

1902.  
NEW ZEALAND.

ACCIDENTS TO TRAINS, DUNEDIN DISTRICT  
(CORRESPONDENCE RELATING TO).

*Laid on the Table of the House by Leave.*

MEMORANDUM for the Hon. the MINISTER FOR RAILWAYS.

Railway Department, Head Office, Wellington, 16th July, 1902.

In compliance with your instructions, I have referred the papers relative to the recent accidents which have occurred on the southern portion of the Hurunui-Bluff Railways to a Board, consisting of Messrs. Coom, Beattie, and Gaw, as representing the Maintenance, Locomotive, and Traffic Branches respectively.

I attach their report, which deals with each accident in the order in which it occurred.

The conclusions arrived at by the Board have my full indorsement.

Personally, should the Government consider further inquiry necessary, I court the fullest investigation.

T. RONAYNE,  
General Manager.

MEMORANDUM for GENERAL MANAGER.

New Zealand Government Railways, Chief Engineer's Office,  
Wellington, 15th July, 1902.

*Train Accidents, Dunedin District.*

In accordance with the Hon. the Minister's request, we submit herewith the following remarks on the series of accidents which have occurred in the Dunedin district during the current year, and the frequency of which has called for criticism from both the public and the Press.

The accidents referred to are as follows :—

1. 21st April, 1902.—Collision and derailment at Hindon.
2. 7th May, " Collision at Port Chalmers yard.
3. 20th May, " Train parting on Crichton grade.
4. 21st May, " Derailment at Totara.
5. 26th May, " Derailment at Hillgrove.
6. 17th June, " Derailment at Sawyer's Bay.
7. 2nd July, " Derailment at Seacliff.

And we offer the following remarks in explanation :—

1. *Collision at Hindon.*—This accident was due to the men of the train from Dunedin neglecting to remain at Hindon to cross a goods-train from Ida Valley. An official inquiry was held, and it was conclusively shown that the accident was due to the failure of the train-men to carry out their instructions. Instructions as to the crossing of these trains were issued to both driver and guard. The men admitted that their instructions were perfectly clear, but that they had been overlooked.

The installation of the train tablet would have prevented this accident.

2. *Collision at Port Chalmers Yard.*—This was due to two causes—1st, driver overrunning the platform; 2nd, the shunter having left two wagons foul of the cross-over road.

The Westinghouse brake would have prevented this.

No official inquiry was held, as the cause was evident.

3. *Train parting on Crichton Grade.*—A heavy goods-train was being taken up the Crichton grade in two parts. The engine with the first part was proceeding up the grade when it ran into a bullock; the recoil of the train broke a coupling, allowing twenty-three wagons to run back and collide with the second portion, which had been left standing on the grade. The broken hook showed a crystalline fracture, but there was nothing to indicate that the iron was of inferior quality.

Although the Westinghouse brake would not have prevented the parting of the train, it would have immediately come into action, and prevented wagons running down the grade.

No official inquiry was held, as the cause of the accident was clear.

4. *Derailment at Totara*.—This accident, the cause of which is somewhat uncertain, is now the subject of an official inquiry; but from the information we have received it was most probably due to the locking of the buffers of two adjoining wagons, causing one of them to mount the track in rounding a curve.

5. *Derailment at Hillgrove*.—Three wagons were derailed on this occasion. The accident was without question due to a badly loaded timber-wagon, the excess of overhang being much above the regulation allowance. The wagon was sent out from Railway Workshops, Addington, and had been loaded by our own staff.

The cause being clear, no official inquiry was wanted.

6. *Derailment at Sawyer's Bay*.—At this accident, which was due to the engine running into a cow, most of the train was wrecked.

The cause was quite clear, and did not require an official inquiry.

7. *Derailment at Seacliff*.—This is now the subject of an official inquiry, and we offer no remarks in the meantime.

Of the whole of the accidents, not including the derailment at Seacliff, to which we do not refer, as it is now under investigation, each is due to a separate and easily explicable cause. In no case can it be said that it was due to either the defects in the rolling-stock or the track, or to any want of care or foresight in the management.

With proper safety appliances, such as the Westinghouse brake and the electric train tablet, the whole of these accidents would have been absolutely prevented or the results greatly minimised. These appliances are now being furnished as speedily as funds will permit.

The cost of these accidents would have gone a long way towards equipping the whole of our railways.

The officers of the Department are quite as anxious as the public to ascertain the cause of every accident which occurs, and there is no desire to withhold information, or neglect in any way to place the blame, where any exists, on the right shoulders.

We are of opinion that nothing would be gained by an inquiry by a Royal Commission or any other outside tribunal.

JOHN COOM,  
Chief Engineer.  
A. L. BEATTIE,  
Chief Mechanical Engineer.  
W. H. GAW,  
Chief Traffic Manager.

