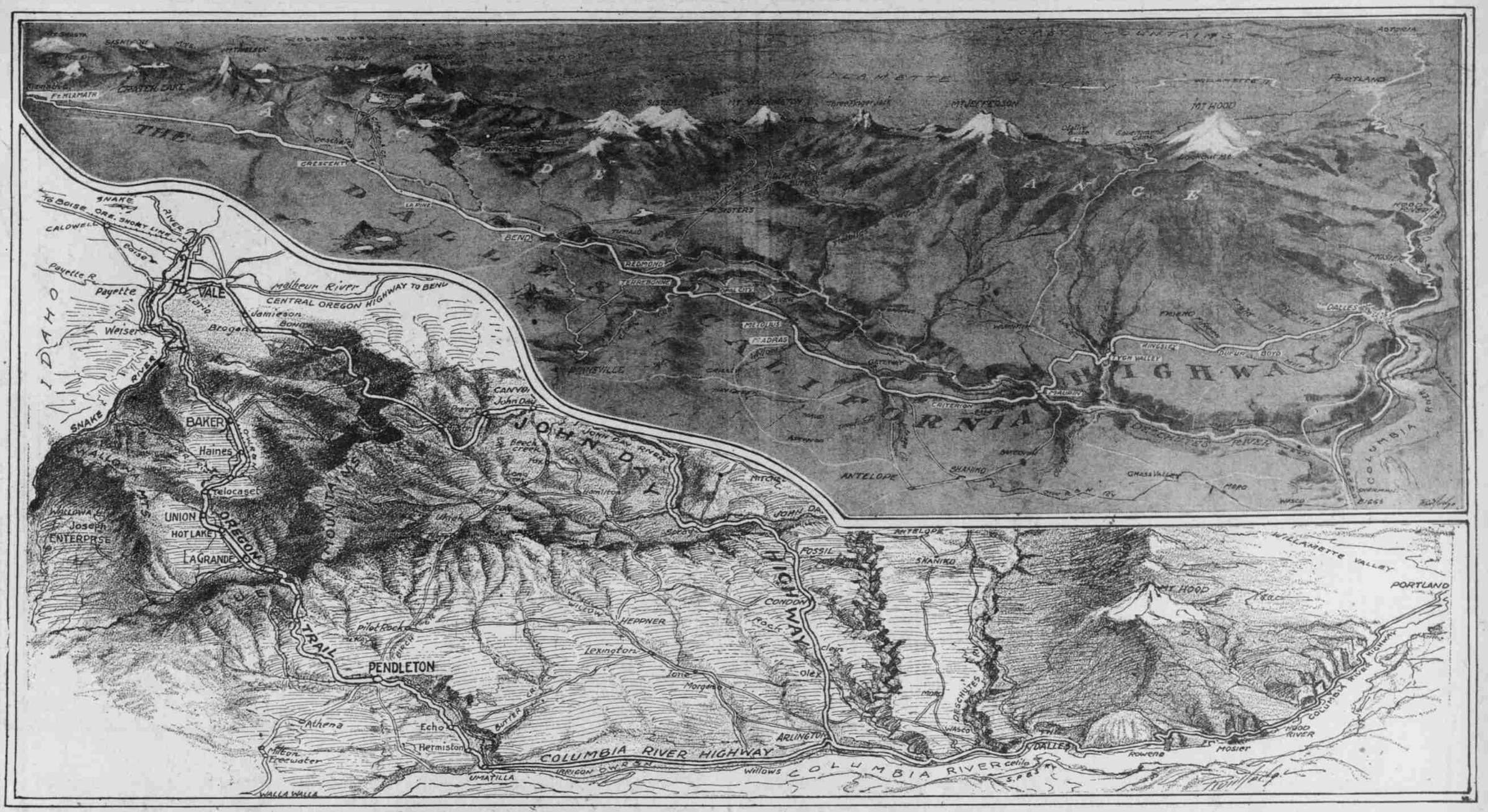
EASTERN OREGON ROAD-BUILDING PROGRAMME INCLUDES 814 MILES

The Dalles-California and John Day Highways and Old Trail of the Pioneers to Be Worked During 1922, Opening Many Districts and Traversing Stretches of Magnificent Scenery of Varied Kinds



THREE of Oregon's important traffic arteries upon which much work will be performed in 1922 are the Old Oregon trail, the John Day highway and The Dalles-California highway. They represent 814 miles on the state road map and each of these roads is east of the Cascades, the natural barrier which divides Oregon, giving it two distinct climates.

