

## Milford Sound Community Engagement Session

22 November 2023

Discover Milford Sound Information Centre & Café, Milford Sound Piopiotahi

### Attendees

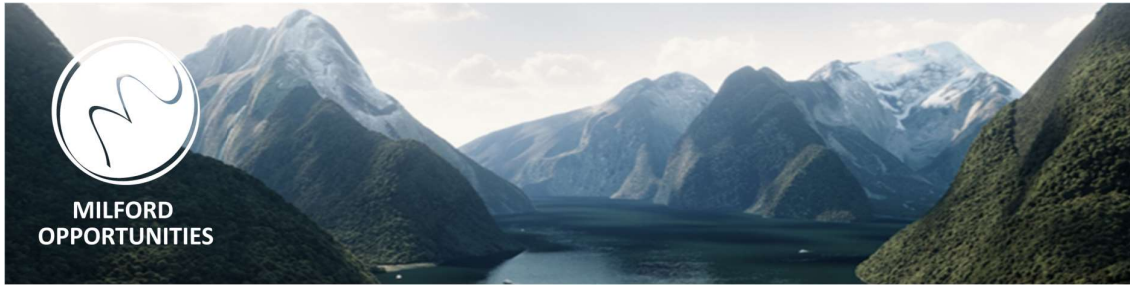
<b>Milford Community (MC)</b>	18 people (including from Roscos Kayaks, Pure Milford, Southern Discoveries)
<b>Milford Opportunities Project (MOP)</b>	Heritage & Ngāi Tahu Workstream Lead, John Twidle, Principal Comms Advisor Lizzy Sutcliffe Engagement and Communications Workstream Lead Phil Tisch

### Main topics

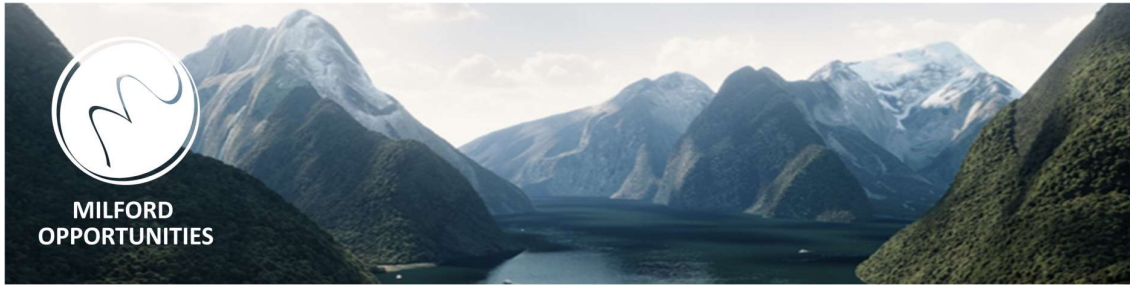
<b>Fairness of access to the place</b> – should cater for all – the diversity of visitors makes this a better place to visit and work
<b>Freedom of access</b> – huge part of the beauty of living here is freedom of access to the surrounding nature – (hunting, kayaking etc). Please ensure any system continues to enable this
<b>Need to protect this community e.g. a single staff accommodation building isn't feasible</b>
<b>Need to "get real" about the true costs</b> of the visitor experience and charge people accordingly
<b>More people on coaches from Te Anau makes sense</b>
<b>Fix the stuff that needs fixing and put the rest into conservation</b> – don't build more
<b>The challenges the project is trying to solve are complex and deep-seated</b>
<b>See how the place holds up this summer</b> – you'll see the issues

