		
Development of goldfields	200,000		
Development of thermal springs and natural scenery	50,000		
			£500,000
Lands Improvement Account			250,000
Native Lands Purchase Account			250,000
			<u>£1,000,000</u>
Total			

The sum of £150,000 was transferred from revenue during the year, while sundry credits to the amount of £18,656 (including released sinking funds) were also received, thus bringing up the total ways and means available to £1,303,074.

The expenditure under the heads above mentioned was £663,915, thus leaving a balance at the end of the year of £639,159. The following table shows the position as on the 31st March last at a glance :—

Fund or Account.	Balances, 31st March, 1896.	Augmentation under Act of 1896.	Transferred from Revenue.	Sinking Funds and Miscellaneous Receipts.	Total Ways and Means available for 1896-97.	Expenditure, 1896-97.	Balances, 31st March, 1897.
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Public Works Fund—							
Part I.	31,150	500,000	150,000	15,275	696,425	414,062	282,363
Part II.	13,923	13,923	13,923	...
Lands Improvement Account	52,625	250,000	...	3,378	306,003	106,930	199,073
Native Lands Purchase Account	36,720	250,000	...	3	286,723	129,000	157,723
	134,418	1,000,000	150,000	18,656	1,303,074	663,915	639,159

It is now proposed to merge all these accounts in the Public Works Fund, and to supplement that fund for the services of the current year as follows :—

Transfer from revenue	£300,000
To be specially raised for additions to open lines	£200,000
" " school-buildings	25,000
" " technical schools	25,000
	<u>£550,000</u>

In addition to this sum it is expected that sundry credits will come to hand to the amount of probably £5,000, thus bringing the gross total ways and means up to £1,194,159.

The estimates of expenditure which I now have the honour to submit to the House provide for a total outlay of £1,021,570, of which £977,592 will be a charge against the Public Works Fund and £43,978 against the Government Loans to Local Bodies Account, so that a credit balance of £216,567 will probably remain in the Public Works Fund at the close of the year.

RAILWAYS UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

I will now give a brief statement of the principal works undertaken on the several lines of railway under construction since my last Statement was delivered, and what is proposed to be done during the current year.