

The trials of a railway-carriage fitted with an internal-combustion engine were unsuccessful, and the motor unit has now been removed from the car.

A "Clayton" steam rail-car was put into service during the year, and after various modifications fairly satisfactory results have been obtained. It is anticipated that this car will be found satisfactory in regular service on branch lines, and a trial will be made on a line where the passenger traffic offering is within the capacity of the car.

Experiments have also been made in respect of light four-wheeled road-vehicles converted to run on rails. One or two of these cars are being tried out in the South Island on branch lines where passenger traffic is light. These cars are operated by one man, and their fuel-consumption and working-expenses are low.

At the time of penning this report an Edison electric-storage-battery carriage is being assembled at Christchurch. The radius of operation of this car will necessarily be limited. It is proposed to give it a trial in service between Christchurch and Lyttelton.

USE OF NEW ZEALAND COAL ON RAILWAYS.

The report of the Board set up to inquire as to the suitability of New Zealand coals for consumption in locomotives was received during the year. The Coal Inquiry Board reports, *inter alia*: "The Board does not claim that the results of the trials carried out are conclusive on all points, because the testing of coals under working-conditions is not a matter which can be disposed of by one or two trials, but must be the work of years of trial and experimentation by those actually engaged in the service, in order that the maximum results may be obtained with any particular type of coal and locomotive. However, the trials conducted by the Board have been more extensive than any series of trials previously undertaken in New Zealand, and sufficient information has been obtained to enable general conclusions to be arrived at."

Arrangements have been made to continue the trials, which have already resulted in an increased consumption of New Zealand coals, with a consequent reduction in importations of this commodity.

The full report of the Coal Inquiry Board is published as an appendix to this statement. (Appendix C.)

DISASTER AT OPAPA.

It is with deep regret that the Board has to record the serious accident which overtook the express, *en route* to Napier, near Opapa on the afternoon of the 22nd September last. Owing to excessive speed the locomotive and five cars left the rails. As a result of this accident three passengers were killed and twenty-one injured. Subsequently the engine-driver was convicted and sentenced on a charge of manslaughter.

A Board of Inquiry was set up to inquire into the cause of the derailment. The finding of this Board is published as an appendix to this statement. (Appendix A.)

DIVISIONAL CONTROL.

Divisional control was brought into operation in February, 1925. A Divisional Superintendent was appointed to each Island to enable decentralization and closer touch with our customers to be obtained.

The new system has been in force throughout the whole of the year under review, and while it is recognized that there are still matters in connection with it that require adjustment in order to get the full benefits, the year's experience has been sufficient to show that the change is beneficial, both to the Department and to our customers.

The alteration in the system of control entailed the reorganization of the various districts and the closing of the District Offices at Whangarei and Greymouth.

The change was necessarily a gradual one, and has been carried out with a minimum of inconvenience.

The responsibilities devolving on the Divisional Superintendents were at the outset necessarily limited, but once the new organization got into smooth working-order the control and direction of all transport work, including the running of trains, handling of goods and passengers, maintenance of track, structures, and appliances, and the general provision of the facilities for travel, were placed in their hands.

The Divisional Superintendents, in conjunction with the officers of the Commercial Branch, keep closely in touch with municipal authorities, Chambers of Commerce, &c., and by personal interview reduce correspondence to a minimum. Delays in meeting public demands for transport facilities are thereby avoided.

INQUIRY INTO THE CONDITIONS OF WORK OF SHUNTERS.

In July, 1925, Messrs. J. Brown, District Traffic Manager; H. L. P. Smith, Assistant Engineer (Maintenance Branch); J. E. Perry, shunter; and S. Schofield, shunter, were appointed a Board of Inquiry to inquire into the conditions of work of shunters in the Government Railways Department as affecting the hazard involved in the performance of their duties, having regard more particularly to the following factors:—

- (1.) The length of the shifts which shunters are required to work.
- (2.) The numbers of the employees composing shunting-gangs.
- (3.) The time that is allowed for the work of making up trains.
- (4.) Supervision that is afforded on shunters' work.
- (5.) The general control of the work in shunting-yards.
- (6.) The lighting of shunting-yards.
- (7.) The lay-outs and proposed lay-outs of shunting-yards.
- (8.) Drainage of shunting-yards.
- (9.) The matter of employees inexperienced in shunting-work being employed thereon.
- (10.) And generally any other matters which in the opinion of the Inquiry Board affect the conditions of work of shunters as bearing on the risks involved in their employment.