

## FINANCING ROAD WORK IN SASKATCHEWAN\*

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ALL moneys used for the construction and maintenance of rural highways in the province of Saskatchewan are provided and administered either by the Department of Highways of the provincial government, or by the councils of the rural municipalities.

The moneys spent by the Department of Highways are provided for in the annual estimates under two main heads: (a) money provided from income account, and (b) money provided from capital account.

To income account is charged all expenditures for the construction, maintenance and operation of provincial ferries, construction and repair of timber bridges, maintenance and repair of roads, and maintenance and repair of permanent bridges.

To capital account is charged the construction of roads, and the construction of permanent steel and concrete bridges.

From the time of the formation of the province in 1905 to 1912 highway expenditures were controlled by the Department of Public Works. During this period all road construction was charged to income account, and permanent bridges only were charged to capital account.

In 1912 the government decided that the time had arrived when a more extensive program of highway improvement should be entered upon, and to this end adopted a policy of borrowing money to carry on road construction work as a capital expenditure. A Board of Highway Commissioners was formed to take charge of the administration of this enlarged program.

For the years 1906 to 1911 inclusive the annual expenditure of the Department of Public Works on roads, bridges and ferries averaged about \$784,000. The Board of Highway Commissioners spent in each of the years 1912, 1913 and 1914 on the same services about \$2,000,000.

Since the outbreak of the war it was thought advisable to curtail expenditures on highway improvement and the annual expenditures for 1915, 1916, 1917 and the current year average only about \$700,000.

## Main Road System

The Board of Highway Commissioners formulated a policy of, so far as possible, concentrating the expenditures under its control on the improvement of the main market roads of the province.

There are in the settled portions of the province about 175,000 miles of road allowances. The improvement of this large mileage would be a tremendous task for the people of this province. Very much of this mileage is, however, on roads which are purely local roads which will carry only very light traffic, and fortunately in the open prairie portions of the province many of the roads will in their natural state serve for many years to come to accommodate the small amount of traffic which will pass over them.

It may be roughly estimated that 20 per cent. of the above mileage will be included in a main road system or about 35,000 miles, and probably these 35,000 miles will carry about 80 per cent. of the traffic. The improvement of this 35,000 miles of road represents a big program of road improvement work, but one which the rural municipalities, with liberal assistance from the government, may hope to accomplish within a reasonable time. When we

have succeeded in providing well-graded earth roads, together with necessary culverts and bridges of a permanent nature to accommodate 80 per cent. of the traffic, we will have advanced a long way towards solving the problem of good roads for the province.

The policy of limiting government expenditures to the improvement of main roads embodied in a main road system makes possible a well-defined program of work, a steady adherence to which will insure that every dollar spent will bring us nearer our goal.

The Board of Highway Commissioners, in accordance with its main road policy, established on paper a system of main roads for the province. This was drawn up after consultation with the councils of each rural municipality, from information on the files of the Department of Public Works and from information gathered in the field by officials of the board.

Thus a start was made towards the development of a main-road system, and while this scheme was drawn up with the idea of, so far as possible, establishing this permanently, conditions in a new and growing province such as Saskatchewan, where the opening up of new lines of railways is followed by the growing up of new market centres, are such that modifications have to be permitted to meet changed conditions, so the original main-road scheme has been modified and extended from time to time as circumstances required.

## Administration of Highway Expenditures

In 1917 the Department of Highways was established to carry on the administration of all highway work which had previously been carried on by the Board of Highway Commissioners.

The selection of the locations upon which improvements shall be made each year rests with the department and is arrived at after consultation with the councils of the rural municipalities, and on the recommendations of the divisional superintendents. These latter are officers of the department who have charge of the immediate supervision of the work in each of the eight divisions into which the province is divided.

During the years 1912 to 1914, when under the Board of Highway Commissioners the government was spending a large sum each year on road and bridge construction, the work was carried on either by government road and bridge crews or by means of grants to rural municipalities. The government crews were organized, controlled and paid by the board. There was sufficient work at that time to keep these crews employed for the whole summer season. These crews, under the same foremen, with very much the same personnel, and even the same horses, were employed year after year and generally became very efficient in their work.

Grants were given to rural municipalities for road construction work on what was called the dollar-for-dollar basis. The board entered into an agreement with the rural municipalities to make a grant for the improvement of certain main roads selected by the municipality and approved by the board, the municipality agreeing to contribute an equal amount from its own funds. The work was carried on by crews in the employ of the municipality, and the board paid over to the municipality one-half the cost of the work, on the certificate of an inspector of the board that the work had been done in accordance with the specifications and agreement.

Since the outbreak of the war the expenditures made by the government have been on such a reduced scale that it was impossible to give the government road crews sufficient work to maintain the organization. It was necessary also to discontinue the system of grants to

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