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NATIONAL ROAD POLICY.

The Government's national road policy recently announced by the Hon. J. G. Coates, Minister of Public Works, is to be welcomed as an indication that, at last, the problem is to be dealt with in the only possible way to achieve the proper results. It is a tardy recognition of the fact that road transit has been revolutionised during the last decade. When horse vehicles were universal, the limits within which these conveyances could be used were so circumscribed that the taxation of the user by a local body fairly covered the position, and secured a return which in a rough and ready way compensated the roading authorities for expenditure benefiting the road user. But the motor vehicle has so wide a range within a single day that it might take advantage of the facilities provided by fifty local bodies. Local bodies which have sections of arterial roads to maintain are heavily burdened with a responsibility for which they cannot secure a return, except by the archaic method of the toll-gate. The motor vehicle, given good roads, may become a formidable competitor, within a certain field, of the railway, and it is just as well that same authority should own both types of track and develop them naturally in accordance with the demands of the times. Under the Government's road scheme, attention will first be given to through routes of communication in the two islands. Then, no doubt, more roads will be brought into the scheme, until we have a net-work of good motor routes which will be invaluable in developing the country. The official statement on the subject indicates only the broad general lines of the scheme—national control of arterial roads, non-political administration, and a general tax on road users, by way of a vehicle tax and a special tax on tires. There are important gaps to be filled in later, but if Parliament approves the general lines, the rest will easily follow. The character of the road surface, for instance, is an important point. It will also be necessary to protect good roads in future by prohibiting excessive axle loads. Something has been done already by the County Councils of New Zealand, but the national scheme

should certainly take this factor into consideration, otherwise there will be heavy damage to expensive surfaces through the development of through motor lorry traffic of an unsuitable type. Three American States which have good roads, protect them by a maximum-load regulation for motor vehicles, and their officers see that the law is observed by actual weighing tests on the roadside. The method is drastic. These States have scales which can be quickly brought into use under the axle, and if a load is found to be excessive, the excess is dumped on the spot, and the motor owner must make his own arrangement to lift it. This protects the reasonable motor owner, who appreciates the procedure, as we find that the "Engineering News Record" of New York thus comments on the system:—"As a matter of fact, right-thinking motor truck operators are not objecting to policies which will conserve the highways for their use. Motor transport will live only so long as the highways are in a condition to carry traffic. In the end, the interests of the highway departments and of the motor vehicle operators are one. Motor vehicle legislation, therefore, should aim not to rule trucks off the road, but rather to strike at those selfish interests which, with a comparatively few trucks of excessive weight, soon render highways useless for other and more conservative operators and the community at large."

LOCAL BODY ENGINEERS.

It is satisfactory to find that the Acting Prime Minister is sympathetic towards the proposed Bill to ensure that local bodies which receive assistance from the public funds shall employ qualified engineers. The Institute of Civil Engineers will probably encounter some opposition to its measure, because there is always something to be said against making a close corporation, but they can counter this by clearly indicating the qualifications required of a local body engineer, when it will be found, we are sure, that the Dominion's educational institutions provide ample facilities for the necessary education. Sir Francis Bell stated to a