

railway to this point shortly; and the rails are laid and the line ballasted as far as the Wanganui River, a further distance of rather more than two miles. At this point further progress with rail-laying is, and has for some time past been, checked by the backward state of the works on the large bridge over the Wanganui River. The contract for the erection of this bridge was let to Messrs. Scott Bros. (Limited), of Christchurch, on the 8th May, 1901, and the date fixed for the completion of the work expired in February last, but the bridge is not likely to be available for the passage of locomotives for at least three months. Beyond the bridge the formation of the line is in hand for several miles, and is making good progress. Directly the bridge is available the rails can be laid into Piriaka, and from this point and onwards the valuable timber asset in the Waimarino Forest can be tapped. The question of the manner of dealing with this forest is engaging the consideration of the Government.

By the time the line is opened to Taumarunui it is hoped that arrangements will have been made for taking the tourist traffic down the Wanganui River from this point, so that there may be a through tourist route, without interruption, from Auckland to Wanganui through the interior, and thence to Wellington.

With a road, the construction of which is now being considered, leaving Tokaanu at the south end of Lake Taupo and joining the railway-line at a place called Kakahi, a short distance south of Taumarunui, travellers could make a very pleasant trip from Auckland, passing through Rotorua, Waiotapu, and Wairakei to Taupo Township, crossing the Lake to Tokaanu, then by the contemplated road to the railway-line, on to Taumarunui, and down the Wanganui River to the Town of Wanganui. Or the trip could be varied by leaving the Wanganui River and going up the Tangarakau River to Kouratahi, and thence through Whangamomona to Stratford. By this variation the traveller would see one of the best examples in New Zealand of the development of bush settlement.

The road above referred to would bring Tokaanu within about twenty-eight miles of the railway, and save the inhabitants of that district some thirty miles of road transport and twenty-five miles of steamboat freight.

At the southern end of the line, the section between Mangaonoho and Mangaweka has been opened for regular traffic. The erection of the steel superstructure of the large viaduct over the Mangatewaka Creek was started in November last. This structure is 944 ft. long and 160 ft. high, and is now practically completed. It was tested with three locomotives on the 4th instant, and found to be in every way satisfactory. Some photographic views and a lithographed plan and elevation of the viaduct are appended to this Statement, from which honourable members will be able to judge as to the character of the work and the progress made with it. Beyond the viaduct the formation is ready for rail-laying for several miles; the rails and sleepers are all provided, and the work of rail-laying has now been taken in hand. It is expected that the line will be available for goods, if not passenger, traffic to Taihape by about May, 1904. Beyond Taihape formation is in hand for a considerable distance, and is proceeding satisfactorily. During the ensuing summer materials and stores required for the construction-works in the following winter will be carted on to the ground, so that progress may not be delayed by the condition of the roads during the winter season.

In view of the large appropriation for this line last year, the relative expenditure thereon, at the first glance, appears small. The nature of the work and the late period of the appropriations rendered it impossible to spend more during the financial year. Since the 31st March, however, a much larger number of men has been employed than during the early part of 1902-3, and greater headway will consequently be made, and a vote of £200,000 has therefore been provided on the estimates.

BLenheim-WAIPARA.

The section between Blenheim and Seddon, at the northern end of this railway, was completed and opened for regular traffic on the 10th October, 1902. Nothing further is being done at the northern end of this line at present, as the