Eastern Oregon is a country of vast spaces and is sparsely settled. It embraces the fertile wheat belt, the cattle ranges, the chief irrigation section and the sagebrush and sand. It is the home of the buckaroo, the sheepherder and the great wheat ranches. It contains some of the most awe-inspiring scenery to be found in the state. It possesses some of the most celebrated fossil beds in the world.

These three roads serve as many different districts, but only one will be finished in 1922—the Old Oregon trail. Before the end of the current year, the motorist can travel without interruption from the Oregon state line, opposite Payette, Ida., on the Snake river, to the Pacific ocean, a distance of 536 miles, and the entire journey can be made "on high."

The Old Oregon trail is so-called because it follows the route which the pioneers took who came overland to this state, and there is no more famous path of the emigrants than the Oregon trail. While the original trail is paralleled almost the entire way across the state, the highway designated as the Old Oregon trail terminates at Pendleton, where it then becomes known as the Columbia river highway. In so far as traffic is concerned, the Columbia river highway and the Old Oregon trail are the same thoroughfare.

Special efforts are being put forth by the state highway commission to complete the trail this year. Of the 190 miles there is yet to bring to standard grade 81 miles, and there is yet to surface with rock or gravel 102.9 miles. This is not to be a hard-surfaced highway, but it will have a good surface admirably suited to the needs of traffic in that region. Up to November 1, 1921, the state has expended $1,611,735 on the trail. Estimate to complete the highway, including work now under contract, is $1,600,000, so that the road is already half paid for. Ontario, Or., is the eastern terminus of the Old Oregon trail. There will be a little, but not much, hard-surface on the trail and that little will be confined to Union county.

Scenically, no other travel-way in Oregon possesses more distinct and unique features than the John Day highway. This road connects with the Columbia river highway at Arlington, then takes a southeasterly direction, ending, like the Old Oregon trail, at Ontario. In time, when both roads are completed, the traveler entering Oregon from Idaho will be offered his choice of these two highways, the Old Oregon trail and the John Day highway, and, still later, a third, the Central Oregon highway, for the three radiate like a fan from Ontario. Development of the Central Oregon highway will not be as rapid as in the case of the other two.

Statistically considered, there are 302 miles of John Day highway, of which 153 miles remain to be graded and 208 miles to be surfaced. It has cost thus far $1,553,498 and will call for $2,500,000 to complete. There will be a rock or gravel surface the entire length.

Ages before man appeared on the surface of the earth the country through which the John Day highway runs was the habitat of monsters. The country possessed a tropical climate, with palm trees in abundance and rank vegetation. Here the woolly rhinoceros, the mammoth, and other land animals, as well as the saurians, lived. It was the home of the original three-toed horse. Fossils of all these plants and animals have been unearthed in the region and constructing the John Day highway the road construction gangs have blasted their way through fossil remains of prehistoric beasts.

Picture gorge, a section through which the highway has been built, is a miniature reproduction of the Grand Canyon. Comparatively few native Oregonians are aware of the existence of this marvelous formation, but with the completion of the John Day highway it is likely to become as famous as any other scenic spot in the west.

Considerable progress has been made in opening up the John Day highway east of Prairie and a substantial start has been made at the eastern end so that there is progress from Ontario to Brogan. The gap between Brogan and Prairie presents the most costly piece of construction. Here the highway must climb over the Blue mountains and traverse dense forests. Co-operation will be furnished by the forest bureau on this section. So expensive will the construction be over the mountains that the highway commission has postponed action even to the point of a determination of the complete location of route. However, the commission, within the past few months, has agreed to take up this section as soon as possible.

The Dalles-California highway is the north and south route through the state east of the Cascades, paralleling the Pacific highway on the western slope. Whereas the Pacific highway is 345 miles in length, The Dalles-California is 321. Unlike the road in western Oregon, The Dalles-California will not be hardsurfaced. For centuries the general route of this highway was the path used by Indians coming from California to barter for dried salmon at Celilo falls. Later, the route was used by Fremont, the Pathfinder.

