

By Thomas H. MacDonald, Commissioner of Public Roads

Highway construction supervised by the Public Roads Administration resulted in the improvement of 17,160 miles of roads during the past Federal fiscal year. Of this total, 13,182 miles were constructed in cooperation with the various State highway departments with funds apportioned to all States. The balance of 3,678 miles includes road construction in the national forests, national parks and monuments, public lands, and other work.

Equally as important as the mileage completed was the year's accomplishment in the Administration's program of eliminating hazards at railroad grade crossings. In this program 382 dangerous crossings were eliminated, 86 obsolete grade separation structures were reconstructed, and 438 crossings were protected by the installation of flashing lights and other warning devices.

Of the work in cooperation with all States, 5,541 miles were in the Southern States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In these States were located 162 of the grade crossing elimination projects, 36 of the reconstructed crossing structures, and 168 of the crossings protected.

At the close of the fiscal year, projects involving 10,012 miles of highway were under contract and projects involving 2,718 miles were approved but not yet under contract. In the grade crossing program the work under contract included 153 crossings to be eliminated, 75 existing structures to be reconstructed, and 947 crossings to be protected. Grade crossing projects approved but not under contract included 75 crossings to be eliminated and 17 existing structures to be reconstructed.

The highway and grade crossing work completed during the year was estimated to cost \$336,091,000, of which \$121,151,000 was for work in the Southern States. The work under contract was estimated to cost \$316,378,000, work in the Southern States accounting for \$121,015,000 of this amount. Work involved in projects approved but not yet under contract was estimated to cost \$63,315,000, of which \$23,102,000 was for work in the Southern States.

Funds for the fiscal year 1940, which began July 1, 1939, were apportioned by the Secretary of Agriculture on December 29, 1938, and were as follows: \$100,000,000 for improvements on the Federal-aid highway system; \$15,000,000 for secondary or feeder roads; and \$20,000,000 for the elimination of hazards at railroad grade crossings. Of this total, \$15,911,000 is the Southern States' share. Including the funds for 1940 and balances available from authorizations for previous years, \$228,180,000 of Federal funds remained available for programmed projects at the close of the fiscal year. Of these funds, \$87,113,000 was available for programmed projects in the Southern States.

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1938 authorized the funds for 1940, and also provided funds for the fiscal year 1941 as follows: \$115,000,000 for improvements on the Federal-aid highway system; \$15,000,000 for secondary or feeder roads; and \$30,000,000 for the elimination of hazards at railroad grade crossings. These funds will be apportioned among the States, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico by the Federal Works Administrator by the end of the calendar year. The States share in the funds for Federal-aid highways and for secondary or feeder roads one-third in proportion to area, one-third in proportion to population, and one-third in proportion to mileage of rural post roads. The grade crossing funds are apportioned one-half in proportion to population, one-fourth in proportion to Federal-aid highway system mileage, and one-fourth in proportion to railroad mileage. As the factors in the apportionment formulas do not change greatly from year to year, the Southern States will share in the 1941 funds in nearly the same proportion as in the 1940 funds.

Construction of the main roads in the national forests has been a function of the Public Roads Administration since 1916. As now designated, the forest highway system comprises 21,981 miles of highways in 36 States, Alaska, and Puerto Rico, 6,039 miles of the system being located in 15 Southern States. At the close of the fiscal year, 109 miles of national forest highways in Southern States had been improved.

The construction of roads in and approaching national parks, monuments, and parkways is a responsibility of the Public Roads Administration under an agreement with the National Park Service. The Administration performs all engineering functions on park road construction, which include the making of surveys, preparation of plans, specifications, and estimates, advertising for bids, awarding of contracts, inspection during construction and after completion, and recommendation of payment of vouchers. At the end of the fiscal year 1,577 miles of highway in the national parks and monuments had been improved, 1,06 miles being in the Southern States.

During the past several years Congress has authorized funds for the construction of parkways - landscaped highways for recreational travel leading to or connecting national parks. Attention is now being centered on two parkways; both are in the Southern States. The Blue Ridge Parkway, following closely the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains for approximately 130 miles, passes through Virginia and North Carolina, and connects the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. Approximately 134 miles have been completed to date, and 170 miles are under construction. The Natchez Trace Parkway passes through historic sections of Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee for approximately 155 miles. Approximately 36 miles of this parkway have been completed. Designed and located so as to afford the

traveler vistas of the country traversed, the parkways are attractively landscaped and supplemented with parking areas, drinking fountains, and picnic grounds.

Of equal importance with the physical accomplishments of road construction during the year was the progress made in planning for future highways. By means of highway planning surveys in cooperation with 16 States, necessary inventories of highways, highway traffic, and highway finance, are being taken. All of the Southern States are cooperating with the Administration in conducting these surveys, which will enable the planning of future highway construction on an entirely rational basis.

Information collected by the planning studies was invaluable to the Administration during the past year when Congress directed it to investigate and report on the feasibility of a system of transcontinental toll roads. Six highways were described, three spanning the country from east to west, and three from north to south. Without the information collected by the planning surveys, no reliable report on the feasibility of such a system of highways could have been made. However, the surveys had progressed to the point where a comprehensive analysis of the proposal was possible on the basis of facts. The Administration's investigation, in which it enlisted the aid of all the various State highway departments, conclusively proved that such a system of toll highways would not be self-supporting nor would it contribute much to the solution of our most pressing highway problems.

The Administration's report to Congress, Toll Roads and Free Roads, has been printed as House Document No. 272, 76th Congress, first session. In addition to its analysis of the six toll roads, the report presents a master plan for free highway development. Designation and improvement of a 27,000-mile system of direct, interregional highways is recommended, together with the necessary express highways directly through cities, belt-line highways around cities, and bypasses around towns, to relieve traffic congestion.

The difficulty and cost of obtaining the necessary rights-of-way in and adjacent to cities is one of the most serious obstacles retarding urgently needed improvements. In many cases the costs of right-of-way and property damages far exceed the cost of the actual construction work. The constantly increasing usage of our streets and highways is forcing local, State, and Federal highway officials to a realization of the great urgency of the necessary improvements, and the right-of-way problem can not long delay them.