

## It was a wet and cold one

Winter is now mostly behind us and it was wetter and colder than in recent years, with a weekly storm cycle dumping snow on the Milford Road. Over 250 avalanches have been observed to date on or near the road.

Control work with explosives was needed a number of times to manage these in order to reduce the amount of snow on fields high above the road, and to assess the stability of the snow pack after storms. Numerous thunderstorms in recent weeks have been a particular hazard, as they are volatile and can bring rain to the mountains overlooking the road, and raise the avalanche risk.

Recently, an Alaskan avalanche expert visited the Milford Alliance to see how our avalanche management programme compared to those used overseas, and to explore opportunities for the alliance to further reduce the risks of an avalanche reaching the Milford Road. The visit was a great success, with the alliance seen as operating at best practice. A number of ideas were suggested to help us work even better.

Milford Road traffic will start moving up a gear soon with another busy summer season just around the corner – which is expected to be even more hectic than the last one.

This coincides with a challenging period where we are still managing the avalanche risk for some months as temperatures steadily rise across Fiordland and significant snow remains in the mountains. The alliance team does its best to minimise avalanche risk related road closures or delays, but ultimately the safety of all road users is paramount. Our team is committed to delivering safe travel on the Milford Road and we work hard to make this corridor more resilient and accessible for both visitors and locals.



Machinery like this have been kept busy this winter clearing snow from Alpine sections of the Milford Road

## Making the Milford Road safer

Nine bridges along the Milford Road have widening work planned, underway or recently completed, with eight of them on the Milford Sound side of the Homer Tunnel. This work aims to provide more space for vehicles on what are narrow bridge approaches.

Several crashes and near misses have been reported by regular drivers of the road at these bridges in recent years. This work, which is funded from the Visitor Driver Safety programme, will also see extra safety barriers fitted at several locations, including bridges and areas where vehicles could run off the road and end up in a creek or river.

Electronic speed signage is being installed at Falls Creek near the Homer Tunnel, and on the western side of the tunnel. These sophisticated signs detect high vehicle speeds and then display a 'slow-down' message to the driver. Speed is real concern at Falls Creek, a popular spot with visitors, where large numbers are often on the side of the road and in some cases on the road taking photos of the falls.

## New operations centre



The new operations centre near the Homer Tunnel will be operating by the busy summer season.

A modern operations centre building close to the eastern entrance of the Homer Tunnel will soon welcome our tunnel, avalanche and technical service teams, who work to keep road users safe in this alpine area. This replaces the current but aging nearby operations centre building, locally called 'the Chapel'. It had evolved over many years from a grader shed to housing key systems and staff for managing the Homer Tunnel and avalanche control programmes.

The new building will be ready during the summer season. Timing is a challenge, as the spring avalanche monitoring and tunnel operations must continue during the switch from the old to the new site. To ensure this goes smoothly, the management system will be duplicated as the buildings change over. Once the shift is complete, the chapel will be removed and all alliance operations will be housed in the new building located a short distance away, across the upper Hollyford River.

## Putting our customers in the picture



Open or closed? TV monitors like this in Te Anau businesses are giving people the very latest information about the Milford Road.

Several Te Anau businesses have taken up the opportunity to display 'live' Milford Road conditions on TV monitors near their shop counters. The monitors have a clear and easy to understand graphic showing whether the road is open or closed – plus an image that's updated every couple of minutes of the alpine area of the route. The image above is showing the Gertrude Valley.

Feedback from visitors and locals has been positive. Staff in businesses with the monitors really like this initiative, as they are always getting asked whether the Milford Road is open or not. Now all customers need to do is look at the in-store monitors.

The TV monitor information is also online at [www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/road-status](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/road-status)

If you would like to know more about the Milford Road Alliance, what we do or check out a video about the alliance team, go to [www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/videos](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/videos)