### Feedback/discussion

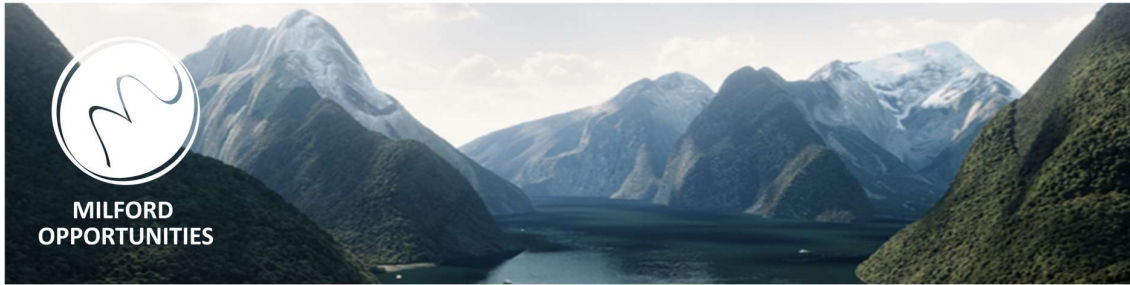
MOP	This is your place. We want to hear from you. Reflecting back what we've heard to date. You've told us this is a special place, you've come from all around the world, it's a tight-knit community/village, this is a place where you feel welcomed and can find a sense of belonging. You want a set up where you can have your own space, places to hang out together. Staff from different organisations can hang out together. What you're wanting to see continue is that sense of community and connection.
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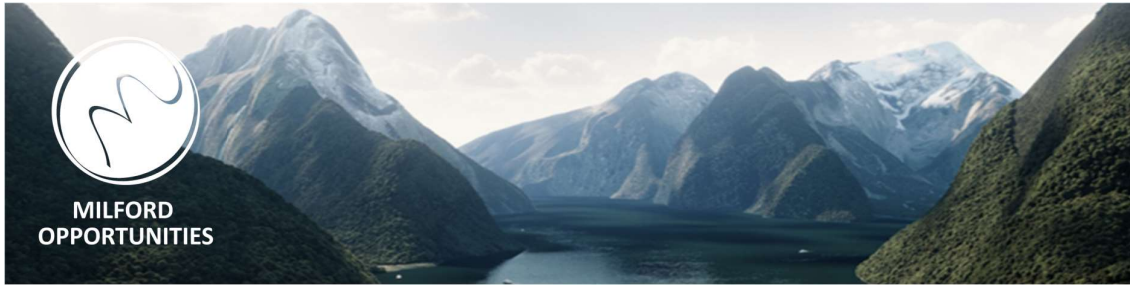
	<p>We've heard the plan for one building for staff accommodation is not going to be socially acceptable. That will be recorded in our advice back. But there are also some wider considerations re safety and preventing loss of life we need to investigate.</p>
MC	<p>It's a conscious choice we're making we know we'd be [screwed] if there was an earthquake.</p>
MOP	<p>Heard views on the aerodrome – it attracts a different visitor, provides for a wider range of experience, it's part of the history of the place – good for some markets. There's a wee bit of confusion re what's proposed. The space the runway takes up offers an entry and sightline for visitors plus coherence in terms of space. Big divider of the place. Noise. We were asked to consider this place with a clean slate. Not about swapping fixed wing for helipads. Anything else you've heard?</p>
MC	<p>You're going to put a heli pad right where our house is.</p>
MOP	<p>In the conceptual plan there is a depiction of how it could be. I think that's what you are referring to. Our job is now to consider if the plan's concepts are desirable or feasible. Essentially – our advice will be a range of options for Ministers in June 2024, they will take those to cabinet as the decision maker.</p> <p>This is a project that started out in Southland, it's being driven, in part, by locals. We're aware locals don't want a project that's done to them. This is your chance to feed into this, make yourselves heard.</p> <p>Project started under a National Govt. We're waiting to hear from the new Ministers, to find out what their priorities are.</p>
MC	<p>You said your reason for the runway was so people could get a view of Mitre Peak. Is that right? Would an alternative be to extend the foreshore walk?</p>
MOP	<p>Yes, we've talked to groups about that. There are a number of options and reasons that we're exploring – what would make a world class experience?</p>
MC	<p>I haven't looked at it in depth. Just got to the gondola page. You're collecting all of our opinions but in the end, it does come down to the government. Do our opinions change anything if Government has the final say?</p>
MOP	<p>It's a really good point and not everyone is going to be happy with the outcome of this project. It's trying to do the right thing for the place and manage the numbers of people that come here better. Our job is to provide really good advice to Ministers' so they can make decisions. Our role is to make sure we know all the things that matter, the context from you that counts. Your advice will be noted as part of that.</p> <p>We've been asked is the Gondola appropriate in a World Heritage Area – with high natural values, in a national park. Our research tells us people want less and better infrastructure here. They don't want developments that are going to impact the natural and cultural essence of this place.</p>