[Extract from the *Lyttelton Times*, 10th July, 1902.]

#### RAILWAY ACCIDENTS.

A good deal of attention has been drawn to the subject of railway accidents of late, and we have been told the New Zealand railways enjoy the unenviable distinction of being among the most dangerous in the world. The charge has been supported by a table compiled by Mr. T. A. Coghlan, which shows that during ten years the number of passengers killed and injured on the railways was greater in proportion to the number carried for New Zealand than for any other country in the world, except Canada. There are, indeed, far too many accidents on our lines, but there is no need to exaggerate the danger of railway travelling in this country. Mr. Coghlan's figures were compiled from the latest returns available in 1900, and must be at least three years out of date. The return of the number of passengers killed and injured on our railways last year, which has just been published, is at least reassuring. No passenger was killed, and only four were injured, the total number carried being 7,356,136. We venture to think that few countries in the world could show so clean a sheet. It must be remembered, too, that New Zealand has a very extensive system compared with its population and the number of passengers carried, and, of course, a single fatal accident looks very black in a comparison. There is no doubt that the efficiency and the safety of the service are both improving, and there is little occasion for such sensational criticisms as those that have lately been published.

[Extract from *Otago Daily Times*, 9th July, 1902.]

#### RAILWAY ACCIDENTS.

While it is satisfactory to know that the Government has decided that an investigation into the causes of the railway accident that occurred last week near Seacliff should be held, it would be infinitely more satisfactory if the inquiry were not what is known as a departmental inquiry. In this present case the inquiry will be held before three officials of the Railway Department, and the proceedings will be private in their character. We venture to think that that is by no means the sort of inquiry that, in the interests of the public, is desirable. Where an accident is obviously avoidable an inquiry such as is contemplated in respect of the Seacliff accident has its undoubted value, for it serves to show upon which of the officials in charge of the train or trains the blame for the occurrence must fall; but where, as in last week's case, the accident may be attributable to causes over which the railway servants who were on the train had absolutely no control, and could not have had any, something more than a departmental inquiry is needed. The accident may have been due to some defect in the rolling-stock. It may have been due to some flaw in the permanent-way. There may be some ground, after all, for the impression that has, notwithstanding the protests which the Railway Department has issued to the contrary, gained currency that the class of locomotive which has lately been introduced is unsuited for traffic on the metals we have in the colony, and that heavier rails are required. There are obvious reasons

why a departmental inquiry is insufficient and why an independent inquiry should be held if considerations such as those we have indicated enter into the question. The gentlemen who have been named as likely to constitute the court of investigation should be witnesses, and not judges. Their evidence would be exceedingly valuable, and, indeed, essential, if a thoroughly searching inquiry such as we believe the circumstances demand were held. There would be no hesitation on the part of the Government in taking steps to have an independent inquiry held if the line of railway upon which such an accident occurred as was recorded by us last week had chanced to belong to a private company. The safety of the travelling public requires, however, that there should be as strict an investigation made into the working of the State railways as, under similar circumstances, the management of privately owned railways would be subjected to.

The necessity for an independent inquiry would be much less urgent were it not that the Seacliff accident was not an isolated affair, but was one of a series that have lately happened, and have had the effect of causing a feeling of uneasiness in the minds of those who have occasion to travel frequently by train. Nor does the comparison over an extended period of the number of accidents that have occurred on the New Zealand railways with those that have occurred elsewhere tend to modify the apprehensions which these recent casualties have excited. The statistics contained in Coghlan's "Seven Colonies of Australia" show, indeed, that the proportion of accidents on the railways of this colony for a period of ten years is greater than in any other country, save Canada, whose statistics are available for comparative purposes. In the following table, which is brought down to the latest available dates, the number of passengers killed and injured per million carried are set out:—

Country.	Number of Passengers.		Average per Million Passengers carried.	
	Killed.	Injured.	Killed.	Injured.
Germany ... ..	470	1,906	0·1	0·4
Austria-Hungary ... ..	104	1,290	0·1	1·4
Belgium ... ..	127	1,209	0·1	1·3
Sweden .. ..	18	29	0·1	0·2
France ... ..	653	3,207	0·2	1·1
Norway ... ..	6	5	0·1	0·1
Holland ... ..	21	92	0·1	0·4
Switzerland ... ..	168	582	0·4	1·5
Russia ... ..	403	1,532	0·8	3·1
United Kingdom .. ..	1,173	14,280	0·1	1·6
Spain ... ..	140	858	0·6	3·4
Canada ... ..	145	700	1·1	5·1
New South Wales ... ..	74	444	0·3	2·1
Victoria ... ..	29	1,165	0·1	2·5
South Australia ... ..	13	24	0·2	0·4
New Zealand ... ..	39	170	1·0	4·2

In the light of the frequency of the accidents that have occurred recently, and of the above statistics, the demand for an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the recent Seacliff accident is plainly, we urge, a reasonable one. If any objection should be raised concerning the difficulty of securing a competent tribunal, it may be suggested that a Royal Commission issued to one of the Stipendiary Magistrates, with whom might be associated a railway expert of standing from the Commonwealth of Australia, would provide a Court in which the public would have perfect confidence. It does seem amazing that the Government should regard an inquiry conducted by three officials of the Railway Department sufficient in a matter in which the Department itself may be on its trial.

