

STATE HIGHWAYS DEPOTS.

For the efficient organization of maintenance gangs on State highways careful consideration has been given to the establishment of depots at suitable locations on the highway system. To provide for the housing of road-graders, lorries, maintenance tar-sealing plant, and other machinery buildings and multiple garages have been erected and fitted with the necessary tools and equipment to enable minor plant repairs to be undertaken on the spot. Stores of fuel oil, motor-spirits, and spare parts are also kept in stock to obviate any delay in the operation of the plant, this being most essential in those districts where dustless paving has not yet been provided and where constant grading is necessary to maintain roads in correct shape.

Temporary depot buildings are being provided in some districts until such time as planned sealing programmes have been completed, when permanent depots will be established in localities most suitable for the effective maintenance of highways under the control of the Board.

BEAUTIFICATION OF HIGHWAYS.

Continued public interest is being shown in the beautification of highways, and the Board is deeply interested in any amenity of this nature which will add to the enjoyment of road-users generally.

There is ample evidence before the Board to show that there is a number of interested societies and local bodies who are keen to proceed with the work, but in most cases some financial assistance is desired, and if the scheme is to be carried out to the best advantage co-ordination of effort is essential.

Approval has already been given in a number of cases to the planting of trees along suitable stretches of road reserves after the Board has first satisfied itself that the growth of these trees would not constitute a future danger to the travelling public.

The many urgent improvement works still requiring attention on highways do not permit of any of the Board's funds being made available for the beautification of the countryside at the present time, but as soon as the Board feels it is in a position to do so careful consideration will be given to the appointment of an expert officer to the Board's staff with the necessary knowledge and administrative ability to be responsible for the proper co-ordination of all work proposed by beautifying societies, local bodies, and other bodies interested and desirous of improving the appearance of our highways.

If the scheme is to be a success, the Board realizes that such an appointment is necessary in the interests of efficiency and uniformity, and in order that any work proposed may be considered in relation to a comprehensive plan.

ADVANCES TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

In many instances during last financial year local authorities found that they were unable to raise loans from outside sources for the purpose of financing their share of the cost of urgent and desirable works required on main highways. Taking advantage of the powers conferred upon it by special legislation, the Board advanced to local bodies, on short-term loans, the amounts required in such cases.

The number of loan agreements entered into during the year was fifteen, the amount advanced being £26,497, as compared with twenty-one agreements totalling £28,801 19s. 3d. for the year 1937-38.

The total principal advanced up to 31st March, 1939, was £296,089 8s. 11d., the amount outstanding at the date mentioned being £106,461 2s. 1d.

PLANT.

The facilities provided by the Board to enable local authorities to acquire plant under the hire-purchase system were taken advantage of to a greater extent than formerly, the purchases for 1938-39 under this heading amounting to £46,835. This showed increases of £10,420 and £31,141 for the years 1937-38 and 1936-37 respectively.

Since the inception of the scheme, plant to the value of £288,168 has been purchased, of which amount £67,058 was outstanding at 31st March, 1939.

The items purchased during the year under the hire-purchase system were: Graders, 15; trucks, 15; tractors, 2; excavators, 2; crusher, 1.

In addition to the above, the Board, for its own use, purchased the following items of plant: Graders, 49; tractors, 43; motor-lorries, 31; power-control winches, 23; angle-dozers, 17; crushers, 17; compressors, 17; road-rollers, 14; road-sweepers, 11; pump and engine, 10; concrete-vibrators, 7; excavators, 7; bitumen-sprayers, 6; concrete-mixers, 6; snow-ploughs, 5; road-planers, 5; machine rock-drills, 5; electric-motors, 4; scarifiers, 4; winch and oil-engines, 4; metal screens, 3; oil-engines, 3; power motors, 3; scrapers (carry-all), 3; trailers, 3; road-markers, 2; bull-dozer, 1; conveyor, 1; generator set (50 kW.), 1; lathe, 1; motor-car, 1; steam-hammer, 1; pile driving monkey, 1; revolving scraper, 1.

TESTING OF HIGHWAY MATERIALS.

Owing to delay in delivery of the equipment no tests have yet been made with the Los Angeles abrasion machine. However, the machine has now arrived, and it is hoped to commence testing at an early date.

Since the samples of rock and stone submitted during the year could not be tested for wear in the Los Angeles machine, the Petrological Laboratory examined the samples microscopically and