

away of a bank composed of pumice formation in which were embedded some very large boulders. Some of these boulders were precipitated on to the track in front of the train at the moment it was passing, causing the derailment of the engine, which led to the telescoping of the carriages. The point at which the accident occurred had never previously given trouble. It was patrolled and inspected shortly before the accident, and there was then no indication of instability or other cause to suspect trouble. It is interesting to note that the postal car, which was immediately behind the engine, sustained comparatively little damage, while the second and third cars were practically telescoped into one, and the third car was telescoped over more than half its length.

As the occurrence was unfortunately attended with serious loss of life and injury to passengers, a special inquiry was instituted into the circumstances by a Board composed of a Magistrate and two engineers of high standing in New Zealand who had had considerable experience in connection with railways. The conclusion at which this Board arrived after close investigation and most exhaustive inquiry was that the accident resulted from causes over which the Department had no control, and entirely exonerated the Department from any suggestion of negligence. The evidence that was available to the Board and to the public in connection with the matter clearly established the fact that unremitting vigilance and a very high degree of care are exercised by the Department to ensure the safety of those who have occasion to use the railways. It was clearly demonstrated that the Railway staff have a very high appreciation of their responsibility, and that in districts where night running of trains is involved and the formation of the country introduces any element of risk they maintain a degree of vigilance worthy of high commendation, and such as to justify the conclusion that public safety is their first consideration in all circumstances, and everything possible is done to ensure that end.

Notwithstanding that the Department was under no legal liability to pay any compensation to those who suffered loss as a result of the accident, a generous measure of assistance has been given to those who have found themselves in a position of necessity as a result of the unfortunate occurrence, and it is believed that the help which the Department has found itself able to afford in this direction has generally been much appreciated by the recipients.

Steps have also been taken to give effect to the various suggestions which were made by the Board. As a result of action along these lines the cars that are used for the Main Trunk express traffic are being specially strengthened so as to reduce the possibility of telescoping, and the equipment of guards' vans, both in respect of ambulance and other appliances, has been increased and generally made more suitable for coping with an emergency such as the one under notice.

Prior to the accident it had already been decided to equip the Main Trunk express trains throughout with electric light. This work is now well forward, and, when complete, will not only provide a more efficient and satisfactory light and increase the comfort of the passengers in that direction, but will also reduce the danger of fire occurring in the case of serious accidents.

Comment on this accident would not be complete without including in this report appreciation of the assistance rendered by the medical practitioners and hospital staff at Taumarunui, many passengers on the train, and numerous other willing helpers who gave ready and effective assistance in connection with the accident. The Railway staff met the emergency with commendable promptitude. The rapidity with which relief was organized and despatched to the scene of the disaster reflected greatest credit on all concerned, while the energy and zeal displayed by the staff were generally recognized. When so much good work was done by many persons both in and out of the service it is difficult to particularize any section, and it is hoped that the foregoing remarks in which particular mention is made of various groups of persons will not be taken as indicating any lack of appreciation of the good work that was done by every one concerned.

#### RAILWAY IMPROVEMENTS.

The expenditure during the year on works authorized under the Railway Improvements Authorization Act, 1914, and charged to capital cost was £23,730, making a total expenditure up to 31st March, 1924, on the various schemes authorized by that Act £923,489. Of the total amount the sum of £296,286 has been spent in connection with the Auckland new station; £240,892 on the grade improvements between Penrose and Mercer, and Mercer-Frankton-Te Kuiti; £14,321 on duplication works and automatic signals in Auckland district; £61,110 on new engine depot, Auckland, and new workshops, Newmarket; £12,708 on grade easements between Marton and Palmerston North; £206,633 on signals, interlocking, and safety appliances; £18,125 on improvements at Christchurch; £59,529 on improvements in Wellington yard, automatic signals, Petone shops, and Haywards station; £1,871 at Hastings; and £12,014 on plant required in connection with the general scheme of works.

The scheme outlined in 1914 was expected to be completed in five years from that time. At the time it was propounded, attention was definitely and pointedly directed to the fact that the then existing facilities were totally inadequate to meet the requirements of a business representing 23,000,000 passengers, 5,662,000 tons of goods, and producing a gross revenue of £4,000,000. The intervention of the Great War prevented any material progress being made towards completing the 1914 scheme. Meantime traffic has increased, and the Department has been confronted with a problem which requires it to deal with a traffic consisting of 29,000,000 passengers, 6,900,000 tons of goods, and yielding a gross revenue of £7,000,000 with facilities that were proved ten years ago to be totally inadequate to provide satisfactorily for the requirements of a traffic comprising 6,000,000 less passengers, 1,200,000 less goods tonnage, and yielding £3,000,000 less revenue, this notwithstanding the fact that the serious disabilities under which the operations of the Department are conducted, the economic waste resulting therefrom, and the urgent necessity of the works involved to afford relief