MC	What would be a good idea is to improve things like the White House – just fix the stuff we’ve got and put the rest into conservation. No need to build more.
MOP	So there’s an access charge proposed for international visitors. It’s a way of funding the needed upgrades but primarily, to fund conservation. It has the potential to generate quite a large fund.
MC	You say putting in more cafes or whatever, how would they be run? Would they be privately owned?
MOP	That is still to be worked through. A range of different agencies manage the place. Our policy and legislation teams are looking at how the place might best be managed. What different governance options look like. Some challenges with the national park management plan currently. There’s a range of options for how the place could be managed.
MC	What does that all mean. Would these things be publicly owned? Privately owned? Would there be one sole company in Milford running all these things? If they owned accommodation?
MOP	<p>It would be surprising if that was the case. There are a whole heap of operators in here currently. I can’t see that changing. There’s a commercial modelling workstream to identify some viable options for this. This isn’t gonna happen overnight. Looking at a 50-year timeframe.</p> <p>Talking about slowing people down, spreading them out, reducing congestion at peak times, encouraging use of Te Anau as a starting point to reduce the trend of 8 hour return trips from Queenstown – which add to risks on the road - tiredness, and congestion – small window to make it to Piopiotahi and get back. Key things underpin our work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing access – making the road safer, fewer vehicles, encouraging tourists onto buses</li> <li>• Charging an international visitor fee – to fund conservation and infrastructure</li> <li>• Ensuring a cultural footprint – acknowledging the importance of this place to Ngāi Tahu.</li> </ul>
MC	Can you clarify, you talk about managing people coming in, does that mean the timing people are coming, spacing them out and increased safety on the road which I really like. If more coaches would run from Te Anau, I believe that would be much safer and much easier for everyone involved. Obviously Te Anau doesn’t necessarily have the ability to house the capacity of people that Queenstown does, the centre of town doesn’t have those booking offices, so I understand there’s limitations in that, but I would love to see that. So in terms of managing the amount of people coming in, does that mean you want less people coming into Milford, or is it spreading them across?
MOP	This is not about capping numbers. About spreading them out across the day, the week and across seasons where possible. Some of the operators have said to us, you can’t change that overnight because this is what the customer wants, it’s something that will take time. We’re looking at change over time, a gradual approach. Some rental cars have been supportive of this approach as it keeps their customers safer.

