

APPENDIX E.

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MAIN HIGHWAYS BOARD.

THE MAIN HIGHWAYS BOARD to the MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

In accordance with the provisions of section 24 of the Main Highways Act, 1922, the Main Highways Board has the honour to submit its seventh annual report for presentation to Parliament through the Hon. the Minister.

The report covers the period from the 1st April, 1930, to the 31st March, 1931, though a number of matters referred to are carried beyond the latter date for convenience and completeness of record.

GENERAL.

The total expenditure from both funds for the year amounted to £2,097,390, compared with £2,317,444 for the previous year. The expenditure from the Revenue Fund was £1,386,140. This amount is an appreciable increase on the figure for the previous year, which was £1,246,027. The increase, however, was not due to any expansion of the Board's normal activities, but was brought about by the operation of the Finance Act, 1930, which transferred certain charges from the Consolidated Fund to the Main Highways Revenue Fund. The most important of these charges is that in respect of the Government subsidies on rates to local authorities, amounting for the year to £219,316. The expenditure from the Revenue Fund on highway maintenance actually showed a substantial reduction on the previous year, but this matter will be dealt with in detail later in this report. Operations under the Revenue Fund included the payment of subsidies on the maintenance of 10,419 miles of main highway, of which 6,641 miles are regarded as primary highways and 3,778 miles secondary highways.

The expenditure from the Construction Fund for the year was £711,250, the figure for the previous year being £1,071,417. These figures indicate a severe curtailment of construction operations. The expenditure from the Construction Fund resulted in 130 miles 19 chains of highway being formed and widened, 128 miles 21 chains gravelled and metalled, and 159 miles 24 chains surfaced with bituminous materials or concrete. The year has been a notable one in regard to bridge construction, the total length erected being 11,175 lineal feet, a record for any year since the Board commenced operations in 1924. Engineering surveys were carried out over a length of 145 miles 30 chains of the highway system.

In each of the past two annual reports the Board was able to record large increases in the expenditure on construction in the South Island. These increases were gratifying on account of the fact that during the first few years of the Board's operations construction work in the South Island lagged far behind similar work in the North Island. The operations during the year under review again show a satisfactory position in the South Island, the total amount spent on construction being £303,466, or 42·66 per cent. of the total construction expenditure. Last year the ratio of construction-money spent in the South Island was 33·96 per cent.

It has always been the Board's policy to require as far as possible that all work shall be carried out under the contract system. In last year's report it was mentioned that there had been a tendency towards a reduction in prices, some very favourable tenders having been received for all classes of work, including formation, surfacing, and bridges. For the year under review it is necessary to record still further reductions in prices, but unfortunately in some cases tenders have been lowered to such an extent that acceptance of same would have meant almost certain insolvency for the contractors concerned.

During the year the sum of £108,320 was expended in the Nelson and West Coast districts on the restoration of damage caused by the earthquake of the 17th June, 1929. The total expenditure on the restoration of main highways in these districts up till the 31st March, 1931, is £195,198. The severe earthquake which occurred in the Hawke's Bay District on 3rd February, 1931, involved the Board in further large liabilities. Up till the end of the financial year under consideration, the expenditure on restoration work in the Hawke's Bay area was £7,473. Further details concerning earthquake damage appear later in this report. It is noteworthy that the whole cost of these disasters to the Main Highways Board has so far been met from revenue, and not from borrowed money. The Board's consistent policy during the past seven years of having a fairly substantial reserve in its Revenue Fund has been completely justified.

PERSONAL.

Mr. A. E. Jull, one of the members representing the New Zealand Counties' Association and a foundation member of the Board, resigned his seat on the Board in September, 1930, to contest the Waipawa by-election, as a result of which he was returned as member of the House of Representatives for that district. Mr. Jull took a most active part in the proceedings leading up to the formation of the Main Highways Board, and was originally appointed a member on the 12th June, 1923. His long experience of local-authority law and administration enabled him to render very valuable services, and the successful functioning of the Board during its first seven years of office was due in no small measure to his efforts.