

PENROSE-PAPAKURA DUPLICATION.

This work has been completed to Westfield, and will shortly reach Otahuhu, where the extensive rearrangement work involved is nearing completion.

ELECTRIC LIGHTING.

Steady progress has been made with the work of providing electric lighting in railway houses and on station premises where power is available in the vicinity.

SIGNALS AND ELECTRICAL WORKS.

Considerable additions have been made to fixed signals at officered stations.

Special locking arrangements have also been provided at a number of stations.

Double-line automatic signalling has been brought into use between Auckland and Westfield, and also between Dunedin and Ravensbourne.

The further installation of automatic signalling and power-interlocking is proceeding satisfactorily.

The electric tablet system has been installed at the stations between Whangarei and Kaukapakapa.

Substantial additions to telephone and telegraph facilities have been made, and metallic circuits have been completed on a number of sections.

Automatic alarms have been provided at a number of railway-crossings.

ELECTRIFICATION OF SUBURBAN LINES.

For many years past a great deal of discomfort has been felt by the travelling public using the railway between Lyttelton and Christchurch, principally because of the smoke nuisance when passing through the tunnel, and there has in consequence arisen an insistent demand for something to be done to improve existing conditions.

The Government has recognized that something ought to be done to overcome the disabilities complained of, and in 1914 provision was made in the Schedule of the Railways Improvement Authorization Act for the duplication of the tunnel. Owing to the outbreak of war this, with many other similar works, had to be postponed.

In my 1924 programme of improvements and new works it will be observed that the matter of duplicating the tunnel was referred to. It will be noted also in that report that both the General Manager and the Chief Engineer of Railways were of the opinion that there was no justification for the duplication of the Lyttelton Tunnel. That view was justified by a close investigation of the business done over a period of years.

There are, however, sound reasons from a national aspect and in the interests of reasonable conditions of travel for taking a more liberal view of this undertaking than is strictly warranted by a survey of traffic volume, and the Government considered itself more or less in duty bound to give effect to the spirit of the promise implied in the 1914 proposal.

In my 1924 Railways Statement I referred to the fact that the Government was obtaining a comprehensive report in connection with the suggested electrification of the suburban sections at the four main centres from Messrs. Merz and McLellan, consulting engineers, of London.

That report has since come to hand, and is appended to this Statement. The question arises as to whether the Lyttelton Tunnel should be duplicated or electrified.

Messrs. Merz and McLellan consider that in so far as track capacity is concerned there is no great difficulty in working, but that the discomfort of travelling in the tunnel under present conditions is a factor to which due consideration must be given. They report accordingly that if electrification is adopted duplication could be indefinitely postponed.

Messrs. Merz and McLellan contend that the electrification of the tunnel only with consequent changes of engines at Heathcote is not desirable, and that if electrification is adopted it should be for the whole section between Lyttelton and Christchurch.