



MILFORD OPPORTUNITIES

FAQs

About the **PROJECT**

Milford Opportunities is exploring ways we might do tourism differently at Milford Sound Piopiotahi and along the Milford Road corridor, for the benefit of people and place.

The project is a collaboration between Ngai Tahu, the Department of Conservation, Waka Kotahi, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, Southland District Council and Environment Southland.

In July 2021, the project released the Milford Opportunities Masterplan. This conceptual document sets out potential future management approaches for Milford Sound Piopiotahi and the Milford Road corridor. Cabinet approved \$15 million to fund detailed planning and feasibility assessment of the Masterplan recommendations and asked that a Delivery Unit and Governance Board be formed to oversee this work.

An extensive programme of engagement is underway to ensure this phase of work is informed by the experience and wisdom of the community, interest groups, experts, tourism operators and users of the national park and Milford Highway. All those with an interest in Piopiotahi Milford Sound are welcome to feed into this work.

Feasibility testing is due to be completed in June 2024 and will result in a report and business case back to Cabinet. Any subsequent decisions will then rest with the project's Ministerial Group and with Cabinet as the final decision maker.

This work stands to provide a valuable test case for transformational change to tourism management approaches, in line with the New Zealand Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy and draft Tourism Environment Action Plan.

Get in touch

This document seeks to answer key questions about the Milford Opportunities Project. Please get in touch if you would like further info.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED Questions

Q: What are the recommendations proposed in the Milford Opportunities Masterplan?

To view the Masterplan's recommendations online, please visit the project website: www.milfordopportunities.nz or pop into the Milford Opportunities Hub to view a hard copy of the document and speak to one of the team.



The Masterplan's recommendations include:

- Restricting private vehicle access to Milford Sound Piopiotahi through a permit and public transport system.
- Charging international visitors for access to Milford Sound Piopiotahi.
- Using the revenue collected from visitors to increase the funding for conservation, mana whenua and community aspirations, and upgrading infrastructure.
- Introducing a wider range of visitor activities and accommodation options.
- Upholding iwi aspirations for the place and guardianship of mātauranga Māori me te taiao (Māori knowledge and the environment) and weaving in authentic mana whenua stories.
- Phasing out cruise ships and the airstrip in Milford Sound Piopiotahi.
- Introducing a new governance and management structure for Milford Sound Piopiotahi, the inland waters out to the Tasman Sea and the Milford Road corridor, to improve efficiency and function.

Q: What specific issues is the project looking to fix?

While people continue to enjoy great visitor experiences to Piopiotahi, tourism growth and behaviours are putting pressure on the area. In the 6 years between 2012 and 2018, the number of visitors taking a boat tour in the fiord more than doubled (from 437,000 to 883,000). Forecasts predict that these numbers will return and grow over the coming years. Expectations are that current management approaches and infrastructure will not be able to protect the unique values and deliver a quality experience for visitors. As a result of this, the main observations of the masterplan include:

- The core wilderness experience and conservation values are being compromised by increasing, unchecked visitor numbers.
- There is limited acknowledgement of Ngāi Tahu identity and cultural heritage that binds the area with Aoraki Mount Cook, the Pacific, and our global indigenous stories and those of Ngāi Tahu.
- Milford Road hosts a series of key experiences; however, these are often missed as most visitors focus on getting to Milford Sound Piopiotahi as quickly as possible.
- An all-day return trip from Queenstown is not the best way of showcasing the wonders of Milford Sound Piopiotahi.
- The pattern of visitation creates intense congestion between 11am and 3pm.
- Milford Road is ranked third of any Waka Kotahi-managed road in New Zealand for personal risk and is considered challenging for international and inexperienced drivers.

- Many visitors are uninformed about the area's numerous natural hazards including, avalanche, rock fall, flooding, earthquakes, and tsunami.
- Some activities detract from the beautiful natural setting, including:
 - Cruise ships that block views and create smog.
 - A deteriorating aerodrome with associated noise that is used by a small percentage of visitors and takes up a third of available flat land.
- Most infrastructure in the village is old and in poor condition.
- Visitor spending is not being maximised throughout the region despite significant numbers.
- It is hard for those who manage the place to strike the right balance between conservation, commercial activity, and investment back into the area.

All the above factors mean the status quo is not an option.

Q: Have any decisions been made about the Masterplan's recommendations?

No decisions have been made at this point. There is considerable assessment and planning work needed to determine the feasibility of the specific recommendations. That work includes an extensive programme of engagement with stakeholders and the public, which is currently underway.



Q: How much has this project cost to date?

The Milford Opportunities Project has received a total of \$18.25 million of government investment, which includes:

- 2016: \$250,000 Regional Growth Fund Programme Project Concept Development seed funding
- 2019: \$3 million International Visitor Conservation & Tourism Levy (IVL) Develop a Masterplan (including research, analysis, stakeholder engagement & comms and the cost of governance of the project)
- 2021: \$15 million Tourism Communities: Support, Recovery and Re-set Plan Stage 3 Phase 1 (includes detailed planning, consenting, community consultation and preparation for infrastructure build).

Q: How is Milford Opportunities working with the community and local operators?

Public engagement and consultation are crucial throughout this stage of the project and this work is well underway. We are connecting with groups, individuals, and experts, both locally and nationally. Feedback to date has been highly constructive and generally positive regarding the project's work and approach.

There will be a further opportunity to feed into the process early in 2024 when Milford Opportunities releases a discussion document for public consultation. Submissions from that process will inform any final recommendations.