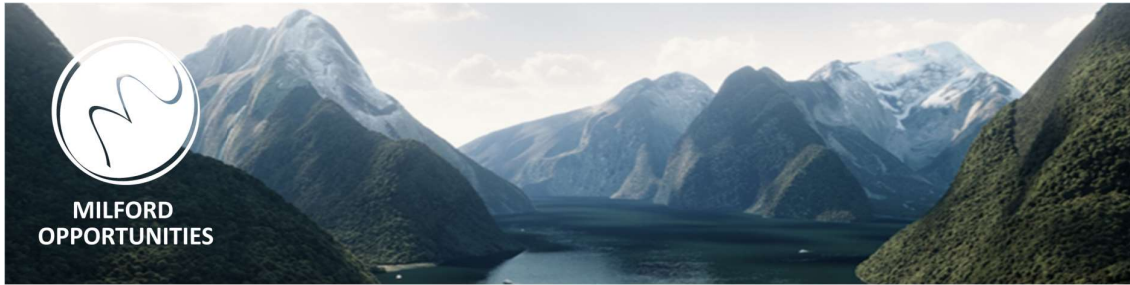


MC	If you were to do that – some people want to hike, they don't care about doing a cruise. Will there be places for buses to pull off and let people off at every single one of those walks?
MOP	The plan is divided into nodes, with potential for bus stops at each to provide access to the tracks/viewpoints etc. Chances are, if you live here, you want to go to a random place, say a waterfall that's not on the track, you should still be able to do that.
MC	How would we be able to do that? How will we be able to access the place? What about the locals in Te Anau? What about locals in Christchurch who come down to climb for a month? What would it mean for them? How will it work?
MOP	This is all what is being worked through at the moment. Hasn't been identified how it will work yet. The system could be designed so that a local in Te Anau can get up the Milford Road. The change proposed is NZers would need to get a permit.
MC	So how access will work for general NZers - it's on the radar?
MOP	Absolutely! We've been talking to the climbing access trust, and others, we've looked at a map with them to consider all the places they might want to stop. These are things that are being considered. How can they and other NZers continue to access these places.
MC	Not just climbers.
MOP	We're seeking to manage those real hotspots, Mirror Lakes, Lake Marion. Masterplan is looking predominantly at international visitors, charging an access fee, predominantly using buses etc. We're seeking to get most visitors on buses where it works for them – domestic and international visitors. Lower carbon footprint. But it's something we've got to work through. Lots of work to do. Access is something that is really important to people, and we've got a lot of work to do to find the best solutions.
MC	<p>I've been coming here for a long time, since the 80s, and we've gone through various governments, plus the Milford Sound Accreditation Programme which was late 1990s and the idea then was to have a park and ride at knobs flat, people took their car in there and then jump on a bus. They went to all the operators, like Fiordland Travel, Magic, said you can do this if you get your vehicles up to a high standard. That one fell over because they couldn't create exclusive use legally of the road to prevent people from driving their own cars.</p> <p>Then there was the gondola proposal, there was the Dart proposal in 2002 e-bus through to the Divide – it was roughly \$150 per person to get a Milford Sound bus and boat ride at the time, that proposal was gonna work out at nearly \$900 per ticket.</p> <p>So any green option is always gonna cost a whole lot more and unfortunately we've got a whole lot of government legislation to get through.</p> <p>We change our politics very quickly – so you've just got one person across it and then that changes, and then you've got to decide what you're gonna do with all the private companies that own assets here and are shareholders in Milford Sound transportation,</p>