[Extract from *Southland Times*, 8th July, 1902.]

#### RAILWAY ACCIDENTS.

The frequency with which trains have come to grief on the railways during the past two months or so suggests the inquiry whether there is not some discoverable fault either in the permanent-way or in the rolling-stock. On the assumption that no cause or explanation can be assigned these occurrences have been called "accidents"; but when accidents very much resembling each other in facts become numerous within a short period of time, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some constant cause is in operation which might be discovered and removed. The newspaper reports of the accidents which have befallen trains on the Otago Section at short intervals offer no decisive verdict as to the causes responsible for the casualties. Such opinions as are expressed are so guarded and conditional that no great weight can be given to them. Still, there is a sameness in the circumstances that leads irresistibly to the question, Are not all these accidents attributable to one and the same cause, a cause as yet unknown, but capable of being ascertained? If not asking the question precisely in these words, the public are at least commenting upon the peculiar series of mishaps that have been recorded recently. The inevitable result of such a series of accidents is that the confidence of the travelling public in the trains wavers; the service gets a bad name, and loses its reputation as a safe carrier. We do not aver that this consequence has already followed in

Otago, for it has been a feature of all the accidents that they have not been attended with loss of life, and public alarm is never fully aroused until, in addition to the piling-up of broken wagons and dented locomotives, human life is sacrificed. The people of Otago probably regard the mishaps to the trains as purely accidental, and their frequency as merely a coincidence. Nevertheless, it is not out of place to point out that there may be some fault at the bottom of all the accidents. It is natural under the circumstances to suggest that some such fault exists, and that it might be discovered and remedied by experts. No doubt reports upon accidents have been drawn up by qualified officers of the Department, and it would be interesting, and perhaps satisfying, to the public to learn how railway engineers account for the proneness of our trains to go wrong. Are the mail-trucks insecure, or the wheels of the rolling-stock badly made? Or is the speed of the trains too high for the gauge in use? It would be a pertinent question from the benches of the House to the Minister for Railways, "Can the Department provide the public with any authentic expert information as to the accidents which have recently happened on the Otago Section of the railways?"

[Extract from the *Waimate Times*, 5th July, 1902.]

The oft-recurring railway accidents which have occurred during the past few years are making the majority of the travelling public painfully conscious that they enjoy but a very questionable immunity from being mixed up at almost any time in the miscellaneous *débris* of some terrible smash. And they have but very poor assurances, unless some terrible holocaust, some deaths or maimings, are in course of events brought about, that there will be sufficient inquiries made to establish that confidence which those who continually make use of the railway should have.

As regards the fearful accident at Rakaia, the cause was so palpably evident that every person of intelligence who at all interests himself in the matter could not but at once come to the conclusion as to where the chief blame for that blunder lay; and the inquiry did really little more than confirm that. In addition, some minor points of looseness and want of arrangements were brought to light. But, as a rule, when the serious accidents which have become so frequent of late take place, a departmental inquiry is held privately, and the public are allowed to know nothing about it, except perhaps in a brief or few brief paragraphs from the Head Office, Wellington; and the incident and the occasion are soon forgotten. But let not the public think that the accidents which have been published somewhat prominently of late are the only dangers that cause anxiety to the officers at the head of this very important and fast-growing Department. There are many incidents—"close shaves" as they are called—as in all large concerns, which the public never hear of, or they are known only locally. Most of such, when inquired into, result probably in nothing more than in some employee being dismissed—a ganger, a guard, a Stationmaster, maybe, shifted or disrated, or a driver put back to the position of fireman. The employees are under strict orders as to reticence on such an occasion, and it is only when some ubiquitous reporter happens to be about, or nervous officials, off their guard, let fall a few expressions, that the public are made aware of the miraculous escape they have had from a more serious result. We submit that an independent tribunal should be set up, and that every accident, however trivial the Railway Department may consider it to be, should be fully inquired into by such a Board—such Board having power to summon witnesses and to maintain its authority.

