

During the past year there has been a continued increase in the growth of motor traffic as revealed by the greater number of vehicles licensed for operation and the record consumption of motor-spirits. The density of present-day traffic therefore requires that every effort be maintained in the direction of reconditioning the highways system to a standard in keeping with the needs of modern transport. Particularly does this apply to the State highways of the Dominion which carry a tremendous amount of arterial traffic. Very substantial improvements have been made since the Government assumed direct control of State highways, and the public is benefiting considerably, both directly and indirectly. For example, the development of commercial transport has been possible only because of the excellent standard of the improved highways. Under such circumstances it is not possible at present to consider any curtailment in highway activities or expenditure.

Satisfactory progress has been made with the programme of works, other than actual reconstruction and surfacing, for the purpose of making main highways safer for all classes of users. A considerable amount of protective fencing has been erected on hilly sections and also in other localities where this protection affords added safety. The erection of guide-posts has been extended throughout most districts, particularly where night traffic is appreciable and where fog conditions are common. This simple method of marking the boundary of the trafficable portion of road and indicating the variation in alignment has effected a very material improvement from the safety viewpoint. Another phase of activity in regard to safety has been the adoption of a policy of improving visibility at the junction of side roads with main highways. In this connection the co-operation of local bodies has been obtained in respect of highways under their control, and many corners have already been improved under a standard scheme of subsidy.

In the course of investigating the problem of road safety it became apparent that a common hazard affecting both motorist and pedestrian arose from the lack of footpaths, especially in closely-settled localities where vehicular traffic was heavy. The matter was discussed with the Main Highways Board, and as a result financial assistance is now given from highway funds towards the construction of footpaths where circumstances require. A condition of the subsidy is that the footpath proposals must include the provision of a paved surface, as otherwise the tendency would remain for pedestrians to prefer the paved highway to any loose-top footway.

Consideration is being given to the provision of separate cycle-tracks where road traffic exceeds an average of 1,600 vehicles per day. There are a number of difficulties in connection with the construction of cycle-tracks, however, not the least of which are the limited width of existing highway reserves and the irregular or uneven surface of the land. However, the matter is being carefully investigated in order that traffic conditions affecting the cyclist, the motorist, and the pedestrian can be materially improved.

The question of highway lighting was carefully considered by the New Zealand Road Safety Council, which came to the conclusion that it would be desirable to install some modern form of lighting on those portions of highway carrying a sustained average daily traffic of 2,500 motor-vehicles or more. This recommendation was adopted, and the Main Highways Board, with the assistance of a technical advisory committee, has made extensive investigations into the various types of lighting which might prove suitable. It is hoped that in the near future it will be possible to commence the lighting installation on the two most heavily trafficked highways in the Dominion.

It is pleasing to be able to record that there is evidence of practical results having been achieved from the safety campaign in respect of main highways. While the ratio of accidents in urban areas has increased and in settlement areas has remained stationary, on main highways there has been a reduction of 18 per cent. This indicates that the general improvement of main highways has made a definite contribution towards road safety, and it is my earnest hope that still more favourable results will be obtained in the future.

A detailed statement of works undertaken throughout the year under review is contained in the annual report of the Main Highways Board, which is attached to this Statement. The report discloses that the total receipts from revenue sources