

The total sum voted by Parliament last year under all votes and accounts (exclusive of Roads on Goldfields vote) for the construction, supervision, and maintenance of roads and bridges throughout the Dominion was £547,843. In pursuance of the previously expressed intention of the Government to intrust local bodies with the expenditure of the major portion of the votes, £183,444 was either authorized or offered to the various County Councils and Road Boards for expenditure between the time of the passing of the estimates and the close of the financial year, and during the same period £79,900 was authorized to departmental engineers.

This year it is proposed to invite the local authorities to submit their proposals for the expenditure of the sums available forthwith, and if reasonable expedition is exercised in doing this there should be no difficulty in the formal grants being in their hands and available for expenditure within a few days of the actual passing of the appropriations by Parliament.

While dealing with road matters I should like again to emphasize one point which I drew attention to last year—namely, that while the construction of new roads to open up backblocks is a work that may properly be regarded as devolving upon the Government, and that while the Government may reasonably be expected to assist in the improvement and metalling of roads that were originally constructed as bridle-tracks or were left unmetalled, the mere maintenance of roads and bridges, except in very special cases, is a work that should and must devolve upon the local authority of the district. Amongst the numerous applications that have been received for grants for roadworks during the current year, quite an appreciable percentage are for works of repair and maintenance, which should undoubtedly be provided for by local rating. During the financial year 1908–9 the Government of the Dominion undertook the maintenance of no less than 3,352 miles of dray-road and 2,017 miles of bridle-road, or a gross total of 5,369 miles of road. During last year the figures were much smaller—namely, 2,597 miles of dray-road and 1,246 miles of bridle-road, or a gross total of 3,843 miles of road.

#### ROADS ON GOLDFIELDS.

The authorizations last year under this head were £86,286, on account of which a vote of £51,250 was taken. The total expenditure during the year was £40,830. The vote was made up of a large number of quite small items, there being no individual grants of any magnitude. For the current year the proposed authorizations total to £83,175, on account of which a vote of £50,000 is asked for.

#### TOTAL PROVISION FOR ROADS.

| Last year appropriations were as under :— |      |      |      |      | £               |
|-------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------------|
| Roads, &c.                                | .... | .... | .... | .... | 216,360         |
| Backblock roads                           | ...  | .... | .... | .... | 210,200         |
| Roads on goldfields                       | .... | .... | .... | .... | 51,250          |
| Loans to Local Bodies Account             |      |      | .... | .... | 50,000          |
| National Endowment Account                | ...  |      | .... | .... | 17,151          |
| Land for Settlements Account              | .... |      | .... | .... | 19,132          |
| Maintenance of roads (Consolidated Fund)  |      |      | .... | .... | 35,000          |
| Total ....                                |      |      |      |      | <u>£599,093</u> |

The provision now submitted for the current year is as under :—

|                                          |      |      |      |      | £               |
|------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------------|
| Roads, &c.                               | .... | .... | .... | .... | 270,480         |
| Backblock roads                          | .... | .... | .... | .... | 229,520         |
| Roads on goldfields                      | .... | .... | .... | .... | 50,000          |
| Loans to Local Bodies Account            |      |      | .... | .... | 100,000         |
| National Endowment Account               | ...  |      | .... | .... | 15,935          |
| Land for Settlements Account (say)       | .... |      | .... | .... | 17,000          |
| Maintenance of roads (Consolidated Fund) |      |      | .... | .... | 30,000          |
| Total ....                               |      |      |      |      | <u>£712,935</u> |