

Hollyford Road rebuild complete

After a lot of hard work by repair crews, the Hollyford Road has been fully restored following a destructive flood in February 2020.



A repaired section of the Hollyford Road

This road, classified as 'special purpose' because of its location, is managed by the Southland District Council with 100% funding from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.

Following the February 2020 flood, Waka Kotahi confirmed \$1.8m in funding to repair the road. This work was carried out by the Milford Road Alliance team and their sub-contractors. It involved fixing bridges, culverts and significant washouts. People can now drive to Humboldt Creek and the start of the Hollyford track, as they could before the flood. However, the severity of the storm changed the course of the river meaning the newly repaired road doesn't finish exactly on the river where it had previously. People should consider this if they are planning a trip down the river. It will take some years for flood damaged areas adjacent to the road to fully recover. Further maintenance is planned to keep the road open as much as possible. We appreciate the patience of those who used the road while this job was being carried out.

The Milford Road Alliance team would like to acknowledge the tragic death of Anthony Lush during the repair works. Anthony worked as a sub-contractor on the project, and his death is a huge loss to his family. He will be sadly missed by both the project team and the wider Fiordland community.

SH94 Milford Road reconstruction

Repairs to large flood damaged retaining walls supporting SH94 above the river in the Hollyford Road intersection area should be finished in early spring. Several sections of wall were destroyed during an intense rainstorm in February 2020 that dumped 900mm of rain in the area in just three days. Restoring the highway to its pre-flood width through this narrow gorge section should also be finished in the coming weeks. Construction of the last retaining wall, in the Windfall Creek area should be underway soon. By late December and with favourable weather, we are aiming to finish the largest storm repair jobs seen on the Milford Road. A top priority for the Alliance is minimising delays for people using this road while remaining work is completed.

Avalanche management

Snowfall and avalanche conditions on the Milford Road are starting later and lasting longer, sometimes into late spring and early summer. Over the last few winters, there's also been greater variations in freezing levels and snow conditions, making it difficult to forecast and manage winter and spring highway access to Milford Sound.

Conditions in alpine areas are constantly monitored with passive (no stopping zones along the road) or active measures (reducing snow volume with explosives) to make the road as safe as possible.



Explosives going out the door to shift an unstable area of snow above SH94

Increasingly, new technology and ideas are supporting our avalanche programme decision making. This includes laser scanning to show snow field depth and snow structure, while future avalanche modelling tells us if there's enough snow on any given day that could see an avalanche hit the road. This arms our avalanche management team with valuable information they can consider when deciding if it's safe to open the road. Infrasound studies (beyond human hearing) detection, avalanche mapping, particularly at night, along with other measures are generating a wealth of valuable avalanche management data for the alliance.

Tunnel upgrade

If you have driven through the Homer Tunnel recently you'll have noticed lots of different safety improvement work happening. Currently the team are busy securing all data and fibre cables and power lines inside a protective concrete duct. Running the full length of the tunnel, it will help ensure these critical lines aren't taken out in a tunnel crash or fire. People driving through the tunnel over the next few months should allow extra time for minor traffic delays associated with this work.

In recent weeks, loose rock has been removed from the tunnel roof and walls. Rock must regularly be manually prised off to reduce the potential of rockfall that exists due to the natural rock the tunnel is mostly lined with. Investigations into several larger and more complex safety upgrades for the Homer Tunnel will continue through winter.



Removing loose rock from a section of wall inside the Homer Tunnel

Work on those with the highest priority could potentially start next summer (outside of avalanche season).

Rockfall checks



Regular rock removal was carried out over summer in mountainous areas above the Homer Tunnel entrance. We removed loose material and rocks that could hit the road hundreds of metres below and identified areas where this work may need to be carried out in future. We do our best accommodate people wanting to be in this alpine area of the Homer Saddle during February/March when we do this work - but ask that they check with us first before going into the area.

Several telemetry monitoring points are located on rock features above the tunnel entrances. The photo above shows one of our team checking one of these for rock movement at a site 800m directly above the eastern side of the tunnel. Any rock movement detected by this equipment is relayed straight to Homer Tunnel operations centre staff to analyse.