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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

After a long period of study, the Swiss Federal Authorities have at last completed a general plan for the building of national highways. In a few years' time, Switzerland will have at her disposal an improved road network which will allow the steadily growing volume of traffic to flow smoothly. Moreover, the country will be able to avoid the danger of being omitted from the important international routes.

As a result partly of the prevailing economic prosperity, road traffic has developed immensely in recent years. Prior to the Second World War, only one family out of twenty possessed a motor car. Today, in Switzerland, there is a car for every three families. Should this evolution continue, in a few years' time, we shall have caught up with the United States, who hold the record in this domain.

The Swiss road network, however, has not developed concurrently with this incessant growth in traffic. In fact, it has not changed for the last twenty years. Some improvements and corrections have been carried out, here and there. But, what was lacking was a general plan.

This fault lies in the federalistic regime in Switzerland which, in spite of its advantages, is often a hindrance to necessary technical developments.

Until two years ago, road building was still the responsibility of the cantons individually. Thus, there was no general plan which determined the laying-out of the roads. Things just went on from day to day, with rather too much attention being given to local considerations.

It was only two years ago that it was decided to invest the Central Executive with powers in these matters; the purpose was not to entrust it with the task of road-building, but so that a general road plan could be established. As from that moment, studies were pursued very actively and a programme for road-building adapted to present-day requirements—as well as for the future — was published recently.

This plan provides for three national highways. On those roads — or sections of road — where the traffic is very dense, first class high-speed motor roads will be established, with double traffic lanes in each direction, separated by a turf-covered footway.

This is the plan for the greatest Swiss artery, the one which connects Geneva with Saint-Gall and which will be the transversal highway, running from West to East. A second main road will run from Basle to Lucerne, will pass over the Saint-Gotthard and will terminate in the Tessin. This will be the North-South transversal artery.

These first class high speed motor roads, when added to the second and third class national highways, will form a network of 1,700 km, which will connect all the towns of more than 40,000 inhabitants and three-quarters of the cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. About two-thirds of the Swiss population lives within five km. of the planned national roads. Moreover, the network will render great service to the principal tourist regions around lake Lemman, those in the Canton of Valais, in Central Switzerland, in the Bernese Oberland, the Grisons and the Tessin. Two-thirds of this road network, 1,200 km, will be built by 1970 at a cost of some three thousand million francs.


In this way, in a few years' time, Switzerland will be able to offer her road users a modern network, comprising both high-speed motor roads and main highways, along which it will be possible for traffic — which is sure to develop still further — to flow under excellent conditions of safety.

This progress in the matter of roads has another advantage. Switzerland has run the risk of the big international roads stopping at her frontiers, and of road users tending to avoid Swiss territory because of the bad roads. Thanks to the measures which have now been taken, Switzerland will remain a transit country. Put differently, this new project for the improvement of the Swiss road network not only offers a national advantage, because of the lay-out being co-ordinated and adapted to the economic requirements of the country, but also an international advantage, because Switzerland can then continue to be — as someone once put it — “the turn-table of Europe”.

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