

During the year the train-services in several parts of the district were considerably improved and extended to cope with the increase in the traffic; also some important alterations in the timetable were caused by the connection of the Wellington, Napier, and Wanganui lines.

The working of these additional trains, and the general improvement of the traffic, has necessitated a large increase in the staff of the district; extra men have been provided accordingly.

The traffic has been conducted under great disadvantages in the matter of the supply of rolling-stock, the year's work having shown conclusively that engines of greater tractive power are imperatively required to cope with the greater weight of many of the trains; that the number of passenger-cars requires augmenting; and that a large increase to the stock of goods- and timber-wagons has become an absolute necessity if the traffic is to be dealt with to the satisfaction of the department's customers.

The general improvement at present perceptible in business leads to the conclusion that the volume of traffic for the year under review will be not only maintained, but to a considerable extent exceeded, during the year now current.

I have, &c.,

T. E. DONNE,
District Traffic Manager.

The General Manager, New Zealand Railways, Wellington.

SIR,—

District Traffic Manager's Office, Christchurch, 30th April, 1898.

I have the honour to report on the working of the Christchurch district for the year ending the 31st March, 1898.

The year's operations have resulted in a gratifying increase of business in nearly all branches of traffic.

The passenger traffic has grown largely, 60,399 passengers more than last year having travelled, producing an increased revenue of £5,018 7s. 2d. The holiday excursion traffic has developed remarkably during the year, there being an increase of 34,456 passengers carried at the various descriptions of excursion fares—the number of passengers carried for the year being 155,378, as against 120,922 for the previous year. The tourist traffic to Hanmer Plains has increased about 20 per cent., but the Mount Cook and southern lakes excursions remain about stationary.

In goods traffic there are substantial increases in cattle, sheep, chaff, firewood, timber, and merchandise, and slight decreases in pigs, grain, and minerals. The sheep traffic has grown to very large dimensions, 950,429 sheep having been carried during the year, the number for last year being 692,761. There is, therefore, an increase of 257,668 sheep, or nearly 40 per cent. In cattle there is an increase of over 40 per cent., and in pigs a decrease of about 25 per cent. The wool traffic remains about stationary. In grain there is a decrease of 6,520 tons, and in minerals of 3,686 tons.

The prospects for the current year, although they may to some extent be affected by the protracted drought, are, on the whole, distinctly hopeful.

The grain yield has not realised the expectations formed earlier in the season, but it is anticipated that the total quantity will be at least equal to last year's yield, and probably may exceed it to a small extent. It may also be assumed that the improved prices for grain will stimulate production, and cause a larger area than usual to be sown. Some further growth may also be looked for in the sheep traffic, the capacity of the meat-works in this district having been considerably increased.

The passenger traffic, which has steadily grown during the last year, may also be expected to increase, the issue of holiday excursion tickets on all important holiday occasions being an inducement to travel which is being taken advantage of in an increasing degree.

I have, &c.,

W. H. GAW,
District Traffic Manager.

The General Manager, New Zealand Railways, Wellington.

SIR,—

District Traffic Manager's Office, Dunedin, 4th May, 1898.

During the past year ten miles of new line have been added to the section from Hyde to Kokonga, making a total mileage for the district of 354 miles 10 chains.

The volume of freight and passenger traffic during the past year has been most satisfactory. Merchandise traffic increased by 16,624 tons, and passenger traffic by 45,681. The total cash collected amounted to £275,383 16s., against £261,870 13s. 4d. for the previous year; the expenditure being £47,882 14s. 2d.

Owing to the drought in the Oamaru district grain crops failed to the extent of 3,910 tons, but around and south of Dunedin there were increases to the extent of 3,750 tons. Unless the season for sowing winter wheat becomes more favourable in the northern district than at present, I fear a similar loss there for 1899.

Our parcels traffic has increased by 7,333 parcels. Season-tickets have also increased by 2,786, caused chiefly through the demand for workmen's tickets.

The output of coal from pits in the district shows an increase of 6,870 tons over 1896-97, and 22,252 tons over 1895-96.

In 1896-97 we shipped 183,450 carcasses of frozen mutton, and 242,791 for the year just ended.

School and factory excursions show an increase of 18,614, the revenue being £3,557 10s. 11d.

Traffic in rabbits increased from 464 tons in 1896-97 to 2,348 tons last year, and to judge from present traffic a very large increase may be expected on above tonnage. Traders are becoming more alive to their interests in the method of forwarding rabbits, and packing in cases and crates is becoming more general.

Comparing the year upon which we have just entered with the past, I am inclined to think that we may suffer a slight decrease in all lines in the Oamaru district, but apart from this, and in