There are still 200 miles to grade and 216 miles to surface of the total 321. It has cost to date $970,281 and is estimated to cost $2,800,000 to complete. The former figure does not include work now under contract.

Sections of this road have been completed, the work through Jefferson and Deschutes counties being either finished or under contract, and sections in Klamath county have been built. Very little has been done in Wasco county, the northern end of the line, as the location was made by the highway commission but a few months ago. Owing to the topography of the country, the highway through Wasco county will be costly, as it must negotiate heavy grades and work down into and up out of Deschutes canyon. For the greater part of its mileage, however, The Dalles-California highway traverses comparatively level ground, covered with pine.

It is worth a note to call attention to the road metal used south of Bend. The highway commission surfaced many miles of the highway with cinders from an extinct volcano. These cinders make an excellent surface for a time, but are too light to withstand heavy traffic.

Heading southward to Klamath Falls and the California line, a spur leads off The Dalles-California highway to Crater lake and in the Wasco division another spur will tap the Mount Hood loop.

By means of the McKenzie pass, traffic can go from The Dalles-California highway to the Pacific highway, this being the one connection in the two trunk lines throughout their length. The pass, however, is inaccessible during winter, owing to snow in the Cascades.

The John Day highway and The Dalles-California highway are essentially commercial roads, despite the wonderland of scenery along their routes. These regions of Oregon are without railroad facilities and, unlike the Pacific and Columbia river highways and the Old Oregon trail, they tap territory untouched by steel.

MOTOR VEHICLE LICENSE AND GASOLINE BUILD OREGON HIGHWAYS

Registration of Cars and Consumption of "Fuel," With Other Sources of Revenue, Held Sufficient to Complete Present System, Comprising 4350 Miles, Until Length Is Graded and Surfaced.

By R. A. Booth, Chairman State Highway Commission.

THE state highway programme with all of its ramifications is the greatest economic problem that has ever come before the people of Oregon and one that more nearly touches or influences their activities than any other problem ever has or probably ever can.

The wheel long used as a powerful and appropriate instrument in mechanics does not yet appear to be giving place to other agencies in moving people or their belongings from place to place and, as long as vehicular transportation, the highway problem will continue of increasing interest and for many years at least lead as our most important agency of development.

Oregon has undertaken to build her state roads with funds collected from license fees for auto vehicles and a tax on gasoline. The income from these sources, under the present schedules, is sufficient to provide for the retirement of a bond issue equal to the present constitutional limit of 4 per cent of the total assessable worth of the state, and supply in addition several hundred thousand dollars annually for maintenance or betterment.

At this time it appears to be a well understood policy of the state to build and maintain its state highway system without a direct property tax. This fact should be emphasized as statements are frequently made, generally in all good conscience, that the road expenditure through the state highway system comes from a direct state tax. As the laws now are, not a dollar is gathered by the state from direct tax for road construction or maintenance.

So far as can now be seen the revenue collected from licenses and gasoline tax will be sufficient to continue the improvement of the present system of state highways, comprising some 4350 miles, until the whole is graded and surfaced to the present state standards. This statement is based on the assumption that the number of licensed vehicles and the fuel used by them will annually increase over a period of five to ten years, which will cover the time of active construction required to complete the standardizing of the system as it now is.

There will be reqquired, however, some extension to the constitutional limit for which the state way be bonded for road improvement for the annual increase in the assessable worth of the state will not be sufficient to automatically increase the bonding limit to an amount equal to the requirement of finishing the job.

To extend the constitutional limit for bonding for road construction requires a vote of the people. This fact should be prominently featured that all our citizens may properly understand it, for they are certain to be called upon to vote on the proposition of extension of bonding limit or be compelled to discontinue active construction work before the present system is completed. Let it be understood, however, that increase of the bonding limit does not involve a system of direct tax or any other system than the one now being followed under state laws; that is to say, revenue annually collected from present legally designated sources will be sufficient to pay the interest and principal on an amount considerably beyond the 4 per cent limit if the increase in the use of auto vehicles increases during the next decade or the major portion thereof as rapidly as it has during the past five years. That the increase will so continue seems beyond question when the record of registration is studied or, possibly more to the point, if the saving by use of auto machines over improved highways is considered, as it surely must.

