

STRATFORD—MAIN TRUNK.

Mention was made in last year's Statement of the necessity of making further surveys to determine the point on the Main Trunk Railway that would best serve for a junction-station for this line, and also to exactly define the route of the first few miles of the railway at that end, which has not been definitely fixed at present. Considerable survey-work has since been done, as a result of which I am advised that a better line, and one passing through better country, can be obtained to a point considerably to the north of Ongarue than would be the case if the line were to join at that township, as seems to have been contemplated when the railway was first authorised. Further surveys and engineering reports are necessary before this point can be definitely decided upon, though it is desirable to have the question determined as soon as possible in order that construction-work at the north-eastern end of the railway can be put in hand.

Work has been carried on throughout the year at the Stratford end of the line, and the section between Douglas and Huiroa was completed and handed over to the Railway Department on 1st April last. The Te Wera section is now in hand, and a large staff of workmen engaged upon it. The completion of the line to the end of this section will bring it into contact with the main road to Whangamomona, thus making the railway much more useful to the settlers in the backblocks, as well as insuring a largely increased traffic.

The expenditure last year amounted to £12,365, but, in view of the proposal to commence work at the north-eastern end of the line, a larger vote is necessary this year, and I am accordingly asking for an appropriation of £40,000.

MOUNT EGMONT BRANCH.

The first section of this railway, up to and including the crushing-station at Manganui, was completed and handed over to the Railway Department in April last, and broken stone and ballast is now being produced there. It is proposed to extend the railway to the site of the permanent quarry on the slopes of Mount Egmont, about three miles further on, and provision for taking this work in hand is made on the current year's estimates.

Last year's expenditure was £8,367, and for the present year we propose an appropriation of £15,000.

NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK.

Very satisfactory progress indeed was made with this railway during the year. The only section actually handed over to the Railway Department for traffic was that between Mataroa and Waiouru, which had previously been worked both for goods and passengers by the Public Works Department for some time. This section was handed over at the end of June last. The Public Works Department's trains have continued carrying passengers between Waiouru and Ohakune, and at the northern end between Taumarunui and Raurimu, and later to Waimarino and ultimately to Makatote, and the rail-heads were finally connected on the Manganui-o-te-ao Viaduct on 3rd August ultimo, and before the date promised in my previous Statement. The first through passenger-train (the "Fleet" parliamentary special) was run on 7th-8th August, and returned ten days later. A large amount of work still remains to be done, however, and a considerable force of men is still employed upon it, and will be maintained there until its completion. I hope to be in a position to carry passengers right through by about 1st November.

Every credit is due to the departmental staff for the excellent work that has been done on this railway during the last two years, but especially to the officers who have filled the responsible positions of Engineers in charge at the north and south ends of the line respectively.

The vote taken for the railway last year was £330,000, and the expenditure amounted to £330,224. To provide for the work done since 31st March last, and for the completion of the works still remaining to be executed, a further vote of £225,000 will be required.