



## Telecommunications

### Early telegraphy and telegrams

Māori communicated over distance in early New Zealand by means of gongs, horns, smoke and even 'human semaphore' – gestures and stances. After European settlement, electro-mechanical telegraph devices invented in Britain and the United States were used.

Brief messages were translated into Morse code and tapped into the telegraph network, arriving at the telegraph office closest to their destination. The code was then returned to written form and carried by a telegraph messenger to its recipient.

#### The national network

New Zealand's first telegraph line – between Lyttelton and Christchurch – was set up by the Canterbury provincial government in 1862. By 1865 the southern telegraph line extended from Invercargill, via Dunedin and Christchurch, to the Hurunui river in North Canterbury.

In 1866 the link across Cook Strait was laid. Development of the North Island network was delayed by opposition from hostile Māori. The Wellington–Auckland line was not fully operational until 1872. With the help of sympathetic Māori and the use of military redoubts, a route through Napier, Taupō and Tauranga was used.

#### Cabling disaster

It was a near disaster when the telegraph cable being laid across Cook Strait in 1866 fouled. A huge knot of rope tangled in the cable-laying drum. Wheels broke, and pieces flew into the air and thundered down on the deck.

#### International connections

In February 1876 the Eastern Extension Company laid cable between La Perouse, New South Wales and Wakapuaka near Nelson. The New South Wales and New Zealand governments subsidised the cost. Connections overland via Adelaide and Darwin, and undersea via Java and Suez, allowed telegraphic contact with London the same year.

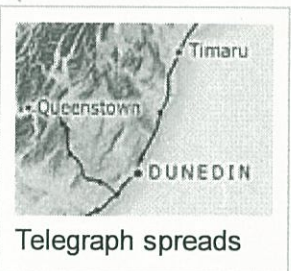
#### Cost to the consumer

At first telegrams to London cost 15 shillings per word (around \$100 in 2009 terms), and those to Australia cost 1s. 6d. Most telegraph use was by government officials and businesses.

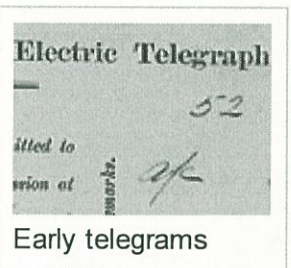
From the 1870s telegram rates came down as technology and service improved. The 'shilling



Putātara (shell trumpet)



Telegraph spreads



Early telegrams

## Rate of use

In 1865 some nine telegraph stations (mainly in the South Island) sent almost 100,000 messages. During the prosperous Liberal government years, traffic had grown from 1.96 million messages (excluding non-paid ones and cables) from 145 stations in 1890, to 8.5 million from 300 stations in 1910.

Overseas cables further swelled the colony's telegraph traffic, and messages to and from overseas grew eightfold to 120,000 between 1880 and 1910.

## Biographies



Thomas Hickman, 1848–1930



James Kennedy Logan, 1844–1912



John Mackintosh Roberts, 1840–1928



Te Peeti Te Aweawe, ?–1884



Heinrich Franz Vosseler, 1885–1975



Joseph George Ward, 1856–1930

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