

MAMAKU—TE PUKE.

A rough exploration of a projected railway route between the above points has been made. Mamaku is the summit station on the Rotorua line, and the projected railway, if constructed, would connect the fertile lands of the Bay of Plenty with the Auckland railway system. From the rough examination of the country that has been made it appears that a very favourable route for constructing a line at comparatively small cost can be obtained. It is proposed during the year to have a trial survey made, and I hope to be able to submit the result to the House next session.

STRATFORD—ONGARUE.

The section of this line between Toko and Oruru was opened for regular traffic on the 1st March last; and formation on the Huiroa Section has been begun. The extension of this line will be of material assistance in developing a good class of country, and will eventually form an important connection between Auckland and Taranaki. The expenditure last year was £6,217, and for the current year an appropriation of £20,000 is provided.

MOUNT EGDMONT BRANCH.

This is one of the new lines authorised last session. The earthworks were commenced in January, and have now been completed for a distance of four miles, and the bush felled for a mile and a half further. A start has also been made with the platelaying, and machinery for stone-crushing has been ordered. Probably by about the end of the financial year the output of stone ballast from this railway will have commenced. The expenditure last year was comparatively small, having amounted to £1,986 only, but for the present year a vote of £15,000 is proposed. This will complete the line to the point where the first deposit of stone is met with, and will also cover the cost of the crushing plant.

NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK.

At the northern end the rail-head has been advanced to Owhangō, 190 miles from Auckland. The formation is complete for four miles further, and is in hand as far as and a little beyond Pukerimu, 198 miles from Auckland. The works on this section are rather heavy, and include two tunnels—one nearly 5 chains and the other 19 chains in length. Beyond this point the service-road is in course of construction. The formation has already reached the edge of the Waimarino Plateau, and is being pushed forward to the site of the Makatote Viaduct so as to facilitate the work of erecting that structure. The contract for the Makatote Viaduct was let to Messrs. J. and A. Anderson, of Christchurch, in June last, for the sum of £53,369. Though both longer and higher than the Makohine Viaduct, the structure at Makatote will not be of so difficult or costly a character. The principal reasons for this are the shorter spans and the safer material on which to build the foundations. At the former the foundations were in papa, and necessitated the use of enormous concrete monoliths, while at the latter the material is much harder, and less work and expense is necessary. The longest spans at Makatote will be 100 ft., whereas at Makohine they were 247 ft. A drawing of the Makatote Viaduct is appended to this Statement.

At the southern end platelaying between Taihape and Mataroa is in hand, and ballasting has been begun. The "heading" through the Mataroa Tunnel has been finished for some time, and the work of enlarging and lining is being vigorously pushed on, the parties working night and day. As soon as the lining of this tunnel is finished the platelaying on the section to Turangarere will be put in hand, the formation of that section being now well advanced. Work is also in hand on both the Waiouru and Murimutu Sections, and preparations are being made for taking in hand a further section of the unfinished portion of this railway during the coming summer.

The number of men at present employed on the line exceeds thirteen hundred, and this number will be increased as soon as carting can be resumed.