

PLATFORM TICKETS.

The matter of admitting the public to platforms at principal stations at the times of departure of the express trains has been engaging my attention. Unrestricted admission at such times would not only cause very great inconvenience to the work at the stations, with consequent delays to trains, but would be fraught with danger. To permit persons to go on to the platforms to assist passengers or for other good reasons a limited number of platform tickets will be issued.

RAILWAYS IMPROVEMENT.

Many works of considerable magnitude come under this heading. I intend, however, to make a careful study of the whole of the requirements and then formulate a definite programme, having regard to the amount of finance available.

HOUSING.

A perusal of the General Manager's report will indicate the excellent progress that is being made in solving the Department's housing problem, and experts greatly praise the sawmill and house-factory at Frankton. Its estimated output is 300 houses per annum, but experience so far indicates that the estimate will be exceeded. The Department requires 1,200 houses to meet its own demands—sufficient to keep the factory engaged for nearly four years. Besides house-building, all kinds of timber construction-work will be carried out, such as the building of railway-wagons, station buildings, stock-yards, &c. The effect of the acute shortage of houses on the Railway Department can be appreciated from the fact that the cost in the additional transfer expenses of its staff is approximately £10,000 per annum. The labour-saving methods adopted in house-construction result in a very material reduction in capital cost, enabling the Department, after allowing for maintenance, interest, and depreciation, to assess a weekly rental based on one day's pay. With the factory at Frankton Junction fully equipped and running smoothly, urgent requirements should soon be overtaken. The houses being erected by the Department are comfortable and convenient to the occupants, and I join with the General Manager in expressing the hope that those who are in occupation will take an interest in and improve their surroundings. I would desire to see every railway settlement a garden suburb.

GENERAL.

On the one hand, the Department is expected to ensure the maximum degree of safety to its staff and its customers, punctuality is regarded as essential, and concessions and facilities are continually being pressed for. On the other hand, the Department is seriously hampered by the want of those facilities which are imperatively necessary. As with many other things, the provision of these facilities had to be postponed owing to the exigencies of the war period, but I am satisfied that the commencement of the works enumerated by the General Manager cannot, with justice to the Department and the public, be longer postponed.

I am very desirous of bringing the Department into intimate touch with the users of the railways, and I intend to make the fullest possible use of the two Commercial Agents appointed to attain that object. I may say that these two officers have already done excellent work throughout the Dominion, coming into contact with the public, clearing up many matters in dispute, and generally creating a better understanding between the Department and its clients. I am convinced that their appointment was a step in the right direction, and that users of the railways may place before the Agents with every confidence any matters that may require to be investigated and adjusted. Unfortunately, pressure of business has hitherto prevented the General Manager from moving about the Dominion as much as might have been desired to come personally into contact with the Department's customers, but the arrangements in train will enable this to be done.