

## MAIN HIGHWAYS.

I have already mentioned the progress which is being made in the direction of improving the standard of main highways throughout the Dominion, and this applies not only to the actual reconstruction and realignment, but also to maintenance. The past financial year was a record year of activity since the main-highways system was introduced some thirteen years ago.

In my Statement last year I made reference to what I considered to be a disadvantage in the methods of administration, arising from the divided control of main arterial routes. Legislation was approved by the House which made provision for the principal trunk roads to be controlled by the national roading authority. Subsequently approximately 4,000 miles of State highways were placed under the direct control of the Main Highways Board. In anticipation of the introduction of this change, tentative arrangements had been made in certain directions, and it was possible for the Board to take over some arterial highways immediately after the end of October, 1936. However, owing to lack of plant for maintenance purposes, it was found necessary for some local authorities to continue operations until departmental equipment could be obtained.

During the financial year just past, the amount of traffic on main highways showed further increase. The consumption of motor-spirits was very much greater than for any previous year, and, in addition, the registrations of motor-vehicles reached peak figures since the advent of this form of transport. If any further justification for major improvements to our highways were needed, it is surely to be found in these factors, which are a true index of traffic densities.

The activities of the Main Highways Board for the period now under review are more particularly described in its annual report appended to this Statement. The report shows that the total receipts from revenue exceeded £2,300,000, which is a record to date, and that the total expenditure from the Main Highways Account for the year ended 31st March, 1937, on actual works as distinct from loan and special charges, amounted to £2,400,000, which is almost £800,000 more than was expended on similar works during the previous year. Nearly £1,400,000 was spent last year on reconstruction and improvements, including the elimination of level railway crossings, £900,000 on maintenance, and £106,000 on the replacement of bridges. In addition to the foregoing, interest and loan charges accounted for £307,516, while general rate subsidies, which are paid from the Main Highways Account, totalled £195,000.

The programme carried through last year involved the borrowing of £853,500 for main-highways purposes.

Since the amalgamation of the Revenue and Construction Funds under the Main Highways Account, true maintenance-costs have been recorded, and the expenditure during the past financial year amounted to an average of £90·5 per mile. It is not possible to compare this average with previous years by reason of the fact that expenditure under the Revenue Fund was not dissected to show maintenance-costs separately from other work charged to the same Fund. In future, however, the trend of maintenance-costs will be readily ascertainable.

In order to provide finance for the current year's activities, it is proposed to allocate approximately £1,200,000 for maintenance purposes and £2,600,000 for improvements and reconstruction. Of this latter sum, it is anticipated that £500,000 will be absorbed in the elimination of dangerous railway-level crossings.

A further sum of approximately £230,000 is being proposed for expenditure this year on the replacement of highway bridges.

This class of work is being carried out as expeditiously as circumstances permit, but progress is dependent on engineering investigations and designing. It is not practicable to standardize plans for the reason that each site presents singular physical and technical features and requires special consideration. During the year ended 31st March, 1937, 9,575 ft. of bridging was completed and a further 15,000 ft. is at present in process of construction.

As the arterial highways are reconstructed to modern width and curvature, it is the policy to pave those sections which are heavily trafficked. The last