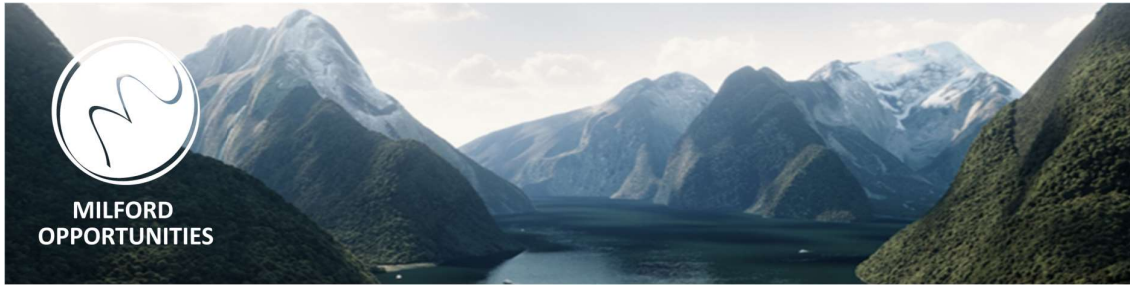


	<p>how are you going to deal with their ownership of this place as well? They've been here a long time, they may lease stuff, but they are synonymous with here.</p> <p>So you've got all those issues to deal with. The other key one is, if you look at the human footprint as it is now, whether it's the runway, village etc that's increased over the years. Is the footprint of what you're proposing going to be the same or are you going to let some of the bush come back to the place and make it special again. I can see why you'd want to build a multistorey building – it puts everything in the one place, but I've spent a wee bit of time here, everyone likes to have their own independence, they like to have a party etc as well, I can't see a big tower block working.</p>
MOP	<p>No one's suggesting that, and actually our job now over the next months is to find what will work. It's not easy work and it's not without some contention, But does that mean we do nothing? Pretty much everyone agrees that some changes are needed. Pretty much everyone you talk to says that the do nothing option is not an option. We have to try to see what can be achieved for this place.</p>
MC	<p>If you look at the road now, just before COVID came along there was a big flood, there are sadly parts of the road that no one's allowed to go back to and they haven't invested any money – the Chasms a classic example, nearly everyone coming in by car or coach would stop there and it's a pretty cool spot to have a look at, but it's been left dormant. We used to be able to get off at the tunnel there's a beautiful walk around there, all that's changed – health and safety. Can you progressively get some better access so if you wanna go hunting, fishing see a yellowhead you can. Great to encourage buses, great to have electric, hydrogen but that's 3-5 years away and very big capital costs, we need the road to have places where people can get off. And we need to be charging people that come to our country and experience all these beautiful places for free, instead of burdening taxpayers.</p>
MOP	<p>Our research shows, people are actually not just resigned to paying, they expect to pay. But they want to see that money going back to the place. People are used to paying to use national parks overseas, it's a system they are familiar with and where they know the money is going into looking after the place.</p>
MC	<p>What kind of costs are you looking at?</p>
MOP	<p>It went up to between \$90 and \$100 before markets began to drop off willingness to pay to visit.</p>
MC	<p>And that was on top of a cruise for them?</p>
MOP	<p>Yes they did know that it was on top of things like transport, a boat tour, accommodation, but we need to do the modelling work, what would that mean for a family etc.</p>
MC	<p>Quite contradictory to try to make it more accessible and then put a very large fee on it.</p>
MOP	<p>It's not about trying to push more people here at all, it's about looking at what methods we might use so we can look after the people who come here, give them a really great experience and also protect the place.</p>