In Oregon the registration of motor vehicles for 1920 was 103,790, producing a revenue of $1,972,166; for 1921 it is estimated at 118,500, producing $2,224,159.

The Oregon registration of motor vehicles for the first six months of 1920 was 89,173, producing $1,828,696. For the first six months of 1921 it was 102,274, producing $2,089,618.

The increase in Oregon is not an exception. During 1921 all but 12 states of the union increased their registration. In some states it is stated that the registration law is not being strictly enforced, owing to financial depression, which may account for shortage of about 60,000 registrations covering 12 states.

The increase in the use of motor vehicles is rapid. For instance, there was registered in the United States during the first six months of the present calendar year 13,244 more vehicles than were registered during the 12 months of 1920.

The compelling use of the motor vehicle is its saving. It is estimated that there was more than 1,000,000,000 tons of freight moved by vehicles over the improved highways of the United States during 1920, and that the saving in cost of such movement was not less than $1.70 per ton, or equal to $1,700,000,000.

Tasks hitherto impossible are made easy by good roads and motor vehicles. The worth of a man under these bettered agencies increases many fold because of what he can accomplish under the bettered conditions and of the time saved in performance.

To what purpose funds may be most profitably spent in road betterment is a matter for serious consideration and one that is being much discussed in Oregon and elsewhere. Some seek to exploit the tourist and others would serve first, the farm or factory. Somewhere between these extremes appears the sure course for Oregon. Fortunately, most of the roads constituting the Oregon highway system are largely market roads and practically all of them are scenic. There is not a scenic road in the state now constituting a part of the highway system a considerable part of which does not serve as an every day market road. It may well be wished that this statement might become more generally known to be a fact. It is true in a marked degree of the Mount Hood loop, the Crater lake and Josephine caves roads, and these are the roads most referred to as scenic or tourist roads.

The tourist crop is a varying, but increasing asset and will add many millions of dollars to our annual income and a steady increase to our population, but it not as stable a foundation to build upon as the farm and factory.

Statistics showing the influence of improved highways are not altogether reliable and have not yet been sufficiently compiled to show accurate results except in special instances and restricted areas. It has been published, however, that the farm growth—that is the increase in soil production—along the improved highways in Ohio has increased 186 per cent in the past five years and that factory production increase during the same period due to the same influence has been 185 per cent.

Oregon's growth can best be enhanced by her soil production. Properly treated, this alone may make her a great state. Our manufacturing, now considerable, must be greatly expanded. Agricultural development and factory growth stimulate each other, and both must be carefully considered in our road programme and advanced in all reasonable ways.

To a large extent these interests were considered by the legislature and are now being considered by the highway commission in locating and developing the great undertaking.

The automobile, so far as its intensive use is concerned, is largely an American institution. More than 86 per cent of all registrations for 1920 were for vehicles in the United States. Over 9,250,000 motor vehicles have already been registered in the United States during 1921. About 2,250,000 of these are in use on the farm. Two per cent of the American farms now use motor trucks and the number is rapidly increasing.

The American farmer is now in the front ranks of good road enthusiasts. He, in common with others, is demanding better roads—better as time savers and in carrying capacity. It is common knowledge that the soil is our great source of wealth, but we all need to be constantly reminded that its yield is not spontaneous but needs the help of every possible agency, and one of the greatest and most important is the good road. American industry dies as the soil withholds her treasure. Daily bread lessens or disappears as the soil fails us. But the soil will never fail us if properly treated. Only man fails, and he can better afford to fail at any other point than in aiding the producer from the soil. This should be an every day consideration by the people of Oregon in the development of her present road system and the extensions to it.

It seems difficult to write of the Oregon road programme without arguing for it even though it is no longer necessary. It is important that those who follow the programme closely should be well informed as to revenue, cost and progress that is being made, and for that reason from time to time full information is given the press, which has manifested the keenest interest in publishing the news and in giving splendid support to the highway commission.

It is hoped that statistics to the extent here given may not prove dull, but will serve to give in general the progress of the work during the past year, with some resume of the work done by the commission as now constituted and a glance ahead covering at least the proposed activities for 1922.

