

view of motor transport—being charged. Frequently the rate charged is unremunerative, and it is well known that on this account many owners have been forced to go out of business.

An analysis of all the figures obtainable not only in this country, but abroad, shows that the average price per ton for transport by motor-vehicles is very much more than the lowest prices which are charged by any considerable motor organization operating in New Zealand. The result of the cheap freights quoted in some cases has been to create an impression in the minds of the public that motor transport is more economical than railway transport. This, however, is an entire fallacy. A return of 3d. a ton-mile on the average on the goods hauled on the railways would enable them to make a handsome profit, but the average figures from over one thousand vehicles operating in New Zealand seem to show that 1s. 6d. a ton-mile is nearer their cost, and even in the most favourable cases, where long hauls with full loads are operated, it is in the region of 6d. per ton-mile or over.

When considering the economy or otherwise of motor transport, the individual consignor is very prone to look only at his freight bill, and to think only of the convenience of having the motor-vehicles calling at his door; but if he pauses to think of what motor transport viewed as a whole is costing New Zealand this would probably change his ideas. Last year the cost of upkeep of the roads of New Zealand approached the £3,000,000 mark, an enormous increase on what was necessary before the motor became a serious user of the roads. Towards this the motor-vehicle contributed less than £1,000,000, and when converted into cost per motor-vehicle per year, the maintenance expenditure amounts to £18, without making any allowance for the interest and fixed charges on capital expenditure, and the above average cost is obtained by regarding the motor-bicycles (numbering nearly thirty-four thousand) as motor-vehicles. If the latter were ignored, and only the motor-cars and commercial vehicles taken into account, the figure would be in the vicinity of £23. In 1914 the gross annual expenditure on roads, capital expenditure included, was just under two and a half millions; in 1927 it was considerably over five and a half millions. Viewed in another way, in the past eleven years there has been spent in maintaining the roads £255 per motor-vehicle, during which time there has been received £24 in taxation per motor-vehicle. The amount of money found in the way of rates by the rural portions of New Zealand has trebled since 1911.

When factors like the foregoing are taken in conjunction with the higher rate per ton-mile charged by the motor-vehicles it becomes a question for very serious inquiry as to whether we are not paying too high a price for the convenience of having the long-distance motor carrier calling at our doors. The total expenditure on motor transport is estimated to be nearly three times that spent on railway transport, being about eight and a half millions for railways and over twenty-nine millions for road transport.

Another matter which warrants very serious consideration from those utilizing commercial road transport where the State railways are available is that by depriving the railways of the high-class freight they leave the Railway Department in a position that it is unable to operate except at a loss, unless the rates on the cheaper and more bulky classes of goods, which provide the greater part of the tonnage to be hauled, are raised. As frequently the margin on which these goods are carried is so narrow that an increase even of a fraction of a penny per ton will divert or kill the traffic altogether, the inevitable result is a deficit on the operation of the railway system. This deficit must be made good by the general taxpayer, and thus many people, while congratulating themselves on obtaining a convenience and imagining even an economy by using road transport, are actually being involved in a loss; and even if no individual can show from his own books that he is suffering a loss, nevertheless the country as a whole is undoubtedly doing so. The motor-transport bill for every man, woman, and child in New Zealand is £20 per head per year.

It is not possible to ascertain definitely how many more tons of goods there are to haul about the line of communication of New Zealand than there were, say, in 1914, before which the motor was not a dominating factor, but if we take the tonnage of overseas vessels entered and cleared we find that between 1914 and 1927 there has been an increase of less than half a million tons.