At Home the Board of Trade makes the inquiry. Not only so, but it inspects railways and their works before they are opened for public traffic, inquires into complaints from railway servants as to the hours of work, and approves by-laws of railway companies. Only last year this Board issued its first rules under a new Act for prevention of accidents, which involved the fitting of "either side brakes" to all wagons, and other improvements and equipments for safer working, which entailed considerable expense on the various companies. They are at present considering the improvements of fog-signalling and the interlocking of signals and points at junctions. All this tending to lessen the chance of accidents, to ameliorate the conditions of the workers, and to enhance the public safety. Under the new Act just referred to two "assistant inspecting officers" have been during the past year attached to the railway department of the Board of Trade; their duties are akin to those of Factory Inspectors.

This last point is instructive, and leads us to observe that there are other ways of preventing accidents besides rules, regulations, and traffic-circular instructions referring directly to the running of trains. A regular system of overhauling rolling-stock in the workshops should be seen to. We are quite aware that the traffic has increased enormously, so that both passenger and goods traffic show by the financial results the elasticity of the methods adopted, and the public approve of the way in which the management endeavour to meet their wishes in these respects. But we must not be blind to the fact that such a strain is constantly put upon the plant available that, maybe, the inspection is often carried out in too perfunctory a manner for the insurance of safety.

Two serious accidents have taken place now within a few weeks of each other, where in each case a truck seems to have jumped off the rails in the centre of the train, or else an axle-wheel has given way. As a case of this kind may at any time bring about the most tremendous disaster, does it not point to the need of the most careful inquiry—an inquiry in public and publicly reported, so that we may know exactly how the matter stands? The system of tapping the wheels with a hammer might or might not reveal a flaw; and it is this which may go on until the breaking-point reveals only the fact that the vehicle should long since have been "sent in" for the usual overhaul, which it had to miss through stress of traffic.

Referring to the recent accident near Seacliff, it appears that when the driver saw the erratic movements of the faulty wagon he put on the brakes and caused the train to "buckle." Under the circumstances it could do nothing else—the very laws of its momentum would naturally bring that about. If, however, he had signalled the guard to "Down brakes," and thus have pulled up

the rear of the train, the result might have been different. That, however, is for the inquiry to bring out. At present we are only concerned with the danger attending these incidents, which may at any time lead to the most woful consequences, and to urge that more strenuous measures should be adopted to insure the inspection in the most careful manner possible of the under-gear of all vehicles.

Chief Traffic Manager's Office, Wellington, 23rd July, 1902.

*In re* the attached extract from *Otago Daily Times*, dated the 9th July, 1902.

*Railway Accidents.*

THE figures quoted in the *Otago Daily Times* are not a fair comparison so far as this colony is concerned.

During the ten years ended the 31st March, 1899, passengers were killed and injured as below:—

	Killed.	Injured.
From causes beyond their own control ...	8	68
From their own misconduct or want of care ...	31	102

The General Manager, Railways, Wellington.

W. H. GAW,  
Chief Traffic Manager.

Chief Engineer's Office, Wellington, 22nd July, 1902.

*Re* your minute of 15th instant on attached paper.

*Train Accidents, South Island.*

As before remarked in special report of the whole series of accidents referred to, each was due to separate and distinct cause. In no case has it been shown that the permanent-way was too weak or defective.

The speed of the express trains is limited to thirty miles an hour between Oamaru and Merton, and twenty-five miles an hour between Merton and Purakanui, with a still further reduction to ten miles an hour over a short distance around the Blueskin cliffs.

I consider these speeds may be run with safety.

General Manager.

JOHN COOM,  
Chief Engineer.

[Extract from *Otago Daily Times*, 8th July, 1902.]

OUR RAILWAYS.

(To the Editor.)

SIR,—

In connection with the recent epidemic of accidents, will you kindly allow me space to point out one or two matters affecting the public welfare. Until a comparatively recent date the New Zealand railways enjoyed a remarkable immunity from accident. Why? Was the rolling-stock kept in better order and the permanent-way maintained in a state of efficiency, or can we attribute the change wholly to the use of a heavier type of engine and wagon on a line too weak to bear the strain? No doubt this will be carefully inquired into, and if the latter solution is found correct the Department will be forced by public opinion to revert to the old order of things until such time as a permanent-way is made that will carry with safety the heavier vehicles.

In my opinion, in place of accelerating the speed of the express trains it should be much reduced. The north express has for some time been travelling quite fast enough for safety, and on some portions of the journey much too fast. Regular travellers of an observant turn know this well. I refer to the portion of the journey south of Oamaru. Another thing the Department should remedy, and at once, is the speed over level crossings. The rate at which the express and, in fact, all the main-line trains cross Thames Street, Oamaru, is simply ridiculous, and it is only a matter of time ere a frightful accident will occur if the present speed is maintained.

I am, &c.,  
OBSERVER.

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