

NEW RAILWAY-LINES.

Progress by the Public Works Department in the construction of new railways has been retarded during the year by the shortage of skilled and semi-skilled staff, and also by adverse weather conditions. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that the Kirikopuni-Dargaville line and the new Dargaville Station will be brought into full use about the end of the year, and that the Westport-Inangahua Junction and Napier-Gisborne lines will be available for traffic early in the New Year. The completion by about the middle of 1942 of the Wharanui-Parnassus line (northern extension of the South Island Main Trunk Railway) is dependent upon the full supply of rails being available when required.

As a matter of war economy, the Government authorized in March last the suspension of work on the Palmerston North railway deviation.

TRACK IMPROVEMENTS AND ADDITIONS.

During the year, track improvements and track maintenance have been continued to the extent that the existing conditions have allowed. The war situation made it difficult to obtain certain essential materials, but, notwithstanding this, satisfactory progress has been made with such necessary undertakings as deviation, duplication, and grade-easement works. Other important works which have been completed or well advanced during the year include the construction of several new bridges, the renewal of a number of bridges, the erection of new goods and locomotive sheds, station yard alterations, and the provision of new sidings and crossing-loops at numerous stations.

Exceptionally severe weather conditions necessitated special measures being taken to repair and counteract damage by slips, washouts, and floods on the Main Trunk, Stratford-Okahukura, Wanganui-New Plymouth, Napier, Wairarapa, and Manawatu lines in the North Island; and on the Main South, Otago Central, and Midland lines in the South Island.

The heaviest charge against slips and flood damage was on the Stratford-Okahukura line, where the destruction was the most extensive in the history of the Department.

More than 21 miles of track was relaid during the year.

New sleepers to the number of 187,611 were laid, and a total of 256,963 cubic yards of ballast was placed on the track.

NEW BRIDGES.

Steel and concrete bridges completed in 1940-41 comprised a 960 ft. structure over the Wairau River near Blenheim; a 242 ft. bridge over the Mangawara River near Taupiri, which has facilitated double-track working through Taupiri Station yard; a 630 ft. bridge over the Rangitikei River, a little north of Feilding; and a permanent structure between Waipunga and Waikoau Stations (at a point about 20 miles north of Napier) to replace a temporary bridge erected over a 70-ft.-deep chasm which resulted from the floods in 1938.

The foundation piers of a 2,295 ft. bridge over the Waiau River near Parnassus, and of a 520 ft. structure over the Opawa River in the vicinity of Blenheim, have been erected, and their steel superstructures will be completed as soon as the requisite material is available.

NORTH ISLAND.

On the Papakura Horotiu duplication, progress has been made on formation works along the final gap of 32 miles between Paerata and Ohinewai, but the shortage of material has, for the time being, prevented double-track operation over an additional area.

Formation works have been completed on the Levin-Koputaroa and Tawa Flat-Porirua track duplications. Similar work was begun in connection with the Levin-Ohau line duplication, but was suspended just before the end of March.