

necessary. A considerable amount of evidence has been taken by the Board in various parts of the Dominion, and exhaustive practical tests are at present being carried out in a railway locomotive with classes and mixtures of coal of all qualities.

When available, the Board's report will be published for general information.

HOUSING.

As will be seen from the Railway Board's report, considerable progress was made during the year with the Department's housing scheme, 253 five-roomed houses having been erected, at a total cost of £170,977. Houses built during 1924 and 1925 were cut to standard size in the Department's house-factory at Frankton Junction, and consequently the average cost has been very materially reduced. The factory is capable of producing about 400 houses per annum, but the high cost involved makes it very difficult for the Department to provide annually the finance necessary for its own requirements. The actual costs for the year, including the erection of the 253 houses, amounted to £220,000. Close analysis of the position shows that the factory must be worked to its full capacity in order to make the scheme a financial success. The present programme is for the construction of 1,500 houses, of which 477 have been built, but I propose to fully review the policy in the near future.

The scheme is an extremely good one both from the point of view of the Department and of the staff. The present receipts from rents of the old and new houses do not quite meet requirements, and it may be found necessary to rearrange rentals to bring them more into line with the annual charges. It may also be possible to reduce costs by working the factory to its full capacity and disposing of the cut houses, over and above the Department's annual programme, to relieve the general shortage of houses existing in various parts of the Dominion.

PROGRAMME OF IMPROVEMENTS AND NEW WORKS, 1924.

The present position with regard to works commenced under the above programme is as follows :—

AUCKLAND-WESTFIELD DUPLICATION.

Work on this deviation was commenced in March last, and good progress is being made. The deviation is 9 miles 67 chains in length, and will be a double track for the whole distance. The maximum grade is 1 in 132, and the sharpest curve 20 chains radius. The substitution of this route for the present heavy grades through Newmarket will materially reduce haulage-costs and allow of increased speeds.

The two outstanding works which will govern the time of completion of this deviation are an embankment for double line across Judges Bay, Hobson Bay and Orakei Basin, and a double-track tunnel, 27 chains in length, under the Auckland-St. Helier's Bay Road. To protect the embankment on the sea side a rubble wall is being constructed in advance of the reclamation. Gangs of workmen, assisted by steam-shovels, are at work on formation and culverts, also on driving headings at the tunnel approach and through Campbell's Point—271 men being employed on the works.

Special attention has been paid to the accommodation of the workmen employed in the tunnel, and a village is being constructed, provided with suitable road access, water-supply, drainage, and electric light.

It is anticipated that this deviation will be completed in three years' time. The work is being carried out by the Public Works Department.

AUCKLAND NEW STATION AND YARD.

The reconstruction of the Auckland yard is being undertaken in conjunction with the Auckland-Westfield deviation, and is under the control of the Railways Department.

The design for the yard provides for a complete remodelling of the passenger and goods yards on a new site. The passenger-station will be of the through type, and built on a raised embankment to provide for the future extension of the line to Whangarei via the Town Hall route, which necessitates crossing over Beach Road with an overbridge.

The goods-yard will be on the low level, and provision is made for new and up-to-date goods-sheds and improved facilities for local loading and delivery sidings.

A commencement will shortly be made with the erection of a new outward-goods shed at Breakwater Road.