

it requires proper regulation, and from the county point of view we want you to give consideration to the conditions out back, as well as to the cities.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] Would you approve of this clause, for example, being embodied in the law : “Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the principal Act, the Main Highways Board may in any year pay out of the Revenue Fund to the local authority having control of any road or street that is not a main highway a subsidy to be expended in the maintenance thereof, not exceeding twenty-five per centum of the estimated cost of the maintenance of that road or street in that year. The total amount to be expended by the Board in any year under the authority of this section shall not exceed one hundred and fifty thousand pounds.” The idea of that clause is to allow the Main Highways Board, in special cases, to vote moneys to roads which are not main highways. Would you approve of a clause such as that ?—I could not disapprove of it ; but even that wants a little more regulating. It does not say whether it is a metalled or an unmetalled road.

Would you consider it a benefit to your county if there was a special classification of roads to provide that no motor-vehicle would be allowed to run over a road unless we were sure that that vehicle would not damage the road by using it ?—I presume it would be a benefit, but I can see a special hardship in cases where there may be only a few settlers on a road.

It would not prevent them using it, but it would regulate the weight of the vehicles ?—We have that already.

But a more perfect regulation in that direction would help you ?—Yes.

*Mr. Ansell.*] You are speaking of backblock roads. I have never been able to get a clear definition of what is a backblock road. Can you define a backblock road ?—You could almost say that the whole of the roads in the Waitomo County are backblock roads.

*The Chairman :* It might be taken to mean all roads that are not main highways or subsidiary highways.

*Mr. Ansell.*] Are these backblock roads roads of purely local interest ?—I do not think you could say they are of purely local interest, because all backblock roads are the only means of outlet for the settlers living on them.

But that is of local interest ?—Yes.

They are roads of local importance ?—Yes. When the petrol-tax was first distributed it was laid down that all roads leading to the railway would be main roads, and it will be found almost invariably that in opening roads the object is to get to the railway. I have been twenty-two years on the County Council, and from my experience I am satisfied that every man's road to his door is his main road, but it is not everybody's main road.

You will admit then that, generally speaking, these backblock roads are local roads only ?—That is so.

*Mr. Murdoch.*] It is quite possible that a backblock road might ultimately be a main road ?—Yes, that is so.

*Mr. Ansell.*] Representatives of the Wellington City Council gave evidence that they expect a proportion of this £150,000 to be paid to the cities. What would you have to say to that ?—I do not wish to interfere with their affairs at all, but simply to put before you the “waybacks.” I come to the city only now and again, and when I come here and see the facilities I am surprised that there are any settlers out back at all.

WALTER ALEXANDER LEE examined. (No. 8.)

*The Chairman.*] What is your position, Mr. Lee ?—I am a member of the Waitomo County Council.

What evidence do you wish to give ?—I would first like to mention that in coming here with Mr. Were and the County Clerk to give evidence apart from the Counties Association we are doing it out of no disrespect to that body, but simply to place our position as a backblock county before the Committee. At the outset the Council desires to congratulate the Government upon this effort to consolidate the numerous enactments dealing with transport. We are not antagonistic to the Bill, but feel that it might be better in the interests of transport generally if it were delayed for perhaps another year. Nevertheless, we feel that it has many advantages so far as the County Councils are concerned, and we wish to present some of our views in regard to an isolated County Council, or a Council working under difficulties which are not met with in a general way, before you. The Waitomo County covers a very sparsely populated area. It has peculiar difficulties in regard to the settlement of land, and, naturally, finds the upkeep of roads, even with the present provision made by the Highways Board, very, very heavy. We claim that at the present time our expenditure is increasing rather than decreasing, and feel that some assistance should be given to the smaller counties beyond what is being given at the present time. When one takes into consideration the fact that the farming community at present owns about 40 per cent. of the cars throughout the country, and over and above the amount they are paying through the Highways Board and the petrol-tax, they have to find 33 per cent. of the annual maintenance of highways, it is very evident that the farming community is paying a twofold contribution over and above what the motorists of the country pay, because, in addition to the 73 per cent. they are paying towards the maintenance of main highways and subsidiary roads, they have in many cases to pay interest and sinking fund on loans raised for first construction. In our case this amounts to something like £6,000 annually on these main highways and subsidiary highways, and that in itself makes a heavy contribution. Then we are paying 33 per cent. of the cost of maintenance, and, in addition, we feel that we are contributing 40 per cent. of the petrol-tax by the consumption of benzine. Perhaps it is not safe to say 40 per cent., because it is hard to arrive at the actual consumption, but the fact remains that farmers' cars amount to over 40 per cent. of the cars registered in the Dominion. There are more, as a matter