

The estimated net expenditure under the General Purposes Account for the current financial year, 1938-39, is £10,145,000, and arrangements are being made with the Minister of Finance to provide the necessary funds. This is the amount shown on the Public Works estimates, which also show an estimated net expenditure of £1,532,030 from the Electric Supply Account and £5,037,200 from the Main Highways Account, a total for all these accounts of £16,714,230.

### MAIN HIGHWAYS.

I have this year used my best endeavours to advance the welfare of the Dominion by providing good roads. This applies both to settlement roads required for backblock access and to main highways which carry the bulk of our rural traffic. Land-settlement cannot be encouraged nor can primary industries be fostered unless reasonable roading facilities are available. The main highways comprise the principal routes for general road transport, and it is most essential that they be constructed and maintained to a sufficiently good standard.

On previous occasions I have drawn attention to the growing road traffic not only in the matter of the number of vehicles registered, but also in the increased mileage travelled. These developments have continued, and to-day there is more highway traffic than ever before. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that steps be taken to expedite the reconstruction of roads that were built many years ago for slower-moving traffic, in order to make them fit for the modern fast-moving motor-vehicle.

During the year under review improvement works on main highways have been pushed forward in order to meet the demands of increasing traffic and particularly to make for the greater safety of the travelling public.

I am aware that my policy in regard to highways expenditure has been questioned in some quarters and that complaint has been made that unnecessary work has been, and is being, carried out to a standard in excess of requirements. I offer no apology for the extensive highway improvements which have been effected, nor for the large amount of work at present in progress. It must be remembered that changes are continually taking place in the design and capacity of motor-vehicles, particularly in regard to speed, and, though I do not for a moment suggest that roads should be built to suit maximum speeds of modern vehicles, it is imperative that low-standard roads of inadequate width and dangerous curvature should be made fit and safe for the traffic which uses them. Although a great deal of progress has been made towards improving a substantial portion of the highways system, it is not yet entirely reconditioned for motor traffic.

Some sections of highway in closely settled areas were reconstructed several years ago, but to-day they are carrying such large volumes of traffic that further improvements are required to bring them up to a reasonable standard. As far as possible present-day improvements are being carried out in such a way as to allow for further traffic development. I am bound to remark that most of the criticism is voiced during the period when earthwork is in full swing and before the full effect of the proposals is apparent to the inexperienced observer. I have not yet experienced a single instance where, after completion, an improvement work has been held to be unnecessary or unjustified, and this fact in itself is a sufficient answer to that type of criticism.