

OTAGO CENTRAL.

The section of this railway between Ranfurly and Wedderburn was opened for traffic on 1st June last. Formation-work on the Wedderburn-Ida Valley Section has been vigorously pushed forward during the year—three relays of workmen being employed in one important cutting and two in others—and such good progress has been made that rail-laying can be begun in the course of a few weeks. The rails and many of the sleepers are already provided, and tenders for the supply of the remainder have recently been invited locally, but, unfortunately, with unsatisfactory results. Arrangements will now have to be made to supply them from elsewhere. Formation has also been undertaken on the Poolburn Section, and the works as far as Blackstone Hill Station are approaching completion, and will be finished ready for rail-laying by the end of the year. In the Poolburn Gorge, where the work is of a heavy character, every available cutting is being worked, and the masonry culverts (which could not be commenced until the frosts were over) have been begun. The tunnels have also been started, and the work upon them is being pushed along as rapidly as possible. A tender for the iron and steel girders for the Poolburn and Manuherikia (first crossing) Bridges has recently been accepted. The line is expected to be ready for traffic to Ida Valley early next year, and to Blackstone Hill by the end of June, and the further sections to Alexandra will, I hope, be completed within three years. Owing largely to the great development of the dredging industry the traffic upon the completed portion of this railway has greatly increased, thus emphasizing the importance of opening the line as far as Alexandra as early as possible. The vote obtained for this railway last year was £60,000. This year we ask for £100,000.

HERIOT EXTENSION.

When the Government projected this extension it was intended that it should not be proceeded with until a suitable area of land in the district had been obtained for the purposes of close settlement. It is now, however, considered advisable to proceed with the work without insisting on this condition. Last year's vote was not expended, but this year an appropriation of £5,000 is proposed, and, if the vote is duly passed by Parliament, operations will be commenced shortly after the close of the session.

CATLIN'S RIVER—SEAWARD BUSH.

Work on the Catlin's River end of this railway was resumed in June last, and is now well in hand. At the Seaward Bush end of the line the survey to Tokonui is in progress and nearly completed, and construction-work will be resumed shortly. Last year's vote for this railway was £12,000, and a vote for a similar amount is proposed for the current year.

RIVERSDALE—SWITZERS.

The branch line from Riversdale to Switzers was authorised by Parliament many years ago and partly constructed, but the bridge over the Mataura River was never built, and it is proposed to take it in hand. As, however, this bridge would provide for both road and railway traffic, the local bodies interested will be asked to contribute a fair amount towards its cost. A vote of £1,000 is asked for on account of this work.

FOREST HILL.

The work on this branch railway which was approaching completion when my last Statement was delivered has since been finished, and the line handed over to the Railway Department.

OREPUKI—WAIATU.

The survey of this extension was started as early as possible after the line was authorised last year, and construction-works followed as soon as a sufficient length of the survey was finished. The work is now well in hand and proceeding very satisfactorily. Last year's vote of £6,000 proved to be in excess of requirements, but this year a vote of £12,000 is asked for.