

THE BRITISH ROAD BOARD.

THE British Road Board was formed in 1910 for the purpose of aiding the county councils and other local authorities of Great Britain in the construction and maintenance of new roads and the improvement of existing roads. The board consists of four members: Sir Geo. S. Gibb, chairman; the Rt. Hon. Lord Pirrie, the Rt. Hon. Lord St. Davids, and the Rt. Hon. Sir J. H. A. MacDonald. W. Rees Jeffreys is the secretary of the board, and Col. R. E. Crompton is its consulting engineer. In addition it has an advisory engineering committee of six.

The board has published its third annual report, covering its operations for the year ending March 31st, 1913, and including, in nineteen appendices, a mass of statistical data relative to its work, and an explanation of the methods of administering its affairs.

While the report covers the year ending March 31st, 1913, in some cases figures are given up to June 30 of this year. Up to this latter date, the total of the grants and loans made amounted to £1,474,793. This was divided among the different kinds of work undertaken, as shown in the following table:

Improvement of road crusts	£1,210,012
Road widenings and improvement of curves, gradients and corners	120,466
Road diversions	29,395
Reconstruction and improvement of bridges..	53,842
New roads and bridges	61,078

Total £1,474,793

The grants and loans indicated up to June 30, 1913, amounted to £3,435,233, or £1,960,440 more than the grants and loans made. This difference is due to the fact that grants and loans may not be actually paid until some time after they are indicated or allotted, since the arrangements under which grants and loans are made may provide for the payment of half the sum indicated in any particular case at the beginning of the work and the remainder at its completion or in instalments payable at the time the grantees are ready to commence work, when the work is half completed and when the work is finished. In this connection, the method followed by the Road Board in making grants is of interest. As set forth in the report, this is essentially as follows:

Any local highway authority may apply for a grant or loan at any time, and all these applications are considered by the board so far as possible when they are received. In deciding upon the making of a grant or a loan, the Road Board investigates its advisability, taking into account the conditions in the district in question, as revealed by information obtained by conferring with the county councils from time to time in regard to the re-

quirements in each county, and from other sources. According to the usual procedure, a county council when making up its estimate for the ensuing year submits to the Road Board a general statement including a list of the contemplated improvements for which assistance is desired. This statement is not usually treated as a formal application, but is followed by a conference of the Road Board and representatives of the county council. At this, and, if necessary, at subsequent conferences, the question is discussed and the decision arrived at by the Road Board after a consideration of the various requests from all of the counties applying for aid. After the Road Board has selected the improvements upon which it is willing to grant aid and has suggested the amounts to be devoted to the work, the local authorities bring in detailed plans and specifications of the work. The Road Board then submits each case to the treasury for its approval, which is usually prompt. The grants are then indicated by the Road Board.

The annual income of the Road Improvement Fund (calculated without regard to the date of the actual receipt of the sums involved) has steadily increased since the establishment of the board, and during the year 1912-13 amounted to £1,252,970 4s. 10d. The details of the income are shown in one of the accompanying tables.

In regard to the policy of the board in making grants and loans, the following statement is included in the report:

In settling the total amount up to which advances may safely be made at any date the board do not confine themselves to dealing with the balance in hand, representing cash received less commitments. They are prepared to anticipate their income to a certain extent, but in view of the limited experience available in regard to the rate at which commitments will mature, and the probability that as the procedure and operations of the board become better known to highway authorities there will be a constantly increasing acceleration in the maturity of commitments and the expenditure of money on assisted works, they have not thought it advisable to anticipate more than a year's income. They are confirmed in this view by the consideration that in their opinion the amount of road improvement work which is being undertaken by highway authorities (apart from urban street widenings to which, for reasons given in their previous annual reports, the board are not generally disposed to make contributions at the present time, except in special cases) is, generally speaking, as much as can practically be carried out by the staff and with the moneys at the disposal of highway authorities aided by advances from the Road Improvement Fund.

At the present time the board are making grants on the assumption that they can safely indicate a sum of about £1,700,000 in addition to the indications made up to June 30, 1913.

Yearly Income of British Road Board.

Item.	Apr. 30, 1909, to Mar. 31, 1910.	Apr. 1, 1910, to Mar. 31, 1911.	Apr. 1, 1911, to Mar. 31, 1912.	Apr. 1, 1912, to Mar. 31, 1913.	Total.
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Motor spirit duties	290,702 15 9	410,376 5 7	591,781 18 7	702,381 10 3	1,995,242 10 2
Carriage license duties	460,265 17 6*	403,270 19 11	493,790 6 9	1,357,327 4 2
Interests on investments and loans	4,851 16 0*	23,064 13 7	56,798 7 10	84,714 17 5
Total annual income	290,702 15 9	875,493 19 1	1,018,117 12 1	1,252,970 4 10	3,437,284 11 9

*From Jan. 1, 1910, to March 31, 1911.