

When the motor-vehicle began to assume importance in the land-transport system the Dominion was in a particularly bad position to deal with this new form of transport. The rural roading system consisted of from 30,000 to 40,000 miles of narrow roads, partly gravel-surfaced, and, as maximum mileage for minimum cost had been the governing factor in road-construction, the alignment was generally bad, and curves of one-chain radius, sudden changes of grade, and narrow bridges were the rule rather than the exception. In other words, the rural roads had been built to accommodate traffic consisting largely of slow-moving horse-drawn vehicles, and of a very low density, and were quite unsuited to the fast-moving motor-vehicle and the relatively dense road traffic of to-day.

The road-controlling authorities and the Main Highways Board have spent large sums of money in improving alignment, replacing one-way and dangerous bridges, and in improving road-surfaces, yet in spite of the large amount expended the Engineer to the Main Highways Board reports in 1930, as follows :—

“To bring up the primary highways system (6,000 miles) to a standard approximately the same as the present road between Wellington and Napier via Palmerston North, and to provide two-way bridges thereon, will cost approximately £25,000,000, and will take twenty-five years to accomplish at the present rate of expenditure. Even then there will be very many places on the primary system where a speed of thirty miles per hour will be unsafe. . . . It is, in my opinion, a definite fact that the risk of road traffic is to-day much greater than five years ago, in spite of the efforts of the Main Highways Board and the local authorities, because the improvements which have been carried out are nothing like as effective in reducing road accidents as the very much greater speeds and volume of traffic are effective in increasing the number of accidents.”

The following general conclusions must, therefore, be drawn from the present state of our roading system :—

- (1) Generally, the rural roads of New Zealand are quite unsuited for high speeds as regards surfacing, alignment, bridges, and protective fences.
- (2) In order that the risk to the motorist may be reduced, it appears that a definite speed-limit should be imposed on all vehicles using rural roads, and rigidly enforced.
- (3) It will be very many years before it will be reasonably safe to allow motor-vehicles unrestricted speeds on the rural roads of the Dominion.

7. GENERAL SURVEY OF TRANSPORT.

The outstanding feature in the field of transport to-day is the dangerously high proportion percentage of national land transport costs to national production. This high proportion is partly symptomatic of the fall in the prices for primary products, but is also a sharp reminder of the wasteful duplication and triplication which has taken place in the provision of various transport facilities. The impelling message of the figures is the urgency of securing co-ordination of facilities as a means of reducing transport costs. The present high level of national transport costs constitutes a serious handicap to economic recovery. Although the transport problem is one of the Dominion's greatest internal economic problems, application of measures to secure co-ordination should result in the level of costs being forced downwards in a comparatively short time.

The shrinkage in the volume of passenger and commodity traffic during the year has resulted in keener struggle for the diminished volume available by the motor, rail, and coastal shipping services. The average number of motor-vehicles on the road during the year was 2 per cent. below the number for the previous year, and the importations of petrol decreased from 64,000,000 gallons to 60,000,000 gallons, indicating a generally lower level of activity in the industry. As between the different classes of motor-vehicles, it is significant that the number of trucks shows a gain of 4 per cent., while passenger-vehicles (cars, omnibuses, and motor-cycles) have fallen off by 3 per cent. In the field of rail and coastal shipping services substantial declines were recorded. The tonnage of freight handled by coastal shipping showed a drop of 20 per cent., while the railway freight and ordinary passenger business fell away by 16 per cent. and 11 per cent. respectively.

The intensified competition has resulted in severe rate-cutting in many districts, but, broadly speaking, the lack of co-ordination of services stands in the way of a permanent and substantial reduction of transport charges, at a time when a reduction is urgently wanted.

Some idea of the volume of passenger and goods transport effected in the Dominion during the year ended 31st March, 1932, and the relative positions of the various transport facilities in the passenger and goods spheres, is to be had from the following summary showing the estimated passenger miles and freight ton-miles for each kind of transport :—

(a) *Passenger Transport.*

Kind of Transport.				Passenger Miles (i.e., one passenger one mile). (000,000 omitted.)	Percentage of Total.
Motor-vehicles	..	..	..	1,753	71
Tramways	..	..	..	263	11
Railways	..	..	..	428	17
Shipping*	..	..	..	37	1
Totals	..	..	..	2,481	100

\* Inter-island traffic only.