

the trunk system of railways through their districts, with the view to connect the various settlements.

It is urged with great force that the timber, gum, coal, and other minerals, which the northern districts possess, together with the capabilities of the soil of a very large quantity of land, would make such a railway at once remunerative, and the means of conferring a large amount of indirect advantage on existing settlers, besides inducing a considerable increase of settlement.

The Government think the subject demands attention, and will cause inquiries to be made in order to place the House in possession, next session, of accurate information concerning the route and prospects of additional railway communication, the extent of Crown lands likely to be benefited, the advantages to existing settlers, and what funds towards payment for the construction of the railway would be derivable from the disposal of the forests, and from rentals obtainable from suitable-sized farms in the districts through which the line would run.

Although, as before stated, I do not propose to go into all the road votes in detail, it is necessary that I should say a few words as regards the total amounts proposed to be asked for under three of the principal classes of roads, namely, the roads north of Auckland, the grants-in-aid under the Roads and Bridges Construction Act, and the roads to open up lands before sale, as it might otherwise appear that these amounts are excessive.

For the roads north of Auckland our proposal is to take a vote for the whole of the balance of the amount already allocated in the loan of 1882, which amounts to £103,800, and to distribute this sum amongst the various local bodies, to be expended by them during the remainder of this, and the whole of the next, financial year. This is done in order that they may make arrangements for the works being executed during the most suitable period of the year, as it has been found that the annual allocations of small amounts, made in midsummer, has the effect of running the construction into the winter-time, and also of necessitating its being done in a very piecemeal fashion.

For grants-in-aid under the Roads and Bridges Construction Act the vote proposed, and the one which so materially swells the total amount asked for under the general heading of roads, is £304,200; and it has to be explained that this sum includes a liability of £204,200, being the total outstanding balance of all allocations made up to end of March last, together with £100,000 which we propose for allocation this year for main roads. This will leave the item of district roads still to be provided for under the permanent appropriation of £100,000 made by "The Roads and Bridges Construction Act, 1882," the balance available for allocation under this head, including some £1,803 of debentures already paid, being £43,987.

For the roads to open up lands before sale the amount proposed to be voted is £133,308, that being the balance of loan allocation of 1882, with some small additions recommended this year.

I venture to express a hope that next year such a system of local government will be introduced as will make it unnecessary to come to this House for such an amount of votes for roads and bridges.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I shall only add that I hope when the time comes round for the next annual Public Works Statement I shall be able to show that the department generally is being administered with greater economy than at present; that I may have been able to place the tariff on the railways in a more satisfactory state; and that I shall be able to submit a Bill providing for the creation of non-political Boards of management, which will be satisfactory to this House and the country.

I have, I am sure, wearied the House, and perhaps I have trespassed too far on its patience; and it only remains for me now to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and honourable members for the indulgence accorded to me.