

## WESTPORT-NGAKAWAU-MOKIHINUI.

The extension of the Westport-Ngakawau Railway to Mokihinui, which was authorised by "The Westport-Ngakawau Railway Extension Act, 1890," to be undertaken at the cost of the Westport Harbour Board, is being vigorously proceeded with. The formation is now almost completed, a large part of which, as previously stated, has been done under the co-operative system.

The bridge over the Ngakawau River, a structure of fourteen spans of 40ft. each, and two of 11ft. each, has been let by contract in the ordinary way, the contract time being ten months from the date of the acceptance of the tender (29th May last), and the contractor is making fair progress with the work. The laying of the permanent-way will be proceeded with shortly, with the view of bringing the coal from the Mokihinui mines into the market at the earliest possible date.

## GREYMOUTH-HOKITIKA.

On this railway work is now proceeding as vigorously as the funds voted for the purpose will permit. A contract for the Kapitea section (formation only),  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles in length, was let in December last, and the work is now well in hand. Since that date a contract has been let for the completion of the Arahura Bridge and the approaches thereto, as well as for the planking of the bridge, so as to render it available for road- as well as railway-traffic, and this contract has just been completed; and several small works have been let on the co-operative principle. The total expenditure on the line to 31st March last has been over £100,000, for which no returns whatever have been received; and costly wooden bridges have been constructed which ere long will require renewing.

The necessity for the early completion of this work becomes more and more urgent every day. Owing to the recent dry weather on the West Coast steamers have been unable to cross the Hokitika bar, and Hokitika has simply been under a famine. Large quantities of merchandise have been landed on the wharf at Greymouth, but there have been no ready means of taking it to the people at Hokitika and South Westland. Goods have actually had to be carried overland to Hokitika by means of wagons a distance of from 40 to 45 miles. We therefore purpose for the present to ask the House to appropriate the sum of £26,000 to this railway, which will enable the formation and the bridges throughout the entire line to be completed.

## OTAGO CENTRAL.

This line was opened to Middlemarch, a distance of 40 miles from its junction with the main Dunedin and Invercargill Railway, on the 4th May last. The line has also been formed and rails laid for a distance of 2 miles beyond Middlemarch, to connect with the Ballast Reserve.

Working-drawings and estimates have been prepared for a further 56 miles of this railway, namely, to the Ida Valley, opposite Blackstone Hill, a distance of  $98\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Wingatui Junction, on the main Dunedin-Invercargill line, and 106 miles from Dunedin.

In connection with this work much has been said and much written, and probably the House is well versed in the history of the subject; but, having heard so many conflicting opinions, I decided to make a personal inspection of the line and the country it traverses, with the result that I have come to the conclusion that the work should be expeditiously proceeded with.

Central Otago is approached at the present time on the north by the line from Palmerston to Dunback; in the centre by the Otago Central; and in the south by the Lawrence and Kelso-Tapanui lines.

The goods for central Otago are conveyed principally by the Dunback and Lawrence lines, so that on the extension of the Otago Central Railway the carriage of goods on those lines will decrease; but every mile of the Otago Central line now made will bring it nearer the land fit for cultivation, and will have the effect of promoting settlement, besides considerably lessening the cost of carriage to the settlers. The state of the roads for traffic in the winter must be very bad indeed. They were bad when I went over them, and that was in fairly good weather.