

to the foregoing concession, the Government decided to write off arrears of interest to 31st March, 1946, amounting to £1,416,297, and also the 1946-47 interest of approximately £520,000.

The activities of the Main Highways Board for the past financial year are described in its annual report, which is attached to this statement. The report indicates that the total receipts from revenue sources amounted to £2,861,016, as compared with £2,174,337 for the preceding year. Considerable progress was made during the year in overtaking the arrears of maintenance, and, while some highways have not yet been brought back to pre-war standard, every effort will be made to attain this object in the shortest possible time.

With the limitations on materials and man-power it has not been possible to embark upon any extensive bridging or construction programmes, but the need for bridge renewals throughout the Dominion is one of extreme urgency and within the availability of resources every effort is being made to meet the position.

In view of the shortages for bridging and for heavy construction works, expenditure and effort for the immediate future will be concentrated to a considerable extent on the extension of dustless surfacing which does not draw heavily on man-power and for which it is anticipated that materials will not be in such short supply. The most appreciated benefit which can be provided for motorists and the road transport industry will be an early extension of dustless surfacing.

ROAD-CONSTRUCTION

Road-construction has been on a modest but increased scale, the limits having been dictated largely by available man-power. Particular attention has been given to roading on land made available by the Government for the rehabilitation of ex-servicemen.

As stated on previous occasions, I am most anxious to provide improved road access to settlers who do not enjoy reasonable facilities in this direction, and hope that next year a very considerable advance will be possible to this end.

Eighty-three miles of formation, 150 miles of metalling, and 1,174 ft. of bridging have been completed; and a further 700 ft. of bridging is in progress.

The Government has had in mind for some time the amelioration of conditions on Chatham Islands, where road access has always been backward, and I am happy to state that a good start has been made with a roading programme there. Earth-moving plant was shipped from New Zealand, and 6 miles of formation and a 130 ft. bridge over the Naim River have been completed already.

RAILWAYS-CONSTRUCTION

With the near-completion of the South Island Main Trunk Railway no large-scale railway-construction is proceeding at present.

In the metropolitan areas investigations have been pursued actively into the rail-access works included in the ten-year schedules of works announced by me. Extensive investigations are in hand upon proposals for provision of suburban railway facilities in the vicinity of Auckland and Wellington.

Survey of one of the Christchurch metropolitan works, the Sockburn Styx industrial railway loop, was carried out during the war, and I am pleased to say that the route now proposed will avoid damaging the best of the agricultural land in the vicinity.

The Government has purchased the 19-mile length of the Taupo-Totara Timber Co.'s line, from Putaruru to Tokoroa, and it is now being operated by the Public Works Department. As a result it will be possible to transport closer to the works on this line materials needed for construction of Maraetai and other hydro-electric projects