Q: Who are the decision-makers?

The Milford Opportunities Project (Unit and Board) provides advice to the Ministerial group, comprising the Ministers of Conservation, Tourism, and Transport. Cabinet is the final decision maker on any subsequent recommendations by the Ministerial Group.

Q: Why has work on this project not progressed more quickly?

It is a complex project with significant commercial and Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi implications. It allows for a considered, big picture approach to visitor planning for an incredible natural taonga (treasure), so it is important we take the time needed to get this right for people and for place.

While we had some pandemic-related delays in establishing the Board and operational Delivery Unit, feasibility-testing work is now well underway.

Q: Might tourists simply go somewhere else if there is a charge for international visitors?

While spreading visitors out more widely throughout Southland and beyond, has the potential to be a positive outcome for many areas, we need to ensure we plan for possible knock-on effects from this work.

Our research will provide good indications regarding whether displacement issues may arise. Early findings suggest very few people would be deterred from visiting New Zealand or Milford Sound Piopiotahi by a fee, but that an international visitor's willingness to pay for access has a tipping point, and charging beyond that may create displacement issues.

It is normal to pay for access to National Parks in other parts of the world so many overseas visitors recognise the wider benefits of that.



Q: Shouldn't we be looking at all the conservation areas under pressure?

This work stands to be a valuable test case for transformative change to tourism management in New Zealand, in line with the New Zealand Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy and draft Tourism Environment Action Plan. Piopiotahi is arguably our most iconic destination, so it is an appropriate place to initiate new tourism approaches that benefit people and place.

Q: How would the permit system to access the road impact locals and recreationists?

We are assessing options for access permits. Comprehensive analysis of the impacts on people's rights and interests will be part of the next stage of work and will be further informed by public consultation. While an access management system would be an extra step in planning a visit, it offers the benefit of removing congestion and other uncertainties (such as finding a parking space) from the trip and potentially improving the experience for you as a 'non-tourist'.

The Masterplan did not exempt locals generally, but did propose special permits for mana whenua, pre-qualified commercial users, operators and service staff, and New Zealanders hunting, fishing, climbing, or tramping, etc, so it does have this consideration at its heart.

Q: Will locals and the taxpayer have to fund any of the recommendations?

Some initial seed investment may be sought from the Crown, but the scale and funding mechanism for the overall outcome is still to be worked through – there are many possible options for this. This will make up a key component of the business case. The project is ultimately intended to be self-funding through a range of revenue streams, including a levy for international visitors to the area.

Q: Will the concessions framework be changed during feasibility testing of the Masterplan?

A comprehensive review of the concession's framework is not within the scope of this phase of the Milford Opportunities Project. However, if implemented, the Masterplan could impact on concession holders to varying degrees. Given this, the project will consider the present and future management of concessions. This will help inform potential future analysis within the context of wider reform of conservation legislation.

Q: Is adding more infrastructure in keeping with the plan?

The plan's intention is not necessarily to build more infrastructure. The intention is that all built infrastructure (existing and proposed) is consolidated, made more efficient and fit for purpose, and has a minimal footprint.

Q: The project talks about Milford but how are you considering the implications for Te Anau?

Stage 2 of the project produced a Masterplan for Milford Sound Piopiotahi and the Milford Road corridor. The Masterplan links Milford Sound Piopiotahi and the corridor with Te Anau by proposing a transport hub and visitor centre. A connected Southland District Council project will explore the further development of the Te Anau Basin including accommodation, services, and recreational activities. The Te Anau community is a vital stakeholder group for this work. We are seeking feedback on the proposals from Te Anau residents in a range of ways, including through the Project Hub in the Town Centre, through presenting to local groups such as the Community Board and Business Association, through community drop-in days and through specific sessions with local operators and businesses. Regular advertisements and updates are also planned for the Te Anau Trader.

Q: This looks targeted at high-end tourists. What about every day New Zealanders?

The Masterplan proposes a number of ways in which people can access, spend more time in, and connect with the area's cultural and natural heritage. It proposes a mix of activities and types of accommodation that cater for a variety of budgets and visitors. We will be looking closely at the visitor experience and how this will provide for existing and future enjoyment of this place.

Q: How are mana whenua supported through the project?

The role of Ngāi Tahu as mana whenua and Treaty partner is acknowledged and emphasised, with Ngāi Tahu narratives, mana whenua values, history and culture woven through the experience of the place.

This next stage of Milford Opportunities Project will include the Crown and Ngāi Tahu working in partnership to build a common understanding for intergenerational benefits and outcomes.

Q: What are the legislative implications of this project?

The project seeks transformational change to current tourism management approaches. The Milford Opportunities Masterplan was designed to look beyond any existing impediments to change or legislative restrictions. The plan provides recommendations but does not include detailed proposals. Until there are detailed proposals, it is difficult to say what level of legislative change, if any, may be required to achieve optimal outcomes. The current stage of detailed planning and feasibility-testing includes legal and policy advice on the management and governance recommendations, and individual projects, for the Milford Road and Milford Sound Piopiotahi.

Q: How will the project deal with impacts on tourism operators, and other livelihoods?

We are mindful of the potential for Masterplan outcomes to impact some stakeholders, particularly given the higher living costs on people and businesses currently. Ongoing engagement with local businesses, interest groups and the community are key to identifying the range of impacts. We are grateful to all those who have fed into this stage of the process so far and continue to welcome all feedback and context.

Visit: www.milfordopportunities.nz/contact-us