

# 94 Milford Road news update

## Winter 2022



It's officially winter and that means a greater likelihood of snow disrupting your travels on State Highway 94 into Fiordland National Park or to Milford Sound. It's a good idea to plan for this possibility by allowing more time for your trip, having extra clothing and blankets in your vehicle as well as carrying chains and knowing how to fit them. Weather forecasts predicting challenging snow or ice conditions that could cause difficulties for inexperienced drivers may also lead to highway closures.

As we move deeper into winter, avalanche conditions are likely. The Milford Road Alliance team uses a range of measures to manage these - from signage and traffic management to explosives, for the controlled and safe release of large accumulations of snow on the mountains high above the road.

The daily avalanche risk is ranked either low/moderate/high or extreme and available on the Milford Road website and can be viewed on TV monitors at selected local locations. These risk rankings guide the day-to-day avalanche management response and give road users important information before they head to Milford Sound.

The road will usually shut as we progress through moderate avalanche risk conditions. Maintenance of weather stations and support equipment high up in the surrounding mountains was carried out over summer, ensuring an accurate source of information to help keep the Milford Road safe for everyone this winter.

### We're almost there

The finish line is in sight on a \$9 million project to repair major flood damage to the Milford Road over two years ago. Work is underway on restoring the last damaged retaining wall located at Red Slip between the Hollyford Road turn-off and eastern entrance to the Homer Tunnel. As the wall is within the avalanche area and prone to high river flows, work can only continue when conditions allow and may mean the job cannot be completed until spring.

Upgrades to the Homer Tunnel and eastern highway approach, to enable better management of traffic with increased vehicle capacity, should be ready in time for the busy summer visitor season. A variable speed limit (30/50km/h) that can be adjusted in response to changing weather or traffic conditions around the tunnel will be possible with soon to be installed electronic signage. Emergency lighting, speakers, radar, cameras and backup communications systems to Te Anau and emergency services, are among in-tunnel safety improvements that are nearing completion.

### Adding fibre to Milford Sound



Crews laying fibre optic cable on State Highway 94 between Te Anau and Milford Sound have reached the alpine area near Monkey Creek on the eastern side of the Homer Tunnel. This fibre will transform telecommunications between Te Anau and Milford Sound enabling greater use of communications technology including cell phones and high-speed internet access for the businesses at Milford Sound.

The Milford Road Alliance is looking after traffic management associated with this important piece of work. With less traffic using the highway it's an ideal time to install this infrastructure.

We acknowledge some frustration among road users over delays associated with this work and are doing our best to minimise these.

### EV chills on the Milford Road

For the first time, the Milford Road Alliance has an all-electric vehicle in its fleet - a Hyundai IONIQ 5. It's working mainly in the Homer Tunnel area and makes the daily trip from Te Anau to support tunnel operations. This test vehicle is being used to find out in a real-world situation how EVs perform in a challenging alpine area, including their reliability, running costs and travel range in extra cold weather. Alliance staff are positive about the vehicle's driving range and handling in winter conditions and will be watching over the coming months to see if it can maintain the good early impression it's made.



### Reaching new heights to lower rockfall risk

Managing rock fall risk is critical for the Milford Road Alliance team. In March and April, an annual inspection was made of the steep slopes several hundred metres above the Homer Tunnel, in search of loose rock and debris that was a potential risk to people using the Milford Road. The rockfall area is large and changes every year. The inspection also provides an opportunity to check rock movement monitoring equipment and remove any major unstable rock. During the inspection, the team tried to accommodate people wanting to visit the popular Homer Saddle or rock climb in the wider area.

