

5. Condition of Bridges.—Many of the timber bridges not only on secondary highways and country roads, but also on certain of the more important arterial routes, are in such condition that drastic restrictions of loading now have to be applied in order to safeguard the structures from failure.

In some cases this restriction of loading has very seriously affected the transport of produce and goods. Many of these timber structures are due for renewal and even temporary strengthening is a major task.

6. Road Usage.—Based upon the quantity of petrol estimated to have been used by motor-vehicles during the year, traffic volumes during 1946 (calendar year) exceeded the volumes during 1945 by 32 per cent. and were approximately 17 per cent. greater than in 1940. However, traffic did not quite reach the same peak volumes that were experienced in 1938 and 1939. Traffic increased considerably during the latter half of the year, private-car traffic being still restricted in the early part of 1946 by reason of petrol-rationing.

ROAD FINANCE

7. Dominion's Road Bill, 1933-34 to 1938-39, inclusive, and 1943-44 and 1944-45.—The Department has abstracted from various official sources the statistical data relating to road finance and analysed it to show the approximate cost of roads, streets, and bridges under the headings of construction, maintenance, and loan charges. The expenditure has been apportioned in the three primary groups of roads, &c.—namely, main highways, urban roads and streets, and other (rural) roads. To obtain the mileages of these groups some estimation has been necessary, as with certain aspects of the figures for the whole road bill. Any estimations have been conservatively made, and the figures are sufficiently close to accuracy to form a reliable basis for broad conclusions.

8. The road bill for the year ended 31st March, 1945, is the latest figure that can be computed from complete available information. It differs materially from pre-war road bills in that practically no construction was carried on during the war years or during the remaining months of the year following the cessation of hostilities. Constructional expenditure for 1943-44 year amounted to only 11·9 per cent. of the total, and for the 1944-45 year amounted to only 15·2 per cent. of the total, whereas the corresponding proportion averaged over the six years immediately preceding the war amounted to 41·2 per cent. of the total.

9. The expenditure on maintenance for the 1944-45 year was 5·7 per cent. below the corresponding figure for 1938-39. The amount spent on maintenance in 1944-45 was £3,499,483, compared with £3,711,737 in 1938-39, so that, allowing for the increased costs, it is apparent that the actual amount of maintenance work done in 1944-45 was below that done in 1938-39.

10. It is reliably estimated that the operating-costs of all classes of motor-vehicles in the Dominion amounted to £48,700,000 for 1946-47. These figures indicate the importance of good roads to the Dominion, particularly when it is realized that bad roading conditions mean high operating-costs for motor-vehicles, whereas good roading means low operating-costs. In addition, good developmental roads mean buoyant rural development. The bill, which is given hereunder, shows the total expenditure on roads, streets, and bridges under the appropriate headings for the year ended 31st March, 1945 :—

Expenditure upon				Main Highways.	Urban Roads and Streets.	Other Roads.	Total.
				£	£	£	£
Maintenance	..	..	..	1,555,596	496,812	1,447,075	3,499,483
Construction	..	..	..	318,856	494,809	248,223	1,061,888
Interest and sinking-fund charges	..	..	..	756,380	634,728	1,033,954	2,425,062
Totals	..	..	..	2,630,832	1,626,349	2,729,252	6,986,433