

## Bumper summer season on the Milford Road

More people than ever are using the Milford Road. At the height of the 2018/19 Milford Sound summer visitor season, a one-day record for vehicles was set in February when 2644 vehicles travelled through the Homer Tunnel.

More vehicles on the road means more work for our team who manage the Homer Tunnel. Over the summer they dealt with more than 300 incidents, ranging from breakdowns to vehicles stopping unexpectedly inside the single lane tunnel.

Great weather also meant a lot of safety projects on Milford Road were completed. Among them were bridge widenings and the building of a slow vehicle bay on the Milford side of the tunnel, plus extending guard rails at several other sites along the road. The Milford Road's first rockfall catch fence was also installed near the Hollyford intersection. Further work will be carried out next summer. Our crews continue to play the role of first responder to many vehicle crashes - which can involve securing the crash site and attending to people involved until emergency services arrive from Te Anau.



The Eglington Valley - a popular stop on the Milford Road.

## Technology key to smarter avalanche management

To get even better at managing the avalanche zone on the Milford Road, some new leading-edge technologies are being trialled, including some world firsts.

We are in the early stages of a trial involving measuring snow depths and condition with a LiDAR (light detection and ranging) unit. This has the potential to provide avalanche forecasters with the ability to 'see' snow type and depth change between storms, and even daily, in avalanche start zones by comparing before and after scans.

The Milford Road Alliance also takes part in regular video conferences with several overseas avalanche programmes in North America where everyone shares their avalanche management knowledge and expertise.

- Learn more about our award-winning avalanche protection programme here: [nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/avalanche-control-programme/](http://nzta.govt.nz/projects/sh94-milford-road/avalanche-control-programme/)



New LiDAR unit in place above the road.

## New Alpine Operations Centre



The new Homer Tunnel control room.

Members of the Milford Road Alliance team, who ensure the safe operation of the Homer Tunnel, are now working from a new purpose-built Alpine Operations Centre near the eastern tunnel entrance. The building also houses the Milford Road avalanche and rockfall protection programmes team and is a base for road maintenance crews. Because of its location in rugged alpine terrain, the new building is designed to withstand the area's harsh climate and is self-sufficient in terms of power and communications.

The nearby 'chapel' which the alliance teams used to work from will soon be removed. When this happens all major road management, incident response and maintenance facilities will shift to the new operations centre site. Key systems that keep tunnel users safe are all in place and operating. These include cameras, radar, sensors, thermal imaging, lighting and communications are all closely monitored by our dedicated teams.

## Homer Tunnel night works

More improvement work is on the go inside the tunnel, on track for completion by mid-June. The tunnel has been closed most nights since late April from 7pm until 4am, during the quiet hours, which minimises disruptions for tunnel users. Much of the work is focused on applying a special type of concrete on identified sections of the tunnel's rock walls and ceiling to provide a protective coat, which will slow its natural deterioration.

Replacement of lighting and other electronic equipment is also being carried out. Working inside the tunnel isn't easy for maintenance crews due to very wet, cold and damp conditions in the tunnel roof area which drains water from the mountains directly overhead.



## Sign up for daily email on-road/avalanche conditions

Ice and frost is already making its presence felt on the Milford Road. Grit spreader trucks have been busy and black ice signs have already gone up in some places. Snow on the road is not too far off, and the snow pack on the mountains high above the road will develop into a potential avalanche danger.

We are now putting out daily road condition reports to help people plan their journey to Milford Sound. You can be added to our Milford Road update list by emailing [office@milfordroad.co.nz](mailto:office@milfordroad.co.nz) or check our website [www.milfordroad.co.nz](http://www.milfordroad.co.nz)