

ROADS AND BRIDGES.

The work on roads is distributed over the whole colony, generally in small undertakings, and consists mainly of making roads and bridle-tracks in new country, although a considerable sum is annually spent in the maintenance of roads already partly constructed, but not sufficiently complete to hand over to the local authorities. In addition to these there are the main arterial roads in districts where there is no railway communication, on which a large amount is annually spent by the Government. A considerable proportion of the annual appropriation is absorbed in subsidies and grants to local bodies, who expend the money subject to the control of officers of the Roads Department.

The expenditure by the Roads Department on roads and bridges since 31st March, 1891, totalled to £2,705, 855. For the year 1891-2 it was £99,920, while for 1902-3 it amounted to £227,184.

Nearly the whole of the new roads or tracks are for the purpose of giving or improving access to land recently taken up and held by Crown tenants under the various land-tenures now in force. Much of this land is forest-clad, and in country which is broken by hills and gullies, making the selection of road-lines difficult and their construction costly. The cost of roads in proportion to the value of the land is much larger than it was formerly, when the more level class of country was being dealt with. This is yearly increasing, because most of the new settlement is forced on to rougher and more remote country.

The great number of dairy factories established and being established throughout the whole colony has largely added to the demand not for roads only, but for metalled roads. Experience has taught that the industry as at present conducted cannot be carried on to advantage without metalled roads, and the necessary provision for such is a heavy tax on the powers and resources of the local authorities. A considerable amount of assistance has been given towards this class of work, but it is a question for consideration whether such assistance can be continued, in view of the very heavy demands arising for money to road newly settled lands and lands which are in process of being settled.

The net expenditure last year, exclusive of roads on goldfields and Government loans to local bodies, amounted to £208,605: with which sum 275 miles of engineering survey was made, 310 miles of dray-road, 157 miles of bridle-track, and ninety-nine bridges over 30 ft. span, of a total length of 7,344 ft., were constructed; 750 miles of dray-road and 197 miles of bridle-road were improved; and 2,471 miles of dray-road and 926 miles of bridle-road were maintained.

The total amount authorised under the Government Loans to Local Bodies Account was £49,900, and the sum voted for expenditure was £45,000. The net expenditure amounted to £18,579, for which 166 miles of engineering survey was made, and 22 miles of dray-road, 42 miles of bridle-road, and three bridges over 30 ft. span, of a total length of 100 ft., were constructed. There were also 76 miles of dray-road and 136 miles of bridle-road improved or maintained.

From various causes many of the local bodies who had been authorised to carry out work did not put the same in hand in time to bring the expenditure within the financial year.

The expenditure has mostly been upon a very large number of small scattered works, the items on the appropriations representing 2,408 different works.

For the current year the proposed votes for the same classes of works are as follows:—

	£
Roads, departmental	18,120
Roads generally	300,000
Maintenance of main roads	30,209
Tourist roads	19,748
Government Loans to Local Bodies Account	30,000
Land for Settlements Account	9,353
Total	<u>£407,430</u>

ROADS ON GOLDFIELDS (MINES DEPARTMENT).

The vote last year under this head amounted to £84,460, the expenditure being £51,690, with contingent liabilities at the end of the year amounting to £49,575.

The sum proposed to be authorised for the current year is £78,425, on account of which a vote £30,000 is asked for.