

APPENDIX E.

TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MAIN HIGHWAYS BOARD.

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

SIR,—

In accordance with the requirements of section 24 of the Main Highways Act, 1922, the Main Highways Board has the honour to submit its twelfth annual report for presentation to Parliament.

The report covers the period from the 1st April, 1935, to the 31st March, 1936, though a number of matters referred to are subsequent to the latter date and are included for convenience and completeness of record.

GENERAL.

The present length of main highways maintained or subsidized by the Board is 12,040 miles, and particulars of expenditure for the year ended 31st March, 1936, as well as a detailed statement on the position of various works, are shown later in this report.

The total length of formed roads and streets throughout the Dominion is approximately 52,000 miles, and, excluding streets in boroughs and town districts, the present main highways system embraces, with few exceptions, all the more important roads in each district.

The total expenditure from main highways funds for the financial year ended on the 31st March, 1936, amounted to £2,337,558, compared with £1,943,814 for the year immediately preceding.

The expenditure from the Revenue Fund for the year 1935–36 was £1,909,534, as compared with £1,618,331 for 1934–35 and £1,147,731 for 1933–34. These figures include a number of charges against the Revenue Fund under special legislative authority, and which are not directly related to matters covered by the Main Highways Act, 1922.

The amounts expended from the Revenue Fund on actual maintenance of main highways (including items such as flood damage, &c.) during the last four years were as follow: 1932–33, £600,324; 1933–34, £674,026; 1934–35, £932,675; 1935–36, £1,190,179. The Board's standard subsidy for maintenance work is £3 for £1, but in some cases a higher rate is paid because of special circumstances.

The expenditure from the Construction Fund for the year 1935–36 was £428,024, as compared with the following amounts spent during the three preceding years: 1932–33, £159,323; 1933–34, £198,295; 1934–35, £325,483.

Towards the end of the last calendar year it became apparent that highways revenue was buoyant and that taxation receipts were likely to exceed the original estimates. A supplementary programme of works was prepared, and an additional £75,000 appropriated by Parliament, which amount was augmented to some extent by the Unemployment Board in consideration of the employment of a substantial number of men from Government Registration Bureaux.

The increase in expenditure under both funds for the year 1935–36 is accounted for principally by (1) the resumption of normal activities as a result of the general improvement in the Dominion's financial position; (2) the supplementary programme of works undertaken to assist towards the relief of unemployment; and (3) the construction of the Milford Sound Highway, the cost of which became chargeable to the Main Highways Account as from the 21st May, 1935.

In its last annual report the Board drew attention to the steady increase manifested in the amount of traffic on main highways. The increase in motor-vehicle registrations and petrol importations is evidence that the volume of traffic on main highways is becoming still greater. Progress has been made in the direction of continuing improvement works such as realignment, widening of sharp corners and narrow sections, reconstruction and dustless surfacing.

PERSONNEL.

Consequent upon obtaining an appointment in the Treasury, Mr. E. L. Greensmith relinquished his membership of the Board, and Mr. T. A. Barrow, Accountant to the Public Works Department, filled the vacancy. The Board recorded in its minutes its appreciation of Mr. Greensmith's services.

Since the end of the financial year a great loss was sustained by the resignation, for reasons of ill-health, of Mr. C. J. McKenzie, C.B.E., who had been a member of the Board since 1924, and had occupied the office of Chairman since 1932. Due in no small measure to Mr. McKenzie's personal qualities, the relations of the Board with the various public and local authorities have been of a most happy nature, and the utmost harmony has prevailed in the Board's administration. Members have expressed their sincere regret that Mr. McKenzie was not able to continue in office, and placed on record their appreciation of his work together with their best wishes for a complete restoration to health.

Mr. John Wood, Engineer-in-Chief and Under-Secretary of the Public Works Department, has been appointed Chairman of the Board, and Mr. A. J. Baker, formerly an acting-member, has been appointed as a member representing the Government. Mr. H. H. Sharp has replaced Mr. Baker as an acting-member.