

paving-season was characterized by unfavourable conditions due to the prevailing wet weather, but, notwithstanding adverse circumstances, 254 miles of dustless surfacing were completed, as compared with 277 miles during the preceding year. At 31st March, 1937, the total length of paved highways was 2,127 miles, which is 17·6 per cent. of the whole main-highways system. Since the inauguration of the State highways system, the Board has concentrated on the arterial routes, and in the early future it is anticipated that a number of metalled sections will be paved, thereby providing continuous paving throughout substantial lengths.

Satisfactory progress has been made with the major programme initiated by the Government last year for the elimination of railway level-crossings, and, although completed projects number only fifteen, work is in progress and contracts have been already arranged for a further sixty-seven. Detailed proposals for an additional sixty-four schemes are completed or in hand preparatory to the commencement of work. Each locality has presented its peculiar technical problems, in some cases of a very complex nature, but the results to date are extremely gratifying. The removal of this source of danger from our highways will undoubtedly result in the prevention of many accidents which certainly would occur if open crossings on highways carrying a large volume of traffic were allowed to remain.

It must be borne in mind that a feature of railway-crossing accidents is the loss of life and every crossing eliminated means the removal of a potential death-trap.

The extent to which main-highways operations are financed by the State is shown by the fact that during the past year approximately 94 per cent. of the cost of improvements and renewals was paid from the Main Highways Account, compared with 6 per cent. contributed by local authorities. With regard to maintenance 82 per cent. was provided from public funds and 18 per cent. by local authorities.

It is reasonable to point out that the administration of a relatively small proportion of public moneys by local authorities warrants the Government exercising a measure of control over the work carried out on a basis more in keeping with the degree of financial responsibility which it assumes. The continued co-operation of local bodies will be welcomed, as it is appreciated that they can assist materially in the maintenance and development of the Dominion's roading-system by carrying out the functions entrusted to them.

Honourable members are aware of the special campaign which has been initiated for the promotion of safer travelling-conditions for all classes of road-user. In my efforts to reduce the undue loss of life and the alarming number of accidents resulting in severe personal injury, I have obtained the considered opinions and recommendations of representative citizens as to the most desirable and practical means of remedying unsatisfactory conditions. It became evident that, in the interests of public safety, there was a good deal of scope for improving main highways so as to minimize the risk of accident.

I am confident that, in certain directions, a higher average standard of driving can be obtained if suitable measures are provided for the warning and protection of motor-drivers. With this objective I have conferred with the Main Highways Board on matters arising from the suggestions made to me by the New Zealand Road Safety Council. Arrangements are in hand for the Board to devote particular attention to centre-line marking of pavements so as to conveniently divide traffic. The adequate super-elevation of curves is being carried out progressively, and already improvements have been made in this direction.

In order to indicate the existence of bends, especially to night drivers, warning-posts and white-painted fences are being provided, while bridges are also being painted in such a way as to readily arrest the attention of a driver. In many localities hilly country is traversed by tortuous roads, and a commencement has been made with the erection of protective fencing. This will not only serve to prevent mishaps, but will also afford a greater measure of security to those who are more or less unaccustomed to hilly conditions. I can say that the Main Highways Board is fully alive to the possibilities for making our main highways safer, and will continue improvement works in furtherance of the present policy.