

“(2.) Before any route aforesaid is so prescribed the Minister—

“(a.) Shall take into consideration the maximum number of motor-omnibuses proposed to be prescribed for the route ;

“(b.) Shall confer with the Victorian Railways Commissioners and the Board and the Council of any municipality concerned, and may confer with^e such other persons as he thinks fit ; and

“(c.) Shall satisfy himself that the condition of the roads to be included in the route is such as to be capable of carrying motor-omnibus traffic thereon without unreasonable damage to the roads, and that there are not sufficient other facilities for the conveyance of passengers to, from, or within the^e district proposed to be served.

“(3.) Notwithstanding anything in this Act or in any Order in Council, regulation, by-law, or license under this Act, the Minister, or any person authorized in that behalf by the Minister in writing (whether generally or in any particular case), may in cases of emergency, by order in writing, authorize temporary deviations from prescribed routes, and temporary alterations of any sections or terminal points thereof, or of stopping-places thereon, or authorize any motor-omnibus for which a ‘regular service’ or a ‘special service’ license has been granted to ply for hire temporarily on any route, whether a prescribed route or not, and every such Order in Council, regulation, by-law, or license shall take effect accordingly.”

Many other useful provisions are contained in the Act, the whole design of which is to secure that the interests of the community shall be the paramount consideration in every case.

This question is not raised by the Board in any spirit of controversy as to the relative merits of motor-vehicles as against railways as a means of transport. It fully and freely recognizes on the one hand that motor transport is capable of much valuable service to the community, while on the other hand it is clearly undeniable that the time is still very far distant when the railways can be dispensed with. If, in any particular case, it is found that the interests of the community can be better served by road motor-vehicles than by the railway, the Board does not desire to suggest that any artificial advantage should be given to the railways at the expense of the community as a whole. The principal concern of the Board in the present connection is to emphasize the necessity of ensuring that the service shall be available to the public on known terms and conditions. Then only can a true comparison be made between the various forms of transport, and the interests of the community be adequately conserved.

STAFF.

The conduct of the staff throughout the year has been good, and it is pleasing to be able to record that a very substantial forward movement has been made in the direction of increasing the interest of the staff in the problems with which the Department is faced, and engaging their active co-operation in the solution of those problems. The Board fully realizes that without the co-operation of the staff its efforts to improve the conditions of the Department generally, both in its relations with its customers and also with its staff, will prove nugatory, and it is equally seized with the importance of encouraging the staff to feel that they have a personal share in the responsibility of ensuring the smooth and successful working of the Department.

It is felt by the Board that the spirit permeating the staff is rapidly developing in this direction, and will continue to so develop with considerable advantage both to the Department and the staff. The Board desires that every member of the staff should have the fullest opportunity for impressing on his work the stamp of his own personality so that every member may be judged according to his true worth. The Board thinks that along this line lies the solution of many of the difficulties that have arisen in the past in making appointments and promotions, and it hopes by bringing about a closer measure of association of all the members of the staff with one another, including the management, those responsible for the selection of men for promotion will have a better opportunity of equipping themselves to discharge that most important duty, while the staff will develop that feeling of confidence regarding the assessment of their qualifications for promotion which is so essential to a full measure of contentment in the service. The Board also considers that the Department has a responsibility to the staff in the direction of affording to them the fullest opportunity for qualifying themselves to give the highest possible standard of service, and with this object the Board has in view the provision of educational facilities which have not hitherto been readily available to the staff. As development takes place in this direction it may be found possible to assist in the selection of staff for promotion by means of qualifying examinations. Indeed, it seems clear that some incentive along these lines is necessary, or at least very desirable, if the fullest benefit is to be obtained from any system of education that may be established, for although, generally speaking, railway men are academically interested in their work to a much greater extent than is met with in other occupations, it is but right that those who are willing to equip themselves by the diligent study of the deeper problems of railway-working should have a reasonable expectation of a reward for their efforts.

The importance of the railways in the economic and social life of the community is being increasingly recognized, and the science of transport is now taking its place amongst the other sciences to which attention is devoted in our higher educational institutions. In Great Britain this has been given a great fillip by the constitution of an Institute of Transport, which is ranking along with other similarly constituted bodies of long standing, such as the Institutions of Civil Engineers and of Mechanical Engineers, &c. Moreover, railway authorities in Great Britain and America are actively co-operating with the universities in order to bring about a deeper study of railway problems, with the result that the standard of service that can be rendered by railways to the community is being raised, while the expenditure of money and effort is, by the development of scientific management, being kept down to a minimum.