

*Main Roads.*—During the past year the department has had under its supervision 1,130 miles of main roads, the cost of maintaining, improving, and extending which has amounted to £22,234.

Within the past three years there have been constructed 371 miles of what are practically main roads. Many of these when finished have been placed under the control of local authorities, and a few are yet in charge of the department.

The result of handing over control of well-formed roads to County Councils and Road Boards is nearly always to the disadvantage of the road. Either from want of funds or of sufficient local interest in these arterial roads they are generally not attended to, the water-tables are not cleaned out and preserved open, the ruts are not filled in, the surface-water is allowed to flow anywhere over them, and it is really most disheartening to pass along what was left a beautiful, even road, and find it furrowed by streams and deep wheel-tracks, with frequent soft clay holes, out of which drays find it difficult to extricate themselves.

There can be no doubt but the County Councils and Road Boards have often failed to maintain the roads constructed by the general Government, and they have also failed to maintain many of the roads handed over to them by Provincial Governments.

It seems, therefore, time for the Government to consider whether the principal roads, or those which are not within reasonable distance of a railway, should not be maintained directly, and so preserved from inevitable decay. Such roads as that from Hunterville to the Murimotu country, and on to Tokaanu; that from Pipiriki, on the Wanganui River, to Karioi, and from Moawhango to Napier, in the North Island; the road from Belgrove, *via* the Buller, to Westport, and from Inangahua to Reefton; that from Kumara to Christchurch; that from Waihemo, *via* Naseby, to Clyde, and Wanaka, and Queenstown; and many others, if they are to be maintained fit for rapid traffic, must, it seems, be attended to by the Government directly.

Along some of these routes there are no rateable lands, and, in consequence, the cost of maintenance is mainly contributed by the Government, through the local authority, without any efficient check.

The country has before it, also, the fact that many of the great bridges, constructed when the public works policy was first initiated, are constantly requiring repairs, and in some cases require renewal.

In connection with the construction of arterial roads in the North Island, arises for consideration the increased value given to Native lands, and lands purchased by Europeans directly from the Natives.

To develop the trade and resources of the interior, and to open lands purchased there from the Natives, Parliament has voted, and there have been expended, large sums for the construction of roads, which must first pass through and materially increase the value of such lands. Yet they are not liable for, nor do they specially contribute, a penny towards them.

Notable instances are the road from Hunterville to the interior Murimotu country. This road was rightly considered to be necessary for the development of the country, and it had to pass through miles of Native land, and land purchased direct from the Natives, before it could enter on Crown lands to open them up. Lands which were of no immediate value whatever were, by the construction of this road, made worth as much, in one case, as £1 7s. per acre, and yet have paid nothing towards that increased value, because there is no law to require them to do so.

One of the principal events in last year's history of our roads was the opening of the Hunterville Road to Tokaanu, at the south end of Lake Taupo. This occurred during the summer, and soon after a coach started running the whole length, thereby opening up an interior line of communication by rail and coach between Wellington and Auckland. The fine scenery and diversified character of the country through which this route passes must render it a favourite one with the tourists.

Connected with the above is the Pipiriki-Karioi-Moawhango Road, which, at a few miles from Karioi, crosses the Hunterville-Tokaanu Road. This road was also opened for wheel-traffic, so that it is now possible to drive with little trouble from Napier to the Wanganui River, and proceed thence down that river by steamer to the Town of Wanganui.

The Stratford route has also advanced several miles towards completion, works having been in progress from both ends. It is highly desirable, in the interests of settlement, that the gap should be finished, and thus allow of through-traffic from Taranaki to Auckland. Settlement would very soon follow.

*Miscellaneous Roads, and Roads to open Crown Lands.*—The total mileage of roads of which engineering surveys were made, to enable contracts to be let for construction, is about 343 miles; and the roads constructed and maintained amount to 1,402 miles, and cost £154,135 11s. 9d.

It will be seen from the tables that of this sum £17,322 18s. 3d. was expended in the Auckland District, £4,738 13s. 1d. in the Hawkes Bay District, £32,649 9s. 10d. in the Taranaki District, £48,914 5s. 9d. in the Wellington District, £3,899 1s. 7d. in the Nelson District, £1,966 14s. 6d. in the Marlborough District, £4,124 17s. 10d. in the Westland District, £23,549 17s. 6d. in the Canterbury District, £8,962 12s. 3d. in the Otago District, £8,007 1s. 2d. in the Southland District.

In addition to the ordinary votes of the Assembly, this includes expenditure under the Land for Settlements Act and the Cheviot Estate Disposition Act.

The cart-roads are formed with a minimum width of 14ft., and the horse-roads of a minimum width of 4ft.—generally 6ft., and the minimum grade is one in fifteen. The expense in gravelling or metalling these cart-roads is very great, owing—especially in the North Island—to the scarcity of stone or gravel deposit, insomuch that many of them have to do without this covering, and of course are unfit for heavy winter traffic.

Settlement is advancing at such a rapid rate that even this large expenditure has hardly reached the more inland lands taken up. If, therefore, the forest-lands of the colony are to be actually settled upon, the construction of roads must go on at a rate not less than during the past year.