

Australian lines, as compared with New Zealand, does indicate that there is less railway travel in the latter country in proportion to the population than in the States mentioned. There were in 1923-24 only 28,436,475 passengers on the New Zealand railways, with a population of 1,347,723, whereas in Queensland, with a population of 805,636, the number of passengers who travelled by railway in 1923 was 29,535,981. South Australia with 515,135 residents had 25,107,379 passengers by rail, and Western Australia had 18,133,168 passengers, for a population of 343,430. The average number of journeys per head of population in the year was—New Zealand, 21·08; Queensland, 35·82; South Australia, 47·46; and Western Australia, 51·27.

Train Services.

We cannot but think that the reason for this disparity is to be found in the train service. On some parts of the system trains cannot be run at any great speed by reason of grades and curves; but when it is found, as a sample, that on one line the only trains run in a day take two and a half hours to cover thirty-nine miles, it cannot be considered as a reasonable rate of progression, and it is not to be wondered at that the motor-car is used by everybody who possesses, or who can hire, such a vehicle, in competition with the rail. Not only is travelling slow—it is irksome; because, with the exception of main-line mail and some suburban, all trains are mixed. Passengers have to sit as patiently as they can in the trains whilst goods-shunting operations are carried out, often at each station at which the train stops. It was stated in evidence (Q. 2503) that “in the case of journeys up to about 40 to 50 miles, where road and rail facilities are about equal, the passenger who is able to choose between rail transit and road transit will usually choose rail. For such short journeys, however, rail facilities are usually both too slow and infrequent, and as a result the passenger chooses road.” The evidence goes on to say, “We are confident that if the rail can economically give equal facilities to the road it can rapidly recover much of the traffic that it has lost to the road. In the case of journeys over about 50 miles very few (if indeed any) passengers travelling on business choose the road unless rail facilities are so poor that they do not provide a practicable alternative. In spite of this undoubted preference for rail transit for journeys over 50 miles, the rail is losing a tremendous number of passengers to the road.” In some cases it is not possible to travel to and from business centres situated 80 or 100 miles apart and return the same day. In addition to the disadvantages of slow travel, there are in many instances long waits at junction stations for connecting trains.

Motor Competition.

Many members of the staff, who were questioned as to any remedy they could suggest for recovering traffic lost to the motor-car, were of the opinion that nothing could be done without running unremunerative trains. They were apparently of the opinion that a single additional train cost 12s. per mile to run. They had evidently taken this idea from the yearly Railway Report, as they also took the loss upon certain lines and deprecated the running of better services upon those lines for that reason. In one instance it was stated, “There is no likelihood of increase in passenger traffic if better services are provided, as there are too many motor-cars in the district.” Other officers were convinced that, as motor competition is becoming more and more acute, a better passenger service should be provided and fares reduced, but they are disheartened by the absence of any determined attempt to meet the competition.

As noted in the “Mechanical” section of our report, there is a waste of engine-power by the standing of engines in steam for many hours when they might be utilized for the additional trains which reasonable public facilities demand. Evidence was given that on a branch line an engine stands from 11.19 a.m. until 3.30 p.m., and in another case from 8.20 a.m. until 6.17 p.m.

The running of mixed trains is, from one aspect—viz., that of avoiding the cost of separate trains for passengers and goods—an economical arrangement, but, apart from the tedium of travel inflicted upon the public, there is without doubt a disadvantage by shunting having to be performed where every train has goods-