

ROAD-CONSTRUCTION.

The expenditure for the year ending 31st March, 1923, on road construction and maintenance has surpassed all previous records.

The amount of construction-work carried out was large and diversified in character. It has been necessary to employ large numbers of unskilled men on relief works, and the object has been, so far as practicable, to employ such men on work of general utility to the Dominion. Consequently, several of the leading highways that came under this category were selected, and have, by means of this labour, been greatly improved by regrading, realignment, and surfacing with metal.

The style of construction has, as far as possible, been standardized, special attention being given to the matter of curvature, as that feature is of great importance to motorists in regard to safety, economy, and comfort.

In bridge and culvert work the durability, strength, and adaptability of concrete, whether plain or reinforced, are being increasingly recognized and made use of.

In addition to the allocation of available funds between different districts, based on the usual factor of population, length of road, cost of completing present roads and forming new ones, present loan indebtedness, &c., special allowances are being made for relief works and for certain roads that will act as temporary substitutes for railways, as well as for roads on which there are gaps that are at present in such a state as to interfere with through traffic.

The works for which special allowances have been made, as well as the large bridge-construction works, have been carried out under the direct supervision of the Department, but other works have, as heretofore, been entrusted to local authorities in accordance with plans and specifications approved by the Department.

As always has been the case, the applications for assistance were more than could be fully met, consequently it was only possible to provide for what seemed to be the most urgent and deserving cases, though every request has received careful and impartial consideration.

The Main Highways Act, though passed during the session of 1922, does not come into active operation till the 1st April, 1924. Meantime, however, much information is being and will still have to be collected, and many problems considered by the Board constituted in terms of the Act.

ROADS AND TRANSPORT.

Doubtless secondary development of the country by means of railway is essential at a certain stage, yet the primary development in any country must be by roads. Very great progress has been made in this direction during the past year, both in materially improving existing roads and in constructing new roads. The expenditure of the parliamentary appropriations for this purpose has been carried out by both the Public Works Department and local-body organizations.

Before passing to other matters I feel it is necessary to specially direct the attention of honourable members, and to ask them in turn to impress upon the country, the absolute necessity of co-ordination between all governing authorities concerned in the provision of means of transport of goods and passengers by land. The authorities in question are the Railways Department, which runs the open railways; the Public Works Department, which constructs railways and roads; the Main Highways Board, recently constituted with the object of co-ordinating and assisting in financing the effort of local bodies in improving the construction and maintenance of what may be termed the main traffic roads, and in addition the local bodies who operate on roads which will not, for the time being at any rate, receive benefits under the Main Highways Act. A co-ordination of the policies of all these authorities must result in the saving of hundreds of thousands of pounds. The absence of a co-ordinated system must inevitably result in disjointed, ill-considered effort, unnecessary duplication of means of transport, competition that is entirely unprofitable to the community as a whole, and, in the final conclusion, the