

WHANGAREI—NORTH AUCKLAND MAIN TRUNK.

The line which will connect Whangarei district with the North Auckland system at Waiotira Junction is just 20 miles in length, and construction-work is completed or in some stage of progress over $16\frac{1}{4}$ miles, commencing at the Whangarei end. The first 4 miles was let in one contract in May, 1914, and the contract has only recently been completed, about two years after the stipulated time. A further length of $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles has been completed for some time, and the section from Whangarei to Portland Station, $5\frac{1}{4}$ miles, is practically ready for traffic. There is a gap, on which little work has been done, of 2 miles to Oakleigh, where there is a wharf, and where the projected Waipu Branch will some day come in; but from that point onwards formation is complete, rails laid and ballasted for nearly 9 miles, and a ballast-train operates over this length. There have been many small slips in cuttings on this line, but no serious damage, and the rate of progress has been affected by the unusual rainfall and the dearth of suitable labour. Over the last 3 miles to the junction-point formation-work is in progress, and will be carried to completion as early as available funds and labour will permit, so that the new line from Oakleigh to Waiotira may be used as a means of conveying material and supplies for construction-work on the Main Trunk line north and south of the junction.

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The terminus of the open line remains at Ranganui, on the Otamatea waterway, 87 miles from Auckland, but a temporary goods and passenger service is in operation from that point to Huarau, nearly 7 miles beyond. Formation-work has been carried out over 13 miles of route from the terminus of the open line, but weather and labour conditions have been difficult during the year, and the diminishing number of workmen available led to the cessation of work in the Huarau and Golden Stairs Tunnels, as well as on earthworks farther ahead. The clay country traversed is very unstable, and slips in cuttings are very frequent. The headings in each of the tunnels mentioned are 12 chains apart, and until these are pierced rapid progress with works farther north cannot be expected.

WAIUKU BRANCH.

The section from Paerata Junction to Patumahoe, over 4 miles in length, was completed and opened for traffic on the 10th December, 1917. Rails have been laid and ballasting completed as far as Mauku Station, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles farther on, to which point goods will be carried pending the completion of another section.

EAST COAST MAIN TRUNK.

Northern Section.—Construction-work with a small number of men has been in progress since January last on the section from Waihi southwards towards Tauranga Harbour.

Tauranga Section.—The line has for some time been open from Maunganui to Paengaroa, a distance of 20 miles, and a regular goods and passenger service has been in operation over this length under the control of the Public Works Department. During the year the goods service has been extended to Matata, 20 miles beyond Paengaroa. The banks over swampy parts of the route still show a little settlement, and have to be added to from time to time as required. Steelwork for the permanent bridge over the Kaituna River has arrived after long delay, and the contractor has resumed the erection of the bridge. The formation on many portions of this line suffered considerable damage from heavy floods in February last, but repairs have been effected, and over a short length the formation-height was raised to guard against risk of similar damage in future. Station buildings are being erected at Matata.

The construction of the bridge across the Tauranga Harbour alongside the town has been carried forward as far as material procurable would permit, but progress has been very moderate.

Gisborne Northward.—The section from Matawai to Motuhora, 5 miles in length, was handed over to the Railway Department for traffic on the 26th November, 1917. No construction-work is being done beyond Motuhora.