

THROUGH BOOKING BY RAIL AND AIR

A service for the through booking of goods and parcels between the North and South Islands by rail and air was commenced towards the end of last year in co-operation first with the R.N.Z.A.F. and later with the National Airways Corporation. The service has undoubtedly proved to be a valuable one to the public and has been extremely well patronized. The regular air service between Paraparaumu and Woodbourne commenced with three return flights, but this had later to be increased to four, and more recently to five.

In addition to the regular service, special flights on charter from the National Airways Corporation were run to give a through service for occasional lots of household removals to Nelson and for consignments of stud rams from and to Feilding, Masterton, Christchurch, Dunedin, and points farther south. In all, 5,893 tons of freight were carried by the service, including 382 stud rams and a very large number of household removals.

The success of this service is based upon the fact that the air journey is a very short one and thus the air costs, which are undoubtedly high compared with those of land transport, are kept down to a minimum. For example, on goods from, say, Napier to Dunedin the air journey involves a distance of only 72 miles out of a total journey of approximately 700 miles and an air rate can be fixed which, taken in conjunction with the rail rate in each Island, will not bear too heavily on the traffic and yet will provide an adequate margin over the air costs.

ACCIDENT TO PICTON-CHRISTCHURCH EXPRESS

A regrettable happening occurred on 25th February, 1948, when the Picton-Christchurch passenger express train became derailed between Blenheim and Blind River Stations. While traversing a 10 chain curve approximately 2 miles south of Seddon Station the engine overturned and the passenger-cars were derailed and some considerably damaged. Six passengers were killed and sixty-one injured, some seriously. The fireman and driver were also injured.

A Board of Inquiry set up under the Government Railways Act, 1926, investigated the accident. Its conclusions were, briefly, that the cause of the accident was the overturning of the engine and tender due to entering the curve at a speed of over 52 miles per hour (over 22 miles per hour above the authorized speed of 30 miles per hour for such a curve) and that the driver was guilty of a serious dereliction of duty in driving the engine at a speed so far in excess of that authorized.

The full report of the Inquiry Board has been published.

I should like to reiterate the expressions of appreciation which have been voiced on behalf of the Department for the assistance rendered by the medical profession and hospital staffs at Blenheim and Seddon and the numerous other willing helpers.

STAFF

A summary of the staff position and a comparison with the previous year's figures are given in the following table (the figures do not include railway employees serving in the Armed Forces) :—

—						1948.	1947.	Variation, 1948 with 1947.
Total staff as at 31st March—								
Permanent	..	..	..	..	..	16,526	16,342	+184
Temporary	..	..	..	..	..	9,433	9,695	—262
Totals	..	..	..	..	..	25,959	26,037	—78
Average staff throughout the year						25,950	26,077	—127