

Since assuming office I have observed that difficulties frequently arise as to the approval by departmental Engineers of plans prepared by local bodies for erection of bridges to be built out of Government grants. With a view to overcoming this, instructions will be issued for the preparation of standard drawings for bridges of varying sizes and classes, which, when completed, will be available for use by local authorities. By this means I am assured that economy in construction and, generally speaking, a very much better class of bridge should result.

My predecessors have had occasion to draw attention to the unwillingness of some local bodies to accept their proper responsibilities in regard to maintenance-work. I have again to emphasize the matter. The law provides that all roads in a county are county roads unless specially declared by Order in Council to be Government roads, and the duty of maintaining such county roads unquestionably devolves upon the local governing body. Local bodies in some cases plead that they are financially unable to undertake the work, but in such cases it is usually found that they are not levying the full amount of rates which the law allows. The neglect of local bodies in this matter and the exceptionally wet season necessitated the expenditure out of the Consolidated Fund vote for maintenance of £37,449 during last financial year, and during the four months of the current year ended the 31st July last a further sum of £17,290 was authorized. A considerable proportion of the expenditure last year and of that authorized this year represents work which should have been provided for by the local authorities.

ROADS ON GOLDFIELDS.

The total authorizations last year under this head amounted to £97,444, on account of which a vote of £55,320 was taken. The vote was made up of no less than 460 different items, so that the average amount voted to each item was only about £120. The expenditure during the year amounted to £41,067. It is necessary to continue to assist local authorities by means of grants and subsidies towards the construction of roads and tracks to facilitate the opening-up of our mineral lands and to enable prospecting operations to be carried on, and a substantial vote for this purpose is included in the estimates. I found on closely examining the items of last year's vote that several of them were really not for roads in connection with mining enterprises at all, and such votes, where it was necessary to renew them, have accordingly been transferred to the general roads vote or to the vote for back-blocks roads.

TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR ROAD-WORKS.

Last year's appropriations were as under :—

	£
Roads, &c.	297,945
Backblock roads	301,545
Roads on goldfields	55,320
Opening up Crown Lands for Settlement Account	100,000
National Endowment Account	19,350
Land for Settlements Account	14,900
New Hutt Road	14,000
Maintenance of roads (Consolidated Fund)	35,000
Total	£838,060

The provision for the current year is as under :—

	£
Roads, &c.	300,000
Backblock roads	200,000
Roads on goldfields	50,000
Opening up Crown Lands for Settlement Account	100,000
National Endowment Account	19,200
Land for Settlements Account	20,000
New Hutt Road	5,300
Maintenance of roads (Consolidated Fund)	40,000
Total	£734,500