

On the road to recovery

Steady progress is being made on repairing major damage left in the wake of a big rain storm that hit the Milford Road in early February.



Storm reconstruction work underway at Windfall Creek.

The Milford Road Alliance (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and Downer) is well set up to manage extreme weather events such as this. The worst hit area was from the Hollyford Valley turn-off to Milford Sound, with damage at several sites along 25km of remote country with no phone, power or facilities. The large sites needing complex repairs are mostly contained in the Hollyford Valley. Two are large gabion walls that support SH94 above the Hollyford River, and the other at Falls Creek Bridge and its approaches, will collectively cost about \$2.5m. Two remaining larger sites involve drainage and pavement reconstructions, including one where the flood swollen Hollyford River has completely taken out the highway.

The Alliance team responded well to this destructive storm. Within five days a four-wheel drive track was formed allowing emergency vehicles to access Milford Sound. A few days later, a driveable road was established to move business and essential service supplies and equipment into Milford. A convoy system was used to minimise traffic disruptions for repair crews, then extended a short time later to include buses and other selected vehicles, to get visitor traffic flowing back into Milford Sound again.

Currently the Milford Road is open to all vehicles, but with some lane restrictions. The Alliance team worked through COVID-19 alert levels 3 and 4 to ensure basic access and maintenance and to keep flood damaged sections of the road safe. Over this period the road served the small number of people who remained at Milford Sound, including those maintaining essential services such as power and water, and for local commercial fishing operators.

Downer NZ is carrying out the storm repairs and had crews in place ready to start work when allowed at alert level 3. Initially, they focused on fixing badly damaged drainage and water channels. As a member of the Milford Road Alliance, Downer NZ was the logical choice to do this repair work. They have an extensive knowledge of the Milford Road, skilled staff and easy access to the right construction plant for a challenging job. Currently Downer has up to 20 staff per day on site. This is giving a welcome boost to the local economy as the company is using local suppliers, accommodation and tradespeople wherever possible.

Good progress is being made on the design work and consenting needed before work can start on larger scale repairs to damaged retaining walls and bridges. The overall project has an estimated cost of \$9m and will continue for at least the next 12 months.

Smoothing the way



Road surface repairs in the Homer Tunnel.

You may have noticed, particularly if you were towing a boat, that the road surface inside the Homer Tunnel isn't that great. The Alliance team has recently been pothole patching and releveling the road surface to maximise the original investment made in the seal, but it's now come to the end of its useful life. Waka Kotahi is providing \$1m to renew the tunnel surface throughout, as well as re-asphalting several nearby curves on the western side of the tunnel. A mobile plant is being set up for several weeks near Te Anau to produce the asphalt.

Less traffic on the road make this an ideal time of year to do this work and minimise disruptions for road users. It's planned to have this work completed in June. Some tunnel closures will be needed, mostly at night or when traffic numbers are low. Emergency access will be available. More information about this work including closure dates and times can be found at www.milfordroad.co.nz

Winter is coming

The winter season is almost here, with several good snowfalls in recent weeks around the Homer Tunnel, resulting in one overnight road closure.

The Alliance team is gearing up for a start to the avalanche management season that's likely to start in June. The official avalanche season can last through to November, as it did last year. Part of our avalanche management includes posting the hazard levels daily, placing no stopping signage and introducing vehicle restrictions such as no towing where necessary. Our other crucial role in winter is avalanche monitoring and control. This can mean bringing down large volumes of snow in a planned and safe way, to keep road users safe.

At least once a day, road and avalanche conditions are updated on the Milford road website www.milfordroad.co.nz, plus daily road condition emails, enabling drivers to plan for the expected weather and road conditions. If you want to be added to this list please email office@milfordroad.co.nz or phone **03 2497004**.



Snow ploughing near the Homer Tunnel.