

EKETAHUNA—WOODVILLE.

Every mile of railway made either from Eketahuna or Woodville will promote settlement, and be of great benefit to the district and the colony. We propose, therefore, to ask the House to vote a sum of £17,000, which will be expended partly at one end of the line and partly at the other. This must be taken only as an instalment on account of the cost of constructing the line, and later on, at an early date, when funds may be available, a further allocation to insure the completion of the connection must be made.

WELLINGTON—EKETAHUNA (Te Aro Extension).

There is a sufficient balance on the allocation for railways, under Part I. of the Public Works Fund, to defray the cost of the proposed extension of this line to the Te Aro end of the City of Wellington. Our predecessors recommended this work, and requested the sanction of Parliament thereto, but from various circumstances that consent was withheld. The longer the construction of the work is delayed, however, the more serious will the complications become. The Railway Commissioners strongly recommend that the work should be proceeded with, and we therefore propose that the amount required for its construction shall be voted out of the balance of the railway allocation under Part I. of the fund.

I will now refer to the railways under construction in the South Island, but, before doing so, will briefly remark on some representations made to me during my recent visit to Nelson on the subject of a proposed deviation of the existing railway between Nelson and Belgrove.

NELSON—BELGROVE.

It was pointed out to me that great inconvenience is caused owing to the steep grades on the existing line immediately after leaving Nelson. It is urged that, by carrying the line from the Port, round the rocks, until it joins the present line over the hill at Stoke, a cheap and level line could be secured. The local authorities, viz., the Nelson Borough Council and the Waimea County Council, have decided to make a road along the route referred to, and have asked the Government for assistance towards the construction of the same, on the understanding that they will form the road to a sufficient width to at some future time carry the railway. The total cost of the work would be about £9,000. The proposal has great advantages, and the Government considers that it would be wise to assist in the matter by granting a reasonable subsidy. It is therefore proposed to subsidise the work to the extent of one-third of its cost, and a vote for £1,000 as a money contribution thereto appears on the estimates this year. The balance of the Government contribution it is proposed should be given in the form of prison labour.

BLENHEIM—AWATERE.

The Utawai contract, which will complete the formation of this line to the Dashwood Pass, has progressed fairly well during the year, and is now nearing completion. The vote proposed for the current year is to cover the liabilities already existing, and to provide for a short extension of the line to the freezing-works.

The freezing industry in this locality has assumed such proportions that the expenditure of a reasonable sum to complete the line to the works is warranted, as the portion of the line referred to will amply pay the interest upon its construction, and will also tend to increase the returns from the remainder of the Picton-Blenheim Railway.

As regards the further extension to the Awatere, a great deal must depend upon the attitude which the owners of the private lands through which the line will run decide to take up in reference to the matter. If an undertaking is given binding the owners to sell or lease their lands at rates which the Government may consider reasonable, it would probably be in the interests of the colony to undertake the extension of the line as far as the Awatere.