

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL MANAGER OF THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT RAILWAYS.

SIR,— N.Z. Government Railways, Head Office, Wellington, 31st October, 1918.

I have the honour to report on the working of the New Zealand railways for the financial year ended 31st March, 1918.

The total mileage of lines open for traffic at the close of the year was 2,993 miles, an increase of 23 miles, which represents extensions opened for traffic during the year. These were—

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Matawai—Motuhora	4	62
Waiuku Branch (Paerata—Patumahoe)	5	0
Raetihi Branch (Ohakune Junction—Raetihi)	8	38
Whangamomona—Kohuratahi	4	50
Total	22	70

The capital invested in the lines open for traffic, including the plant and steamers on Lake Wakatipu, on the 31st March was £36,001,432, as against £35,378,664 for the previous year, an increase of £622,768.

This represents cost of construction of new sections of railway taken over from the Public Works Department, £307,277; expenditure on new works chargeable against Capital Account under Additions to Open Lines, £200,162; Railway Improvement Authorization Act, 1914, £111,721; and £3,608 expended on railways and wharves in the Greymouth and Westport districts.

The gross receipts amounted to £4,687,700, against £4,800,810 for the previous year.

The net revenue, £1,644,793, is equal to a return of 4.60 per cent. on the capital invested in the lines opened for traffic, and 4.24 per cent. on the total capital invested in the opened and unopened lines.

The train-mileage for the year (7,468,646 miles) was 1,677,685 miles less than the preceding year. Passenger and mixed trains decreased 1,264,710 miles, and goods-trains 412,975 miles.

The reduction on the North Island main lines and branches was 984,000 miles, and in the South Island 693,000 miles, due to drastic curtailment of services and severe restriction of goods traffic for three weeks in April and May, 1917, under the coal-saving time-table, and by a reduced service brought into operation on the 14th May, 1917, for the purpose of enabling the Department to continue releasing drafts of men for service with the military forces at the front. The curtailment of trains under the staff-saving scheme was less drastic than under the coal-saving time-table, but it nevertheless involved the suspension of one through express train each way between Auckland and Wellington, and between Christchurch and Invercargill; reduction of week-day suburban services; the discontinuance of Sunday suburban trains, and abolition of all excursion trains and trains to and from racecourses, sports meetings, picnics, &c., and limiting the hours during which the lines would be open so as to avoid night shifts as far as possible. The decrease in the goods-train mileage is due partly to the falling-off in goods and live-stock traffic, and partly to the economy resulting from grade easements and the use of larger engines.

Train services were disorganized by floods and slips, involving in some cases suspension of trains and serious delays in others.

On the 28th May floods in South Otago and Southland affected nearly all lines south of Mosgiel. In consequence through traffic was suspended on the 28th, 29th, and 30th May, but on the 31st again all the principal lines were again open for traffic, but some of the smaller branches were not cleared until the 2nd June.

On the 11th June, on the Gisborne line, slips caused a blockage between Mahaki and Otoko, passengers having to be transferred. Further slips and washouts occurred on the 13th and 14th June, from the 2nd to the 15th August, and from the 5th to the 8th March.

From the 12th to the 14th June traffic was suspended between Napier and Hastings owing to heavy floods. The mail-train was able to get through to Napier on the evening of the 14th June.

From the 14th to the 17th June traffic on the Foxton line was interrupted through floods between Foxton and Rangiotu.

A subsidence of the Kaipara line near Wellsford on the 16th July caused interruption of traffic till the 21st idem.

On the Whangarei Section the line was blocked near Hukerunui on the 8th and 9th August through floods.

On the 11th and 13th September the Midland line was blocked by slips between Avoca and Staircase.

Traffic on the Outram Branch was disorganized on the 27th and 28th September owing to floods, and on the 9th and 10th October it was again blocked by further floods.

Owing to damage to the bridge at Waitahu the weekly trains between Reefton and Inangahua Junction were suspended from the 29th September to the 13th October.

Traffic on the Rewanui line (Westland Section) was interrupted on the 8th, 22nd, and 27th October by slips.

On the 1st January heavy floods on the Westland Section interrupted the traffic on the Reefton, Rewanui, and Otira lines. By the afternoon of the 2nd January ordinary traffic was resumed except on the Rewanui line, where, on account of the coal-bins having been destroyed by a slip, a reduced time-table was in operation till the end of January.

Damage to bridges by floods caused a suspension of the ordinary traffic between Hope and Brightwater, on the Nelson Section, from the 19th to the 30th March inclusive. Traffic was maintained by trains on each side of the break, and passengers transferred by road to make the connection.

Washouts occurred at Taringamotu on the 11th January and 11th February, at Otane on the 11th January; and floods on the Kingston line on the 20th March, and Switzers Branch on the 21st March.