

By the year 1870 there were only 46 miles of railway open for traffic in New Zealand, and, as these were built on different gauges, it became evident that confusion and considerable loss would occur if some standard gauge were not adopted. Accordingly, in the year 1870, a Railway Act was passed to authorize the whole of the railways of New Zealand to be built to the 3 ft. 6 in. gauge. Railway-construction proceeded at a rapid rate, and by 1876, this being the year when the Provincial Councils were abolished and the whole of the lines brought into the hands of the General Government, there were 718 miles of railway open for traffic. By 1880, 1,172 miles were open, this mileage of track increasing in 1890 to 1,809, in 1900 to 2,104, in 1910 to 2,709, and during the succeeding decade to 2,996. Of particular importance in connection with the development of the New Zealand railways is the securing of a through connection between Wellington and Auckland, this being opened on 15th February, 1909, while it was as recently as last year (4th August, 1923) that the east and west coasts of the South Island were connected throughout by railway, by the piercing of the Otira Tunnel.

Nowadays practically all the lines are State-owned, but originally several railways were built by private enterprise and subsequently taken over by the Government. The most important lines built by private enterprise were the Midland (87 miles in length) and the Wellington-Longburn (84 miles in length), these being acquired by the Government in 1895 and 1908 respectively.

RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT OVER A PERIOD.

Before dealing in detail with the particular questions referred to us it may be of advantage briefly to review the financial results of the New Zealand Government railways over the past few years. In the table given at the end of this section comparisons over a period of eleven years are included, but it should be emphasized in this connection that such comparisons must be regarded with caution, owing to the fact that the disturbance due to the war period vitiates the accuracy of conclusions drawn wholly upon figures presented in this table.

On 31st March, 1924, the New Zealand Government railways represented a capital of £48,738,821 9s. 3d., including £7,339,394 3s. the cost of lines and works not yet open for traffic. The capital expenditure is divided as shown below:—

ANALYSIS OF RAILWAY CAPITAL EXPENDITURE AS AT 31ST MARCH, 1924.

| Acquisition of land, property, &c., used in connection with railway working | £ | s. | d. | Capital provided for construction of railways— | £ | s. | d. |
|---|-------------|----|----|--|-------------|----|----|
| Amounts paid for construction of lines and works open for traffic .. | 928,104 | 0 | 0 | Opened lines .. | 41,399,427 | 6 | 3 |
| Amounts paid for construction of lines and works (including lands) not open for traffic | 30,350,851 | 1 | 9 | Unopened lines .. | 7,339,394 | 3 | 0 |
| Rolling-stock— | | | | | | | |
| Locomotives .. | 2,779,804 | 10 | 5 | | | | |
| Coaching stock .. | 1,644,010 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| Freight stock .. | 4,942,600 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| | 9,366,414 | 10 | 5 | | | | |
| Manufacturing and repairing works and plant— | | | | | | | |
| Land and build- ing .. | 140,000 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| Machinery and plant .. | 357,139 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| | 497,139 | 0 | 0 | | | | |
| Miscellaneous ex- penditure— | | | | | | | |
| Lake Wakatipu steamers .. | 44,350 | 11 | 1 | | | | |
| Sawmills and equipment, in- cluding house- factory at Frankton .. | 110,262 | 15 | 0 | | | | |
| | 154,613 | 6 | 1 | | | | |
| Purchase of stores (on capital account) | 102,305 | 8 | 0 | | | | |
| | £48,738,821 | 9 | 3 | | £48,738,821 | 9 | 3 |