

Submission on proposed variations to the Otago Southland Regional Land Transport Plan 2015 – 2021

Hello

I have lived in the Te Anau for 43 years.

I am contacting you because I came close to having a 'head-on' accident with a tourist before Christmas, and was lucky that I had enough room to pull off the road and let him pass. I was travelling from Te Anau to Mossburn and came across a long row of about 10 white CRV vehicles coming towards me. They look spectacular on the road, but suddenly one of the cars pulled out and was coming straight for me. I could see his face very clearly and he was Indian. He couldn't get back in the row of cars as they all travel close together. Apparently these are "family tours" that has the guide as a passenger in the first car, and they talk to the other cars. These tours are used by Indian and Chinese tourists. With the Chinese New Year coming up in February, apparently we are going to see more of these family tours, because there are not enough buses for the amount of people coming.

I wish to pass on my concerns to you, for the safety of people travelling on our local roads.

I put a post on our Te Anau Community facebook page, warning the other locals to watch out for this group of white rental cars that pushed me off the road, but I never expected to have so many comments from locals sent straight back to me. I can see that everyone has witnessed a lot of bad driving, but there was one comment particularly that really concerned me. This was from a young man working in a garage next to our Primary School, and he mentioned concerns for the safety of school children walking to School in the morning, as some of the rental cars are going well over 80km passing the Primary School. I would like to recommend a 'round about' for this area, as at the moment we have a "T" intersection, but it does not help to slow the through traffic down. I have attached a map showing this particular area and the entrance to the town centre. I have heard from a women living in Timaru, who witnessed how fast some cars are going around the corner by the Te Anau Primary School. She had said they had a similar problem in Timaru, and once they put in a 'round about' the problem was solved, with traffic being slowed down.

The traffic through our area is fast increasing, especially over the last 2-3 years, and I know our roads and infrastructure are not set up to safely handle this. I feel this summer season is going to be the busiest yet, as it started getting busy a month earlier than normal. There were around 750,000 people visiting Milford Sound last season, and 500,000 the season before that, so it is predicted that there will be more visitors travelling our road this season.

Our main daily traffic between Te Anau & Milford Sound at the moment is 900-1000 vehicles, but will increase over the next 2-3 months. With road stats showing 1000 vehicles currently through the tunnel, it is estimated that 12% are heavies (being buses, trucks and large campervans). An estimate of the 12% are 80 buses and 40 trucks and large campers.

A high percentage of these vehicles also travel the Mossburn to Te Anau road, with the buses on a very tight timetable, tourists not allowing enough time to make the tourist boat trips in Milford Sound, with a lot of overseas travellers who don't understand our roads, yellow lines, blind corners and road signs.

Also put into the equation, is many holiday makers bringing their boats up to Lakes Te Anau & Manapouri for the summer season.

We need more than 'rumble lines', and as a start to addressing this issue, I would like to see at least 3 passing bays put into the road between Mossburn & Te Anau. I have given this a lot of thought, and will list the major areas of concern below:

* Travelling from Te Anau to Mossburn, I would like to see a passing lane on the Gorge Hill road.

* Travelling from Mossburn to Te Anau is where we see a lot of drivers on a tight time frame to get to Milford Sound, so I would like to see a passing lane put around the 'So Big farm' somewhere around the area that had the road re-built up approx 2 years ago. The 2nd passing lane would be past Chewings road, around the bends with double yellow lines, before you get to the Gorge Hill.

* As I mentioned above - a 'round about' in the Te Anau township itself, would help to slow traffic down, when they get to our town.

Travellers trying to make a boat trip in Milford Sound, often don't allow enough time. It is only 120km to Milford Sound from Te Anau, but they don't realise that you have to allow over 3 hours to get there, allowing for stops on the way, and also built up traffic. Travelling from Queenstown to Milford Sound they need to allow approx 6-7 hours.

I have googled "Drive to Milford Sound" and this tells them to allow 4 hours 15 min from Queenstown to Milford Sound (288km). From Te Anau to Milford Sound they are told to allow 2 hours 15 min (121km). These times are totally incorrect

It was discussed around 2015 to look at putting in a 'Park and Ride' service, which means that anyone just visiting our area would have to take a bus to get in and out of Milford Sound itself. I do like the idea in the letter attached from a Queenstown bus driver (Brian Stanley), stating that traveller without a current NZ driving license will have to take a bus from Te Anau.

