

been continually increasing in sympathy with the increasing use of motor-vehicles, so that it is quite apparent that some further assistance must be given to local authorities to cope with an increased expenditure, the greater part of which increase is directly traceable to the use of motor-vehicles. More might be done to reduce the wear and tear on the roads by restricting, in accordance with the heavy-traffic regulations, the weights and speeds of the vehicles which are permitted to travel on them, and I think this course should be followed by local authorities in cases where their roads are breaking up and funds for reconstruction are not available. This principle, if carried too far, would cause administrative difficulties and might be considered as unduly throttling road transport and thereby possibly creating hardship on the very people it was intended to help.

We have therefore reached the point where either fresh taxation must be levied or the good work which has been initiated in the past three years must ease off, which latter course will be disappointing alike to the motorists, the local authorities, and the men engaged on the work. The improved roading facilities already provided have allowed motorists of all classes an opportunity to travel more economically and into districts removed from their own. This has resulted not only in the use and wear of the main highways, but in a great deal of extra wear and tear on the subsidiary or settlers' roads, with the result that the ratepayers in a number of districts now find themselves loaded up to breaking-point with rates, and at the same time they are faced with the fact that their roads are deteriorating.

An examination of the figures representing the importation of motor-vehicles and the cost of maintaining the highway surfaces shows that as the number of cars increases maintenance of road-surfacing increases practically in the same ratio. Since 1924 the increase in the cost of maintaining the highways alone represents from £5 to £6 per annum per additional motor-vehicle registered since that year, whereas the additional contribution from motor-taxation to the highways funds represents approximately only £3 per annum per motor-vehicle. Nevertheless it is most undesirable that there be any slackening-off of maintenance, as such a step would result in the loss of much of the capital which has already been spent in bringing the roads to their present state. It is undesirable, too, for other obvious reasons, that the construction programme be interfered with. Good progress has been made in this direction, but the desire of the motorist who lives in the city to have even better facilities than the present programme and finance allow, and his willingness to pay for such are evidenced by the number of schemes for local taxation which are in operation, are being promoted, or are in the air.

Looking at the matter from all points, it appears to me that a further source of revenue is required which will provide sufficient funds to enable the present programme of highways-construction to continue, the present standard of maintenance to be kept up, and, in addition, to enable the Highways Board to grant such liberal subsidies as will enable the densely trafficked roads radiating from the principal centres of population to be surfaced with high-class paving within a reasonable time. Provision must also be made to enable assistance for maintenance being given on a pound-for-pound basis on a system of secondary highways from 2,000 miles to 3,000 miles in length. This further source of revenue will also furnish the interest and sinking fund on the loan of £3,000,000 which is authorized in the Main Highways Act, 1922. Such sinking fund will be based on a conservatively estimated life of the improvements financed by the loan. This appears to be the right policy, as we have no definite knowledge as to how long the present system of roading in New Zealand will stand the wear and tear of constantly increasing traffic, and therefore the loan indebtedness should be paid off within as short a time as possible consistent with the country's ability to pay.

The particular lengths of road to be paved in the vicinity of the centres of population will be selected by the Main Highways Board after consultation with the District Highways Councils and after any representations of organizations of motor-owners have been considered. The roads to constitute the secondary system of rural highways above mentioned will also be chosen by the Main Highways Board after District Highway Councils have submitted their recommendations.

The principle that boroughs should share to a greater extent than is the case at present (if not universally) in the benefits received by local authorities from the funds of the Main Highways Board under the present legislation has been stressed by municipal authorities. The reply to such a suggestion is that the present funds are inadequate for the purposes contemplated in the present Main Highways Act, nor does the suggested further source of revenue referred to above make any provision for direct assistance to work in boroughs. The latter can only be provided for by a still further source of revenue.