

I regret to say that bridge-building materials, particularly steel, are still in very short supply, and it has not been possible to proceed with the renewal of bridges at a sufficient pace to meet requirements. Many large structures have been given extended life at the expense of high maintenance costs, and extensive use has had to be made of Bailey bridging-material which the Main Highways Board was fortunate in securing from the United Kingdom.

As is the case with other works, shortages of man-power and materials continue to be limiting factors in highways construction and maintenance. Nevertheless, it is interesting to record that, chiefly due to an acceleration of the Board's sealing programme, particularly in rural areas, the volume of work completed is reflected in the fact that the Board's expenditure during the year was the third largest in the history of the Board.

ROAD-CONSTRUCTION

Road-construction has been on the same scale as during the previous year, restricted by shortage of man-power. Nevertheless, I am pleased to say that progress has been made with back-country roading, including access to ex-servicemen's farms.

Eighty-three miles of new formation, 154 miles of new metalling or reconstruction and metalling, and 21 bridges of a total length of 1,291 ft. have been completed.

The roading programme in the Chatham Islands, mentioned in my last Statement, has proceeded satisfactorily, in spite of the difficulties attendant on operating mechanical plant so far from workshops facilities. The season was unusually wet, and it was shortened because the final trip of the steamer to the mainland was earlier than usual. Nevertheless, 18½ miles of formation and 13¼ miles of metalling have been done during the year. The work will be continued during the coming summer months.

RAILWAYS: CONSTRUCTION AND SURVEY

In the metropolitan areas, investigations for improved rail access have been continued. At Auckland, further surveys have been made in an endeavour to improve the northern outlet. Near Wellington a suitable route for the extension of the Hutt Valley Railway beyond Taita has been surveyed; there will be two crossings of the Hutt River. The alignment of the Sockburn-Styx industrial loop in the Christchurch suburban area has been fixed and pegged on the ground.

A trial survey has been made for a branch railway from Edgecumbe (Bay of Plenty) to Murupara, 39 miles up the Rangitaiki River valley. The construction of this railway, if approved, will provide an outlet for the products of the extensive exotic forest areas of the Kaingaroa Plains as well as for the product of private sawmillers and it will also give improved access to settlers.

My Department has maintained and operated the tram-line between Putaruru and Tokoroa which was purchased last year from the Taupo-Totara Timber Co. The alignment and gradients are below Railways Department standards; and a survey has been completed with a view to reconstructing the line.

Relining and grouting of the Fordell Tunnel was completed, and platelaying and ballasting through the tunnel followed immediately. This operation closed the last phase of the work. The Turakina-Okoia Deviation has been carrying traffic since 7th December.

The Commissioner of Works, in consultation with the General Manager, Railways Department, and the Engineer-in-Chief, has re-examined the various routes surveyed for the Rimutaka Deviation, and a decision has been made. In recommending a suitable route, account has been taken of construction costs, operating-costs, gradients,