

BRANCH LINES.

North Island.

Kaikōke Branch.—Construction work on the extension of this line from Okaihau (the present terminus) to Rangiahua, was stopped by the Government during the year. As regards the open portion of this branch line the Royal Commission found that the services were at a minimum and that it appeared impossible to operate this branch other than at a considerable loss. It also recommended that the working of the branch should be closely reviewed from time to time, and if it was found that the people of the district did not support the railway the advisability of closing the branch should be considered. This recommendation is being followed to the extent that the working of the branch is being continued in the meantime, and will be reviewed in due course along the lines mentioned by the Royal Commission.

Kirikopuni Branch.—The Government also stopped construction work on this line after the Public Works Department had completed the line to Tangowahine. The terminus on this branch in so far as the Working Railways Department is concerned is Kirikopuni, the line between Kirikopuni and Tangowahine being operated by the Public Works Department. Our proposals regarding this branch included a reduction in the staff and the cancellation of some of the local services for which the traffic had fallen below payable quantity.

Waiuku Branch.—The train services on this branch were considerably reduced and a reduction made in the staff.

Paeroa-Tāneatua Line.—In addition to the reduction in the Auckland-Tāneatua expresses already referred to, the local services in this area were also considerably reduced.

Opunake Branch.—Economies were effected on this branch under the heading of "Maintenance," the comparatively sparse traffic handled and the relatively slow speeds permitting of a lowering of the standard of maintenance to a goods-line standard.

Greytown Branch.—The train services and the operating costs on this branch were reduced to a minimum and reductions were made in staff.

Raetihi Branch.—The train services were reduced and economies effected in track-maintenance.

Napier-Putorino Line.—The Eskdale-Putorino portion of this line (26 miles 74 chains) was opened on the 6th October, 1930. During the previous part of the year this portion of line was under the control of the Public Works Department, the Railway Department operating only the Napier-Eskdale Section (11 miles 67 chains). As a result of the severe earthquake in February last, the permanent-way, bridges, and structures over the whole portion of this line beyond Napier suffered considerable damage, and it will take some months to effect the necessary repairs to permit of the resumption of traffic.

South Island.

Rangiora-Oxford Line and Kaiapoi-Bennetts Line (Eyreton Branch).—Our original economy proposals contemplated closing the Eyreton Branch and working all the traffic of this area over the Rangiora-Oxford line. The proposal to close the Eyreton Branch was strongly resisted by the local interests in that area, and after lengthy negotiations with the various interests concerned it was agreed to keep the Eyreton line open and to work only restricted goods services on each of the two branches. The passenger services were abandoned under these arrangements and the locomotive depots at Oxford West and Bennetts were both closed and the crews transferred elsewhere, the services on the two branches being worked by main-line trains. This rearrangement permitted of substantial savings being effected in this area.

Oxford West - Sheffield Line.—This portion of line (distance 11 miles 50 chains) was closed down as from the 14th July, owing to the operating and maintenance costs being out of all proportion to the revenue obtained. Negotiations are at present in hand with the Highways Board and the local bodies concerned regarding the future maintenance of the combined road and rail bridge over the Waimakariri River between Sheffield and Bexley.

Waipara-Parnassus (Cheviot Branch).—A reduction was made in the train services in this area, the unprofitable Wednesday sale-day trains being eliminated owing to lack of support.

Waipara-Waiatu.—The train services were reduced in this area to meet the altered conditions. The locomotive depot and train crews were transferred from Culverden to Waikari and the running of the morning and evening Culverden-Christchurch trains confined to the Waikari-Christchurch area, except on Wednesdays, on which day these trains commence and terminate their journey at Hawarden.

Southbridge Branch.—The train services in this area were reduced.

Springburn Branch.—Our economy proposals had in view the closing of the portion of this branch between Mount Somers and Springburn (about 4 miles) owing to the small quantity of traffic offering and the limited possibilities of any increase. It was, however, decided by the Government, upon assurances being given by the settlers of future support, to defer action as regards closing the Mount Somers - Springburn portion of the line for another year, the position to be reviewed then in the light of the support afforded the branch by the settlers in the meantime.

Fairlie Branch.—We had for some years past maintained fast passenger services on this branch in an endeavour to attract the passenger traffic, but, in view of the meagre support that was afforded these trains, their running was discontinued as an economy measure, and mixed train services were reverted to.

Waimate Branch.—During the year considerable adjustments in the train services have been made on this branch with a view to reducing the operating-costs. Passenger traffic between Waihao Downs and Waimate (distance 8 miles 21 chains) had fallen to such negligible proportions that it was decided to abandon the passenger facilities in this area, and this section of line is now worked for goods traffic only. Between Waimate and Studholme Junction the passenger traffic by rail was also discontinued,