The funds used in state highway construction come from four sources, federal aid, sale of state bonds, license fees from automobile vehicles and tax on gasoline. The amount of federal aid received depends on congressional action and has varied from year to year. The recent bill passed by congress provides funds for 1922 only. The amount to be apportioned thereunder to Oregon will total about $2,250,000. This will come in about equal amounts from the forest and postal road funds.

The amount of state bonds that can be sold under the present law is somewhat variable and must not exceed 4 per cent of the total assessable worth of the property of the state. The state assessment of 1920 was $1,040,839,049, the bonding limit thereunder 4 per cent being $41,623,561. The assessable worth for 1921 it now appears, will be less than for the preceding year and will correspondingly reduce the bonding limit. The par value of state bonds sold during 1921 was $11,000,000, and the total par value of all sales from 1917 to 1921 inclusive $20,140,000. In addition to this there is advertised for sale on December 15, 1921, bonds to the par value of $560,000.

The gross amount received from license fees for 1920 was $1,972,166, and the estimated receipts from the same source for 1921, under the schedule as revised by the last legislature, is $2,244,159. After deducting the cost of administration by the state for registration, 25 per cent of the remainder is turned over to the counties contributing; 75 per cent going into the highway fund.

The receipts from gasoline tax for 1920, being one cent per gallon on all sales of gasoline and distillate, were $404,050. An additional tax of one cent per gallon on gasoline used in motor vehicles was imposed by the last legislature. It is now estimated that the tax on gasoline, as now provided by law, will total for the year 1921, $936,000.

The increase in consumption of gasoline for 1921 over 1920 is, as nearly as can be estimated, 15.7 per cent, and the increase in motor vehicle registration is estimated to be 15.4 per cent.

Since the organization of the highway commission as now constituted and which has functioned from 1917 to 1921, inclusive, there has been disbursed by the commission for all purposes from money received from all sources, including county and federal co-operation, about $53,000,000. Of this amount $18,371,000 covers the 1921 programme.

Since April 1, last, the highway commission has maintained all completed sections of state roads and expended therefor slightly more than half a million dollars. The law does not require state maintenance, but the commission, acting under "a gentleman's agreement" with the legislature and county representatives, undertook the maintenance for the remainder of the calendar year, or until such time as the maintenance problem could be further considered by the legislature. This maintenance extends to the completed sections of the state highways and, with the betterment problem, will be carefully studied and reported to the next regular session of the legislature.

The roads first constituting the state highway system were designated by the legislature, which provided that additions thereto might be made from time to time by unanimous vote of the highway commission. The system may therefore be extended by the legislature or the highway commission, as stated.

The highway commission is composed of three members, being appointed by the governor, one from each of the congressional districts of the state. The commission is required by law to make annual reports to the governor covering all its activities. The members serve without pay.

The total mileage of public roads in the state, including of course all county roads, is 41,825. Of these roads, 4356 miles comprise the state system.

Under the new federal law not to exceed 3 per cent or 1254 miles of the public roads of the state must be designated as primary roads, and 4 per cent, or 1672 miles as secondary roads. The primary roads must be interstate in character and the secondary roads intercounty in character.

The war department, under congressional direction, has turned over to the states of the union much equipment that was purchased for war purposes. It consists of automobiles, trucks, tractors, powder, etc. From this source Oregon received about $1,500,000 worth of equipment, which has largely been worked over to adapt it for use in road building, and a considerable portion of it has been passed on to the counties of the state under leases favorable to the counties.

The state has now finished or under contract 620 miles of paving, 815 miles of macadam and in addition 360 miles of standard grade. It is now planned with reasonable assurance that the Pacific and Columbia River highways will be completed during 1921 and the work will be well advanced on several other principal roads. The Pacific highway will be paved from Washington to California and, if the job is finished as planned, it will become the first paved interstate highway in the union.

After completing the contracts now awarded, it is estimated that there will remain of available state funds about $7,500,000. Of this amount $2,500,000 is held for the present to match possible special federal aid in constructing the Roosevelt highway. About $4,000,000 will be required to finish the Pacific and Columbia River highways.

At the end of 1922 there will be but little if any unappropriated funds, but there will be much of the present road mileage uncompleted, though well advanced. What further highway development may thereafter be undertaken must be decided by the people voting directly or by action of their representatives in the legislature.