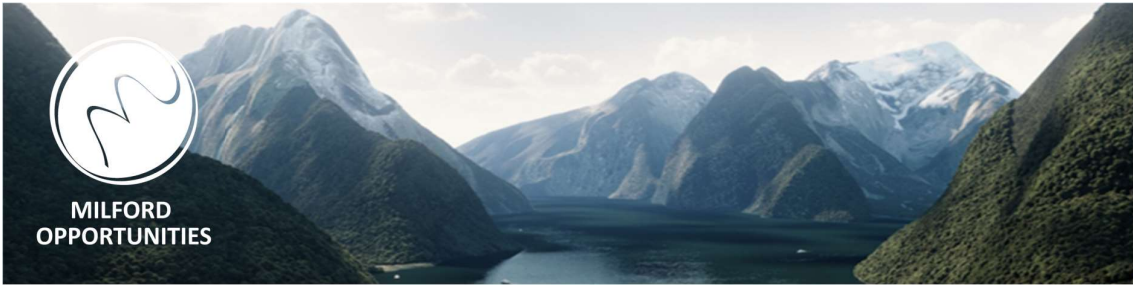




MC	But essentially catering to people with more money?
MOP	Who's been to the states, who has experience of their national park system?
MC	Yeah they sort of bundle you in, bundle you out, you wanna go and actually see a place, do something.
MOP	What we heard was most people were happy to pay up to a point.
MC	Let's say people were paying \$90 per person – how much of that would go back into conservation?
MOP	This hasn't been decided. It's been proposed that all that money would go back into place – conservation, infrastructure.
MC	<p>People need to get a little bit realistic about the cost. I've been doing this for a long time. Coach and cruise from Queenstown in 1997 was \$155. What did people get paid per hour in 1997 compared to now? Cruise and coach now nearly double that cost but wages 4 x what they were. So when you say \$100 to come to a place like this, you've got to be realists, the cost of maintaining the road, bring your kayak in, it does cost money to do everything.</p> <p>If we want to have better conditions for ourselves, for staff, wages etc, that costs a lot of cash. The only way to minimise people generally is to put the price up. That sieves it out – more exclusive and sadly so many places around the world that you can go to are like that. Take fly fishing – here you can rock up anywhere, pay your licence, you can't do that in many other places around the world.</p> <p>So if we wanna look after it forever, you gotta put a bit of skin in the game which is paying for it. Otherwise it's not gonna be there for ever.</p>
MOP	<p>Its one of those issues that we have to face with growing population and tourist numbers, there's a whole lot of hard decisions to make regarding how we protect our place. We want to go everywhere and we want to go for free, but there's a lot the government needs to pay for.</p> <p>We would like to know, when you say it sounds like it's just for rich people, or might not be fair, is that something that's important to you?</p>
MC	Yeah of course. I first came to Milford as a customer, that's how quite a few people end up working here. That's their first experience. If you up the costs there probably wouldn't be many people working here now, like the backpacker market. Part of the charm of the place is that it has a variety of people coming here to visit – not just the same type of person every time. It makes our jobs much more fun for sure.
MOP	Any other thoughts, concerns about the plan, about what you've heard?
MC	It's just interesting to hear. I was there in Te Anau when the masterplan got launched, all the cable car up the hill, glad to hear tonight that's not a top priority for the project.



	<p>The place does need to be more controlled somehow, just finding that balance between the pros and cons. Controlled access makes sense. Works well in places like Japan - the Kurobe Gorge.</p> <p>We've got to get it tidier and neater. To allow people off the road and into those tracks etc.</p> <p>The Government organisations need to be funded better. I think the only way of doing that is to charge people to come here.</p> <p>This is not \$1m its billions. People need to get on the same page, put their egos in the bin and get together on this. And that it'll be a miracle if you can get that to happen.</p>
MOP	<p>Need to make this your plan, some change is almost inevitable so please make sure you feed into this. Go online on <a href="http://www.milfordopportunities.nz">www.milfordopportunities.nz</a> or come visit us in the Te Anau hub. When should we come back and talk to you?</p>
MC	<p>Before the end of the season. Come see how it's all held up. You'll see how it's coped – now numbers are getting back to pre-covid. Everyone's pretty busy, car parks full, people parking on the grass, buses double parked, have a look at how the infrastructures holding up, toilets, come back in April. Then you'll know how the place has held up over a busy summer. How badly the infrastructures held up, then you'll know these are the things we don't want happening again.</p> <p>So you're taking your proposals to Govt in June?</p>
MOP	<p>Yes -these are the results of the feasibility testing, here are the options you might want to consider. We'll be putting this conversation in the Newsletter. Sign up if you want to follow the process.</p>
MC	<p>Observation from Tongariro Alpine Crossing management, the valley the crossing goes up is very special to me and my family, we're local to the area, we go there all the time, it's an important place for us to recreate. They had crazy numbers on that walk and so they put a parking permit in, which is fantastic for the environment, and I can see how that was needed, but the problem for us was there was no long-term local's permit. We could go into DOC the day before for a free permit which was great, but it meant that you had to know exactly when you were going in advance, go into DOC, sometimes they aren't open, so it made it quite hard to access a place that meant a lot to us. So maybe if you do need a permit as a local going to Milford Sound or spots along the road like Lake Marion, maybe if you could create a yearly permit for locals so you don't need to know exactly in advance when/where you're going.</p>
MOP	<p>This is something the team is grappling with currently. Great to get this context. There is knowledge within the MOP team of the situation and solutions being explored for Tongariro so we will learn from what is happening there and share our information. We've heard from the climbing community and others, plans are dependent on many factors, can't always plan ahead, particularly due to weather conditions.</p>



MC	Exactly, and our work hours, they're always changing, so you really need flexibility to be able to access the outdoors. We need a flexible system.
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