We are lucky to have a very dedicated Volunteer Fire Brigade which can sometimes get more than one call out on the same day. They are also lucky that most of their employers still pay them for the time involved with accident and fire call outs. The Volunteer Fire Brigade has given me figures for the last 2 years.

1/1/2016 - 31/12/2016: 33% road accident call outs (103 total call outs)

1/1/2017 - 30/11/2017: 23% road accident call outs (77 call outs - figures for 11 months only – does not include December 2017) For the first 3 days of January 2018, they had 5 call outs including 3 accidents in one day.

Even though the percentage is down on fire brigade callouts for 2017, it does not mean that there were less accidents, as some may not have been serious enough for a fire brigade call out. There is a lot more traffic on the road, and the driving is worse.

We only have 2 traffic officers that reside in Te Anau, which does not seem right, as years ago we had half the amount of traffic on our roads and had more police presence in our area. There isn't even a traffic officer on the road to Milford Sound anymore, which is ridiculous.

The Milford Sound road is an alpine terrain, and not an area that you can speed to make up time to catch the boats. Also there is no cell phone coverage on the road to Milford Sound, once you get 10km out of the Te Anau township. This is something that I am sure the tourists do not know, when they decide to drive to Milford Sound.

People living in our area are fearful of a really bad accident, especially with over 1000 vehicles travelling this road daily, with the majority being rental cars with overseas drivers. Last years accident was horrific enough, where 2 young men were on the wrong side of the road, and somehow the on-coming bus ended up on top of the car while trying to avoid them. The car went on fire and unfortunately killed the 2 young men, but luckily they managed to get everyone off the bus before the bus went on fire. The bus driver has had a lot of help to try to come to terms with what happened, even though it wasn't his fault. Two young men lost their lives, and the tourists on board the bus went back to Korea and did not finish their holiday in NZ. The local firemen at the accident also had professional help to try get over what they witnessed. So many people get affected by an accident such as this, which could have been prevented, if there were some restrictions on overseas travellers travelling this magnificent part of NZ.

One last thing that really does concern me, is the way the overseas drivers drive in our country. I do think it is time that the Rental Companies step up and put more time into some training before the keys are passed over. I would like to see the rental companies and the driver sign a disclaimer to say they have had the extra training and information about our roads in NZ.

I have also been told that some overseas travellers do not understand English, so have not comprehended anything that they may have been told by the rental company anyway.

We do need to approach our yellow lines, that some overseas drivers do not seem to understand. It has been suggested to me to put signage on roads especially around Christchurch, Greymouth, Wanaka, Queenstown, Te Anau & Milford Sound, stating "Do not cross over YELLOW LINES – embrace making it safer"

I have also
attached

letters
sent to me

from some concerned people in our area, and can forward you some videos that bus drivers have taken with their 'dash cams' every day they travel this area. There is a video currently on facebook, taken by one of the local bus drivers showing what they see every day. I can send it to you direct, via messenger, if you wish to give me your details. OR you can go to my facebook page (Mary Chartres) where I will 'share' it again so it is recent for you to view.

I have been talking with our local Te Anau traffic officer, Dwight Grieve, and he is happy to discuss these issues in our area with you. Another good idea would be to go into Milford Sound and have a chat with the Bus Drivers that drive the road every day. They are usually in the drivers room from around 12pm – 2pm daily. I could arrange a trip for you with Brian Stacey, on one of the Real Journey's buses from Queenstown to Milford Sound if you like. I can also arrange a trip with a local bus firm in Te Anau if you prefer.

This letter is a plea from our community for someone to stand up and make some simple things happen, it is not scare moungering, we are supportive of tourism but at what cost? At which point is enough – enough? How many lives are too many?

Our town is very much a tourist town and we are fully supportive of tourism and its benefits to New Zealand, but it is now at a point that the people in our community are in fear of their lives when they drive here, and have close calls regularly.

At what point does the financial benefit outweigh the risk to our lives, our family's and friends lives? Is it right we, as locals, refuse to drive our roads during certain hours because it is too dangerous? There are solutions out there but they are too slow in being implemented and often are just put in the too hard basket.

Please put your hand up and see how big an issue this is to our community and make some changes!

Thank you for your time in looking at the information that I have sent you.

Kind Regards
Mary Chartres