

Extensions to existing Western Electric Automatic Exchanges.

In addition to the extensions already mentioned, further apparatus has had to be provided to meet the growth of subscribers at the following exchanges: Hamilton, 700 lines; Masterton, 300 lines; Blenheim, 200 lines.

The total number of automatic-telephone lines installed in the Dominion on the 31st March was 11,580, of which 11,036 were in operation on that date.

GROUPING OF TELEPHONE-EXCHANGE SUBSCRIBERS' LINES FOR THE PURPOSE OF INTERCOMMUNICATION OUTSIDE THE ORDINARY HOURS OF ATTENDANCE.

For the purpose of permitting intercommunication between telephone-exchange subscribers outside the ordinary hours of attendance, arrangements were made in June, 1921, for the grouping of subscribers' lines at closing-time at exchanges at which the attendance is not continuous. The number of individual subscribers that may be connected in one group is limited to ten, but if a group consists wholly or in part of party lines the number in a group may be increased to fourteen. The fee for the service is 10s. per annum at exchanges with over 150 subscribers, and 5s. per annum at exchanges with not more than 150 subscribers.

Where practicable a subscriber may, in the case of sickness or other emergency, be similarly connected free of charge with a local doctor. This free service is limited to a period of one week.

TRANSFER OF TELEPHONE-EXCHANGE CONNECTION.

In March, 1922, a regulation was made requiring an applicant for the transfer of an existing telephone-exchange connection to pay a transfer fee of 5s. This fee is in addition to any charges which may become due for any work involved in the removal of the telephone instrument or the alteration of the line.

TELEPHONE FACILITIES FOR BACKBLOCKS.

The erection of private lines—particularly by local bodies—was further facilitated during the year by an amendment of the Country Telephone-lines Act which prescribed that the security that may be offered to a lending institution for a loan for the purpose of erecting or acquiring a system of private lines be the same as is provided in the Local Bodies' Loans Act, 1913, in respect of a roadwork.

The 1921-22 amendment to the Country Telephone-lines Act further provides that a local authority having erected or acquired a telephone-line in accordance with the principal Act without having raised a loan for the purpose may make and levy a special rate over all rateable property or in any defined area for the purpose of defraying its charges in respect of the erection or acquisition and of the maintenance and control of such line.

Under the same amending Act legislation was enacted whereby the local authority of a district in which a new telephone line and office are required is empowered to indemnify the Post and Telegraph Department for any loss that may be incurred in respect of the construction, working, or maintenance of such line and office, and to make and levy a special rate over all rateable property in its district, or any defined portion thereof, for the purpose of meeting any claims arising out of such contract of indemnity. This provision replaces a system of guarantee by the settlers which was as unsatisfactory to the guarantors as it was to the Department.

There was also put into operation during the year the scheme under which the Department assists backblocks settlers in obtaining telephone communication with telephone-offices and departmental exchanges. Under this scheme the materials for the erection of private lines are sold to settlers at stock-list prices on a deferred-payment system, interest being charged on unpaid money at the rate of 6 per cent., reducible to 5 per cent. for prompt payment, the instalments being such an amount as will pay off both principal and interest in ten years. The first public announcement of this scheme resulted in the receipt of a large number of applications, but lately the applicants have been comparatively few. Consequently the Department has drawn upon and made use of the stocks of materials that had previously been reserved for sale to settlers.

Regulations were recently gazetted under the authority of section 29 of the Post and Telegraph Amendment Act, 1919, prescribing the conditions under which the erection of private lines is licensed by the Department, and outlining the conditions which must be observed in the construction and maintenance of private telephone-lines generally.

Altogether much has been done during the past year in facilitating the erection of lines and the development of the telephone service in the backblocks, where telephone communication is essential, and where it oft-times means the difference between life and death.

OPERATION OF HYDRO-ELECTRIC-POWER BOARDS.

The erection of extra-high-potential lines for transmitting power from hydro-electric works in many parts of the Dominion has necessitated considerable alterations to the Department's lines. Owing to the high voltage of the transmission-lines, telephone circuits are required to be kept some distance away to avoid interferences by induction, apart from the risk of physical contact. The provision of suitable crossings of telephone-wires with high-power electric lines, and other necessary alterations, add to the expense of erecting departmental circuits, besides necessitating a good deal of extra work on the part of the Department's engineering staff.

SLOT TELEPHONES.

The total number of slot telephones in use at the end of the year was 339, as against 319 at the end of the preceding year. Generally speaking, installations in business centres continue to return revenue sufficient to cover working-expenses. Those in residential areas are not so remunerative, and it has been necessary during the year to withdraw one or two slot telephones owing to the decrease in revenue, the receipts being much below the cost of maintaining the service.

The revenue for the year amounted to £20,188, being an increase of £1,982 over the previous year.