

# The Development of Motor Traffic in British Columbia

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One of the many problems which has been presented to the legislators during the first quarter of the twentieth century has been due to the development of the motor-driven vehicle and its general adoption throughout the civilized world. From 1900, every year there has been an increase in the number of motor vehicles, and as they increased it was found necessary to improve and extend the various road and highways. As the roads were improved, so the type of the motor vehicle was improved, so that from the early high-wheeled “one-luger”, of small power and low speed, there has been evolved the low-sung, high-powered car of the present day, quite capable of a mile-a-minute gait should its driver feel disposed to “step on it”.

As the power, size and speed of motor vehicles, as well as their numbers, have increased it has been necessary to pass legislation from time to time for their control, in order that the safety of all might be protected.

Up to the year 1904 there was no special Act provided for the control of the motor vehicle, but on February 10<sup>th</sup> of that year an Act known as the “Motor Vehicles Speed Regulation Act” was passed. Under this Act provision was made for the registration of all motor driven vehicles and the placing of the number of the permit issued in respect of such vehicle on the rear of the same. The provision of necessary equipment, such as warning-signals, lights etc was also insisted upon, as well as the rate of speed, 10 miles per hour being allowed within any city, town or incorporated village, and 15 miles per hour upon any public highway outside of municipal limits, with the provision that any municipal council could by by-law set apart any public street or highway for the testing of motor vehicles, and allow motorists to drive their vehicles at a higher rate of speed than the limit provided for in the Act.

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1911, a new Act was passed, which was cited as the “Motor Traffic Regulation Act, 1911” and the “Motor Vehicles Speed Regulation Act” was repealed. The provisions of the new Act were very complete and covered thoroughly all phases of motor vehicle control at that time, the Superintendent of Provincial Police being primarily charged with the enforcement of the law and the necessary authority given to him for this purpose. The issuance of annual licences of Motor vehicle dealers, motor vehicle owners, and chauffeurs was provided for, and provision was also made for the transfer of licences upon the sale of the motor vehicle, for a permit of thirty days duration to tourists, and a notice of relinquishment of licences for cases in which motor vehicles had been destroyed or shipped out of the Province.

The rate of speed in cities, town and villages remained at 10 miles per hour, but outside these 25 miles per hour was allowed in open country and 12 mph in wooded

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country; a provision with reference to testing motor vehicles in municipalities similar to that provided in the old Act was also included.

As motor-driven traffic increased, it was found necessary to amend the “Motor Traffic Regulation Act”. Amendments made in 1913, amongst other things, increased the length of time for which a permit could be granted for touring purposes to 60 days, and provided for the issuance of 2 number plates for motor vehicles other than motor cycles, and one number plate for motor cycles, such plates to bear the initials “B.C.”, the year of issue, and the licence numbers, and to be of different colour each year. Badges were also provided for, for issuance to the holders of chauffeurs licences. Further amendments passed in 1914 raised the speed limit in cities, towns, and villages from 10 to 15 mph and in wooded country from 12 to 15; and in 1915 an amendment prohibited coloured lights being displayed upon any m.v. in such a manner as to be visible from the direction in which the m.v. was proceeding.

On April 17<sup>th</sup> 1920, a new Act cited as the “Motor Vehicle Act” was passed, which came into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup> following, repealing the “Motor Traffic Regulations Act” and amendments. In this Act the speed limit in open country was raised from 25 to 30 mph and a section was included prohibiting driving to the common danger. Licences were also provided for trailers and the time-limit for permits for touring purposes was extended to 90 days. The age of drivers was set at not less than 17 years, except by special permit, in which case the age limit was reduced to 15 years. Many other very important provisions were passed which space prohibits from setting out in detail.

An amendment of the “Motor Vehicle Act” was made in 1921, by which provision was made for a speed limit of 10 mph in cities, towns and villages and municipalities when approaching a curve, turning a corner, approaching or crossing any street or road intersection, or driving through a lane or alley, and the same limit was set for approaching or passing any school where signs were displayed warning the driver. In 1922 an amendment struck out the provision made in 1921 as to the speed limit of 10 mph in municipalities when approaching a corner, road intersection etc.

A further amendment in 1924 provided for the issuance of drivers license to all persons driving or operating a motor vehicle. It was enacted that there must be a surrender of such licence upon conviction for an infraction of the Act or regulations a blue licence being issued in the case of a first conviction, a yellow licence being issued on the second conviction, and the licence being surrendered for suspension or cancellation upon the third conviction, such licence then being forwarded to the Superintendent of Provincial Police to be dealt with by him.

Speed limits were also abolished in 1924 and the “common danger” clause inserted in their stead.

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From the foregoing it is interesting to note the steady increase in the speed-limits, which have been raised from time to time in accordance with the representations made by motorists, the low-swung automobile of today with its balloon tires and four-wheel brakes being controlled much easier and brought to a stop much quicker, without the danger of skidding, than the car having hard tires and rear-wheel brakes only.

There is no doubt that in the future, legislation for the control of the m.v. will have to be amended from time to time as circumstances warrant, new problems being continually presented. The governing of traffic even at the present time, especially in the larger cities, is quite a large-sized job, necessitating the use of officers trained in this particular branch of work.

The growth of m.v. traffic in this Province is shown in the following table, which gives the number of motor vehicles licenced during the years 1907 to 1925 inclusive.

1907 – 175	1917 - 11639	
1908 – 263	1918 – 15370	
1909 – 504	1919 – 25000	Approx.
1910 – 1026	1920 – 28000	“
1911 – 2220	1921 – 32000	“
1912 – 4289	1922 – 33000	“
1913 – 6138	1923 – 40000	“
1914 – 6688	1924 – 47615	
1915 – 7440	1925 – 55657	
1916 – 8596	1926 – 67012	
	1927 - 76187	