



SH94 Homer Tunnel to Milford Sound speed review

Summary of the speed review consultation

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency

August 2021

--

Copyright information

Copyright ©. This copyright work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and abide by the other licence terms. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Disclaimer

Waka Kotahi has endeavoured to ensure material in this document is technically accurate and reflects legal requirements. However, the document does not override governing legislation. Waka Kotahi does not accept liability for any consequences arising from the use of this document. If the user of this document is unsure whether the material is correct, they should refer directly to the relevant legislation and contact Waka Kotahi.

More information

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency
[August 2021](#)

If you have further queries, call our contact centre on 0800 699 000 or write to us:

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency
Private Bag 6995
Wellington 6141

This document is available on Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's website at www.nzta.govt.nz

1. Background

The 120km section of SH94 is the solitary road link between Te Anau and Milford Sound, one of New Zealand's most iconic visitor destinations. This speed review focuses on the 17km of SH94 from Homer Tunnel to Milford Sound.

This section of highway descends steeply from alpine terrain at 1000 metres at the Homer Tunnel to sea level at Milford Sound. Many road users are visitors with little or no experience of driving in this high-altitude road environment. During the peak November to April summer visitor season there are over 2500 traffic movements a day on this road including up to 80 tour buses. In the last three years a large investment has been made in safety improvements including bridge widening, safety barrier and curve signage as part of the Visitor Driver Safety programme.

Signals manage traffic flows through the single lane Homer Tunnel. Because drivers usually need wait at either end of the tunnel before they can travel through, many leave their vehicles to view the stunning alpine scenery, making distracted pedestrians near the road a safety risk. This can be reduced by lowering highway speeds in this area. Other factors such as increasing traffic volumes, the area's harsh alpine weather and terrain, plus the tight curved nature of the highway between the Homer Tunnel and Milford Sound, mean the current speed limits are too high to feel safe for many road users.

2. Consultation process

Before starting the formal consultation process, we completed numerous steps, including a speed management technical assessment of this section of highway. This identified the existing speed limit on the road wasn't safe or appropriate for the current road characteristics and roadside environment.

A lower speed limit has been discussed several times over the last five years with the Te Anau and Milford Sound communities including the local community board. Southland District Council were supportive of the proposed speed limit changes along with the Police, AA and the Otago-Southland branch of the Road Transport Association.

Engagement provided us with feedback and local insights on how people use the road and their concerns. This helped us decide if speed limit changes were the best option to improve safety, where new speed limits could begin or end, and what other safety improvements might be needed.

During November-December 2019 Waka Kotahi carried out formal consultation on the speed limits below:

| Speed limits consulted on | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | Replacing the current 100km/h speed limits on the eastern approach to the Homer Tunnel (1km) and western approach (2km) and through the Homer Tunnel (1.7km) with a variable 30-60km/h limit. Currently there's a 100km/h speed limit. |
| 2 | From the western approach to the Homer Tunnel to Milford Sound (14km) an 80km/h limit in place of the existing mix of 100km/h and 80km/h limits. |
| 3 | Extending the current 30km/h highway speed limit in Milford Sound 500m east of the Deep Basin Access Road. The existing limit is 80km/h. |

The consultation was advertised and promoted via social media, a website dedicated to this speed review, the Southland Times and local community newspaper. In early November 2019 a media release about consultation starting received positive local media coverage.

People could provide feedback on this proposal via electronic and hard copy submission forms. The latter was made available from locations such as Southland District Council service centres and libraries, and local businesses.

3. Consultation question

The purpose of the consultation phase is to seek any additional information from stakeholders or the public that will help inform the decision about this proposed speed limit change.

During formal consultation we proposed new speed limits and asked the public the following question **“Are there any other factors that we should consider when making our decision?”**

We consider all factors raised during formal consultation when making our decision on new permanent speed limits.

4. Summary and response to submissions

We received 47 submissions. We appreciate the response from the community and thank everyone who provided their feedback.

