

required, to be either worked by the Roads Department and charged to the local body, or lent to the local body, with a charge for interest and depreciation, and worked by themselves. The employment of a local engineer should be made compulsory. To help this a reduction of 25 per cent. on the haulage of metal for local bodies will be made by the Railway Department. I feel confident that if the country is to have the full benefit of the work of the settlers, a great forward movement in these important matters should be made, and, with the assistance that I have sketched for financing local public bodies, and with an active, methodical, and well-controlled provision for the formation and metalling of roads in the interior of the country, I am justified in anticipating that within five or ten years a great transformation can be effected, and that within those periods a very large decrease in the amount of moneys required for roading purposes would take place. I should expect to find New Zealand in this respect as well roaded as any other country in the world. Honourable members will recognise that there would obviously be also a large decrease in the claims upon the central Government for road grants which are now made. I commend these proposals to the most careful consideration of honourable gentlemen.

#### ROADING.

The work of roading in different parts of this country is a matter of the greatest importance. And, in view of the energetic settlement that has gone on all over the Dominion, the time has arrived when greater steps than hitherto must be taken to provide roads for our settlers, especially in the backblocks; and I propose this year to ask the House to provide for £650,000 for roads and bridges, and of this amount £250,000 will be specially devoted to roads in the backblocks, and will be continued for a period of four years, including the current year. A million in all will be expended for this laudable purpose.

#### IRRIGATION.

Provision, as honourable members know, was made last year for carrying on the important work of irrigation in Central Otago. This has not been neglected during the recess, as my colleague the Hon. Minister of Lands and myself made a personal tour through portions of the territory that required artificial means of insuring to the people a regular supply of water. The services of a highly qualified engineer will shortly be secured, and this important branch of the policy of the Government put actively in hand.

#### RAILWAY-CONSTRUCTION.

Full details of the various works that have been in hand during the last year, and of the proposals for the present year, will be given by my colleague in the Public Works Statement, which will be brought down at a very early date; but I may, perhaps, say a few words here with regard to one or two of the more important lines.

First in importance, in every way, is the North Island Main Trunk Railway, and with regard to this great national work I am very pleased to be able to state that completion is now well in sight. The last girder of the great Makatote Viaduct was placed in position on 4th June ultimo, and the rails have since been laid over it. At the southern end the gap between the rail-heads is now under six miles. From present appearances it seems likely that the last rail will be laid about the middle of next month. Considerable work will, however, still remain to be done before the line can be regarded as completed, and before a fast express through mail-service can be run; but there is every likelihood of honourable members representing northern electorates being able to travel by rail all the way from Wellington to Auckland without change of carriages at the conclusion of the present session, and it is also now probable that the regular express train-service can easily be started by the 1st November next. Honourable members will, I am sure, agree with me that this is an announcement of a very satisfactory