

MAINTENANCE.

In the last annual report it was shown that on account of the curtailment by local authorities of their own expenditure the highways were not adequately maintained, particularly during the latter half of the year. The realization of the position, combined with the fact that it was considered necessary still further to relieve the rural ratepayers during the period of economic stress, induced the Board on the 19th August, 1931, to increase the subsidy for ordinary maintenance from £2 for £1 to £3 for £1, the increase to date from the 1st April, 1931. In spite of the increase in subsidy the Board has again to report that the highways during the year 1931–32 did not receive maintenance commensurate with the traffic carried by them, even after making every proper allowance for reduction in wages and other costs. The inadequate maintenance was not reflected in the surface conditions of most of the roads, but it is definitely known that the replacement of gravel and metal was considerably below the amount of material lost by wear-and-tear, with a consequent decrease in the thickness of the metal foundations.

The amount of benzine imported into the country is probably the closest indication of the volume of the Dominion's motor traffic. The gross importations of benzine since 1926 are as follows:—

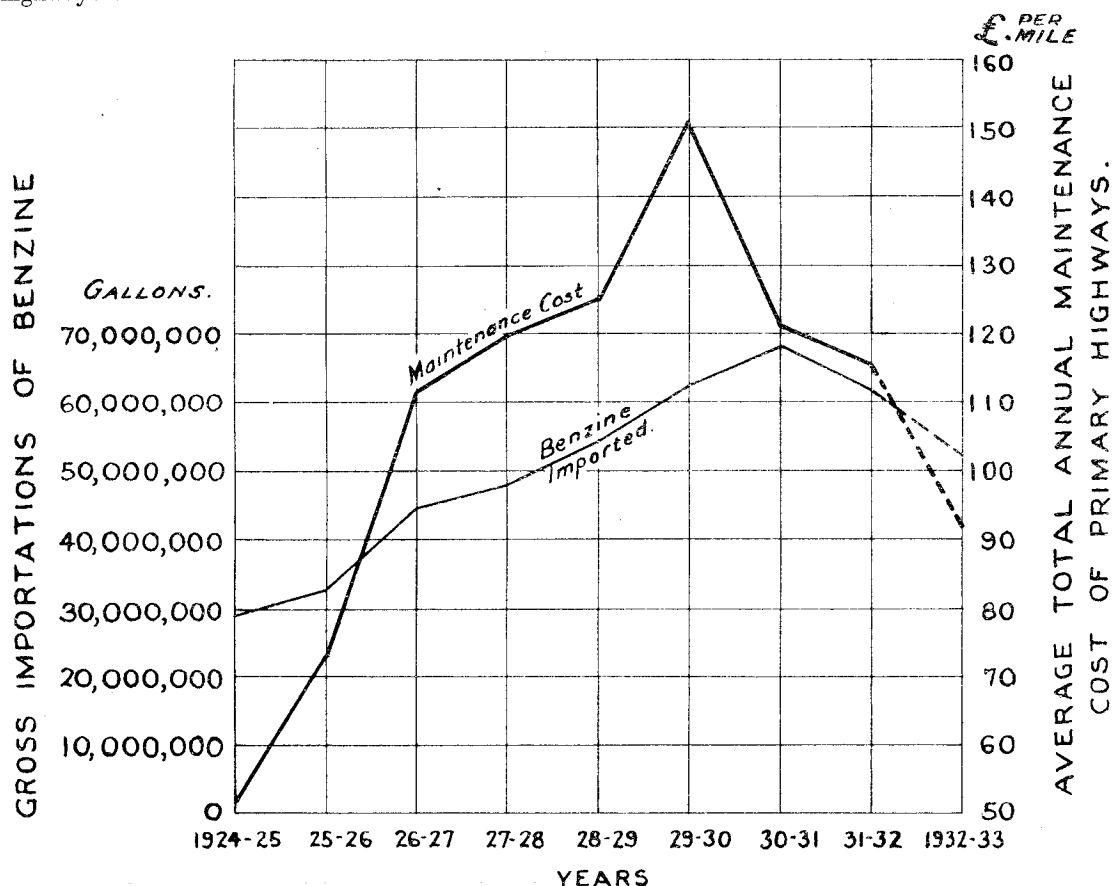
Gallons.				Gallons.			
1926	..	..	..	44,800,000	1929.. .. .	..	62,400,000
1927	..	..	..	48,000,000	1930.. .. .	..	68,300,000
1928	..	..	..	54,500,000	1931.. .. .	..	61,800,000

It will be noted that the above figures are gross simply because the net figures are not available for the earlier years, but investigations made into the comparatively small amounts of motor-spirits upon which rebates of tax have been made in the more recent years indicate that any deductions will not be distorted by the use of the gross figures.

In the same period the total expenditure on maintenance of primary highways, including local authority contributions, but excluding special earthquake damage, has been as follows:—

£				£			
1926–27	..	..	..	715,111	1929–30.. .. .	..	990,953
1927–28	..	..	..	792,646	1930–31.. .. .	..	806,366
1928–29	..	..	..	832,618	1931–32.. .. .	..	773,142

From the above figures it will be seen that, whereas the traffic in 1931 was approximately the same as in 1929, the expenditure on maintenance was about 22 per cent. less. The following graph illustrates the trends in the gross importations of benzine and in the annual maintenance cost of the primary highways since 1924.



It is obvious from the graph that the attention which will be given to maintenance during the current year will be dangerously low, even after due allowance has been made for the reduction in working-costs. It is necessary for the Board to issue a warning that unless the traffic on the roads is