The submissions we received covered a range of issues. These included improving visibility and signage, more safe passing opportunities, extending the area covered by this speed review and a greater road policing presence on this road. The table below outlines some of the main factors people raised in their submissions and our responses.

| Issues/concerns | Waka Kotahi comments |
|---|--|
| <p>Increasing traffic volumes</p> <p>Growing traffic volumes due to increased tourism. Many submitters suggested that locals, people working in the area and commercial drivers should be the only vehicles permitted on this stretch of corridor.</p> | <p>This topic has been raised with Waka Kotahi over the last 14 years and will be considered in further detail by the Milford opportunities working Group. This subject is outside the scope of this speed review.</p> |
| <p>Driver behaviour</p> <p>Concerns about dangerous overtaking due to getting frustrated or impatient along the route and making unsafe decisions.</p> | <p>Speed management should assist in lowering the safety risk from people making poor decisions as it should reduce the speed differential between different vehicle types and driving styles.</p> |
| <p>Increased Police enforcement</p> <p>Some in the local community wanted greater police enforcement on this corridor rather reduced speed limits.</p> | <p>Police are responsible for enforcement. However, we will discuss with the regional road policing team the communities call for more enforcement on this section of SH94.</p> |
| <p>Speed limits</p> <p>Some of the consultation feedback suggested the proposed speed limits may need to be extended beyond the areas proposed by Waka Kotahi.</p> | <p>Transport services will consider whether lower speed limits are implemented as part of the decision- making process for this proposal. Other sections of SH94 will be reviewed in the future under the Setting of Speed Limit rule, and Waka Kotahi speed management programme.</p> |
| <p>Visibility</p> <p>Poor visibility mainly in the form of blind corners, was raised as a safety issue in several of the consultation submissions we received.</p> | <p>The road has two lanes along most of the route with appropriate signage on the few single lane sections. Signage upgrades are not part of the scope of this speed review. This matter will be something considered by the Milford Opportunities Group when they develop a master plan to manage visitor growth over the next 30 years at Milford Sound.</p> |

| Issues/concerns | Waka Kotahi comments |
|--|---|
| More passing lanes to give frustrated drivers a safe place to overtake. | As per policy passing opportunities are considered for routes with more than 4000 vehicles per day. This will be something for the Milford Opportunities group to consider. |
| The length of the proposed 80km/h speed review corridor should be extended south of Homer Tunnel to include Lake Gunn and Cascade Creek. | Other sections of SH94 will be reviewed at some point in the future as allowed by the Setting of Speed Limit rule and Waka Kotahi speed management programme. |

5. Decision

The table below shows the recommendation Waka Kotahi formally consulted on between November and December 2019.

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Replacing the current 100km/h speed limits on the eastern approach to the Homer Tunnel (1km) and western approach (2km) and through the Homer Tunnel (1.7km) with a variable 30-60km/h limit. Currently there's a 100km/h speed limit. |
| 2 | From the western approach to the Homer Tunnel to Milford Sound (14km) an 80km/h limit in place of the existing mix of 100km/h and 80km/h limits. |
| 3 | Extending the current 30km/h highway speed limit in Milford Sound 500m east of the Deep Basin Access Road. The existing limit is 80km/h. |

The consultation submissions did not identify any issues that Waka Kotahi had not already considered.

Stakeholders and the community will be updated via a news, advertising, and social media ahead of the new speed limits taking effect. The implementation of the speed limit change will include installation of new signage

The following new speed limits will apply from Wednesday 11 August 2021:

| Confirmed speed limit changes for SH94 Homer Tunnel to Milford Sound | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Location | Current speed limit | New speed limit |
| 1km of highway east of the Homer Tunnel to the eastern tunnel entrance, through the Homer Tunnel (1.7km) and 2km of highway west of the Homer Tunnel to the western tunnel entrance. | 100km/h | 30-60km/h* variable speed limit |
| From the where the variable speed limit ends on the western approach to the Homer Tunnel for 14km to Milford Sound. | 80/100km/h | 80km/h |
| A 500m section of SH94 from Milford Sound to east of Deep-Water Basin Road. | 80km/h | 30km/h |

*The variable speed limit will be used to safely manage highway issues including weather and rockfall events and vehicle crashes. Variable speed limit operating options being 30/40/60km/h.

Milford to Homer tunnel new speed limits



6. Submissions

You can view the submissions we received for this speed review on our website www.nzta.govt.nz/sh94-homertunnel-to-milford-sound-permanent-speed-limit