

Now that the actual lengths and cost can be correctly estimated, it is found that to complete the lines in the North Island—omitting 24 miles between Featherston and Masterton, to which I shall refer presently—there will be required a further appropriation for some of them of £142,400, while on the other lines there will be a balance of appropriations not required amounting to £50,000.

It is also found that, for the completion of the lines in the Middle Island, there will be required additional appropriations on some of them to the extent of £265,000; and that there will on the others be a balance, already appropriated but not required, of £43,319. For the completion of the whole of the railways now authorized,—always excepting the length from Featherston to Masterton,—there will thus be required to be newly appropriated a sum of £407,400, with a balance of excess of votes of £93,319, thus only really increasing the present appropriation by £314,081.

The total appropriation will therefore be £6,091,981 for the completion of 991 miles of railway fully equipped; 100 miles being of a much more permanent character than previously contemplated.

It is worthy of remark that, with three notable exceptions, one in the North and the others in the Middle Island, the lines as a whole will be constructed for an average cost of about £5,600 per mile; the former being the Wellington to Featherston, and the two latter the Port Chalmers and the Dunedin to Moeraki. These will cost about £10,000, £27,600, and £9,000 per mile, respectively. Of the above 991 miles of railway, we now have open for traffic 278 miles; but there will, in all probability, be opened during the next three months a further length of 173 miles, and before the end of the year it is anticipated 116 additional miles will be ready for opening.

The excess in the cost of completing the several railways will readily be understood when the rise in the rates of labour and material, the still greater rise in the price of timber, and the very heavy cost of transshipment, are taken into account. And still more readily will this be understood, when it is borne in mind that the rise in Home prices forced a large portion of the permanent way to be contracted for at rates no one could possibly have anticipated in 1872; that circumstances have necessitated an expenditure of £120,000 in fencing beyond the original estimate; and that the Government have had in some cases to pay a very high price for the land required for the railways.

I desire particularly to remind honorable members that the estimates made in 1871 and 1872 of the traffic to be carried on the various lines, were at the time generally considered far in excess of what was likely to be realized when the railways were opened. But what has been the result? Why, that the traffic on all the lines is very greatly in excess of those estimates. On this becoming evident, soon after the close of last session, the Engineer-in-Chief very properly pointed out to the Government, that, to avoid the certainty of the carrying capacity of the railways being totally inadequate for the traffic, very large additional rolling stock must be at once ordered in anticipation from England. The Government, knowing by previous experience that it took nearly two years to get out from Home any large quantity of stock, adopted the Engineer-in-Chief's suggestion, and at once sent Home an order for additional rolling stock to the value of £96,000, feeling sure that the House would approve of their action in the matter.

The Engineer-in-Chief also at the same time pointed out that, as the price of iron was falling fast at Home, it would be advisable, in the face of the much larger traffic than was expected when the railways were first proposed, to provide heavier rails on those lines where there were steep gradients and sharp curves. The Government adopted this advice to a certain extent, and sent Home qualified orders for a limited tonnage of rails 52 lbs. to the yard, instead of 40 lbs., the standard weight that had been adopted; and the result is that we are now getting out about 100 miles of rails of the heavier description, a considerable proportion of which will be used in the Wellington Province, and the balance on the line to the North of Dunedin.

The rails will arrive much faster than was intended when the order was sent Home, owing to the Agent-General having, in the exercise of his discretion,