

MAIN HIGHWAYS.

The activities of the Main Highways Board during the past year are more particularly described in the Board's Annual Report accompanying this Statement.

It is of interest to note that last year the expenditure from highways funds on actual works amounted to £385,000 more than in the preceding year.

The maintenance expenditure throughout the entire highways system averaged £100·3 per mile per annum, compared with £78·6 for the year 1933–34.

Special attention has been given to the maintenance of main highways, a feature which the Board has stressed from its inception, and a matter which must always be regarded as of paramount importance by all roading authorities.

Wherever possible, steps are taken to reduce future maintenance costs. For example, the Board has adopted the practice of renewing and constructing bridges in permanent materials, preferably in reinforced concrete, on which latter type of structure maintenance costs are relatively small indeed.

The extension of dustless surfacing means the preservation of the foundations of a greater proportion of our main highways, with consequent savings in maintenance, because road crusts do not require renewal. In addition, travelling conditions for highway users are much improved, while property-owners are relieved of a nuisance which deteriorates our primary products and is often detrimental to stock.

During the year 1934–35, 204 miles of highway were paved for the first time, and at the end of the financial year 14 per cent. of the total main highways had dustless surfaces.

It is gratifying to be able to report that, with the approval of the Government, arrangements have been made whereby a definite programme for the elimination of level railway crossings on main highways is to be financed between the Main Highways Board, the Unemployment Board, and the Railways Board. The Main Highways Board has already commenced engineering investigations of a number of crossings with a view to framing proposals which can be commenced in the early future. In spite of the many difficult problems which will have to be overcome, I am confident that the active co-operation displayed by these Boards will result in a number of dangerous crossings being made safe for road traffic in the very early future. The programme which has been arranged will extend over the next three years, during which period extensive improvements should be effected.

The Board has continued to substantially assist local authorities in financing necessary highways works. It is obvious that in the absence of such assistance local authorities would not be in a position to maintain or develop the primary roads of the Dominion sufficient for modern requirements.

For example, the renewal of large structures such as the Balclutha Traffic Bridge and the Fitzherbert Bridge, both of which cost in the vicinity of £40,000, would have been impossible but for the monetary aid extended by the Government through the highways fund.

The Highways Board's proposals for the current year provide for additional dustless surfacing, as distinct from maintenance surfacing, and the renewal of numerous bridges which are decayed or obsolete, while the improvement of some sections which are dangerous to traffic and expensive to maintain will receive attention.

ROAD CONSTRUCTION AND METALLING.

The expenditure from capital funds on this class of work (£688,565) shows an increase of £136,615 over last year's figures (£551,950). The expenditure on roads other than main highways was £371,573 and on main highways £316,992, compared with £359,671 and £192,279 respectively.

Roading, even if main highways are disregarded, is still a major public-works activity. When framing the estimates for the present and two previous years preference has been given to metalling of existing settlement roads, although, of course, provision has had to be made for construction of roads, including bridges, to new settlements and older localities without road access. Last year approximately 303 miles of dray-road were reformed and/or formed by my Department