

The development of the tourist and scenic attractions of the Dominion is only possible according to the measure of their accessibility, and, where necessary, expenditure has been incurred in the construction or improvement of roads leading to these attractions. I am firmly of the opinion that the natural beauties of our country should be within easy reach of all of our citizens and not merely of those who visit us from overseas, and it will be my endeavour to make this objective possible of achievement.

I have referred elsewhere to the past activities of the Department in utilizing roadworks for the purpose of employing labour which otherwise would not be placed. Formerly, a considerable amount of assistance was obtained from unemployment funds towards the prosecution of works which were commenced principally to relieve unemployment. At present, however, all roadworks under the control of my Department are being carried out at standard rates, and I am satisfied that the ultimate results are proving entirely satisfactory.

Although not financed from capital moneys, the restoration of flood damage is a matter in which my Department has taken an active and practical interest. During the month of February last a cyclonic storm visited the Dominion, and, whilst fortunately many districts escaped severe damage or suffered very slightly, a number of others, such as Whangarei, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, and Wellington districts, experienced considerable damage to settlement roads and bridges. The total cost of restoration in the districts mentioned was estimated to be in the vicinity of £100,000. Many local authorities found it necessary to approach the Government for financial aid towards the cost of repairs, and, after careful investigation of the circumstances, including the capacity of the authorities to meet a reasonable share of the cost, subsidies varying from £1 for £1 to as much as £3 for £1 were made available.

Having regard to the experiences of the past, the climatic changes to which the country is prone, and the probability of flood damage (sometimes of an extremely substantial nature) occurring at frequent intervals, it appears that serious consideration should be given to the inclusion of a reasonable contingency item in the annual budgets of every local road-controlling authority for use should occasion require. The setting-apart of, say, a proportionate amount of a local authority's estimated annual revenue would ensure that finance would be readily available for the purpose mentioned, and, if it happened that the contingency items were not fully expended, the finances of the local authority would be improved by the existence of a satisfactory reserve.

A few of the major works which have been in hand during the past year and are still in course of completion are:—

Reconstruction, including widening and metalling, of the Waikaremoana-Rotorua Road to a standard required for modern motor transport between Lake Waikaremoana and the thermal wonders of the Rotorua district. Work has been in progress at each end of the road for some months, and 377 men are employed.

Widening and extension of the Western Hutt Road, which was started a few years ago as a relief of unemployment work, is now a standard work. This road, when the proposed bridge over the Hutt River at Silverstream has been erected, will provide a much needed additional outlet from Wellington City to the Upper Hutt Valley and the Wairarapa, especially when the present highway through the Taita Gorge is blocked with slips or by flooding of the Hutt River. One hundred and twenty-nine men are employed on this road.

The road which branches off the Western Hutt Road at Haywards and joins the Auckland-Wellington Main Highway at Pahautanui is being widened and otherwise reconstructed to a standard necessary for modern motor transport, and when completed will provide a much better connection between the Hutt Valley and the beach resorts on the West Coast and the Auckland-Wellington Main Highway. Eighty-six men are employed.

Construction of the Lewis Pass Road, involving erection of several bridges, will provide a much shorter connection between North Canterbury and the north and middle portions of the West Coast than by any of the present highway routes. Work has been in progress at the Canterbury end for several years, but a recommencement was not made on the Reefton (West Coast) side until much later. Three hundred and twenty-five men are employed.

Main South Road (Westland): During the past year operations have been confined to the Weheka-Bruce Bay section, on which 107 men are employed.