

Sustainable Destinations: Milford Sound Piopiotahi

Transport Focus Group options workshop notes

Time/date	2.30-4.30pm 17 June 2026
Location	Fiordland community events centre, Te Anau
Attendees	15 representing: Police, Southland District Council, Great South, Milford Sound Tourism, Milford Road Alliance, NZTA, Southern Discoveries, Real NZ, Trips and Tramps, Rosco's Milford Kayaks, Envy Experience
DOC	5 plus external facilitator

Workshop summary

Purpose

Work with stakeholders to identify solutions to address congestion and parking challenges and design a more sustainable transport system for the Milford journey in the long-term (looking out 3+ years).

Overview

On 17 June 2026, DOC held a workshop with the Transport Focus Group to consider and rank four different transport options for the Milford journey. The emerging preferred transport option was:

- Bookable carparking with industry providing more bus options

DOC's priority now is to work with wider stakeholders and the transport focus group to develop a single preferred option for recommendation to the Milford Sound Piopiotahi Programme Board.

Workshop methodology

The Transport Focus Group was set up with local industry experts and agencies to assess options from the Milford Opportunities Project (MOP). The premise was that the people who know the current system best and stand to inherit any changes to this system, are best placed to identify workable solutions.

Using MOP transport recommendations and feedback from the group, DOC developed 4 options for the workshop and established assessment (design) criteria (refer Appendices 1).

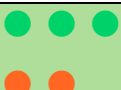
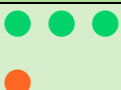
The options were developed to be distinct, high-level concepts, free from current operating/legislative restrictions, to enable to group to identify a preferred long-term vision.

The workshop was run by an external facilitator and comprised of two exercises:

1. To consider individual options in break-out groups.
2. To individually vote for a preferred option and for preferred interventions (e.g. bookable parking).

Options and discussions are covered below. A wider discussion was held on the issue of capacity at Piopiotahi over the long-term, noting that no transport system can support limitless growth in visitor numbers and this must be considered.

Workshop findings

Option Ranking	Group assessment against criteria	Individual votes for preferred option	Preferred interventions	Individual votes for interventions
Option 3. Bookable parking (industry responds)		8	• Self-drive visitors must book a car park in Milford Sound Piopiotahi • Cap the number of car parks available to provide certainty for new transport options • No formal Park & Ride (in addition to existing options from Te Anau and Queenstown)	8 7 2
Option 1. Boat & bus ticketing		6	• Set proportion (e.g. 40%) of boat bookings must include bus transport • Boat & bus combo ticket requirement targets peak periods	4 3
Option 2. Bookable parking with (hybrid) park and ride		0	• Self-drive visitors must book a car park in Milford Sound Piopiotahi • Te Anau-based transport options marketed to support future growth	8 (also in Option 3.) 2
Option 4. Dynamic parking fees (industry responds)		0	• Car parking fees increased to encourage bus/guide use	2

Next steps for DOC

- Share findings with wider key stakeholders and get feedback and further advice
- Arrange another focus group meeting to refine/condense the preferred options.
- Get a high-level peer-review from traffic engineers, before it goes to the Programme Board.

Workshop records

Exercise 1. Breakout group assessment (25 min)

- **Discuss** your allocated transport solution option.
- **Record** key comments, concerns and suggested improvements
- **Apply** a traffic-light rating against each design criterion:
 - ● Meets
 - ● Somewhat meets
 - ● Does not meet
- **Share** your assessment with the wider group

Option 1. Boat & bus ticketing ● ● ● ● ● ●

Criterion	Rating
Visitor Experience	●
Congestion & traffic management	●
Commercial viability & feasibility	●
Environment & cultural values	●

Option 1. interventions

- Set proportion (e.g. 40%) of boat bookings must include bus transport
- The requirement for boat & bus combo ticket will target peak periods
- Boat and bus tickets are scaled to (existing or reduced) car park capacity in Milford
- Self-drive is still in place for remaining boat tickets
- Assumptions:
 - Existing car parks (~450) or reduced
 - All paid parking (no free parking)
 - Assumes a regulatory mechanism could be developed (*acknowledging statutory complexity with cross-agency boundaries*)

Discussion notes: “We thought this option was pretty great generally”

- Commercially there are possibly quite a lot of winners out of this scenario.
- The biggest impact would be on cruise operators to manage it.
- It's an adaptable system that could change over time depending on the numbers – offering flexibility.
- It would need a to go to a pre-booked system – bus or car. Otherwise you'd run the risk of there not being a car park or no boat available when you get to Milford.
- Need to consider rec fishers with their big boat trailers – seasonal and weather dependant – if you get 70 of those guys on the day it takes up a hell of a lot of space. They are highly resourced and know what buttons to press.

Option 2. Bookable parking with (hybrid) park & ride

Criterion	Rating
Visitor Experience	●
Congestion & traffic management	●
Commercial viability & feasibility	● ●
Environment & cultural values	●

Option 2. interventions

- Self drive visitors must book and pay for a carpark in Piopiotahi Milford Sound
- Supported by a new P&R hub(s) in national park – with a dedicated service
- Delivered by public/private partnership(s)
- Te Anau based transport options are marketed to support future growth
- P&R targets peak periods
- Existing industry-led Queenstown and Te Anau P&R continues
- Assumptions:
 - Existing (~450) carparks or reduced
 - All parking paid (no free parking)
 - Backup paid car parks may be required
 - Schedule not tied to cruise departure times
 - Booking system includes parking charges
 - P&R location(s) enable repeat trips
 - P&R car park capacity ~100 – 150
 - Public/private partnership - user pays
 - Start-up subsidy may be required

Discussion: “Quite a lot of complexity”

- Could work – you could throw in some express coaches and options for people in a hurry and some with stops for those who want a slower experience.
- Reliant on good promotion.
- The key aspect is compliance. Same for other options.
- For the commercial criteria – it’s somewhat lower and somewhat meets. It would need modelling and feasibility testing. Plus coach drivers, vehicles and accommodation etc to support it.
- Would it only be for peak times?
- It somewhat meets the experience – any minimisation of traffic is going to help.
- Gonna require good comms.
- Quite a lot of complexity in this option. It has far-reaching implications on what we want to do.
- Harder to ramp up and down. Can’t switch it on and off like the others.
- It would rely on paid parking working to support.
- If visitor growth reaches 1.6m in 10 years – what does that mean for this approach. The whole industry will need to move with it.

Option 3. Bookable parking (industry responds) ●●●●●●●●

Visitor Experience	●
Congestion & traffic management	●
Commercial viability & feasibility	●
Environment & cultural values	●●●

Option 3. interventions

- Self-drive visitors must book a car park in Milford Sound Piopiotahi
- Industry meets travel requirements for those without booking
- The number of car parks available is capped to provide certainty for the market to deliver new transport options
- There is no formal park and ride (in addition to existing options from Te Anau/Queenstown)
- Assumptions:
 - Existing (~450) carparks or reduced
 - All parking paid (no free parking)
 - Backup paid car parks may be required

Discussion notes: “No restrictions on how the companies make this happen, leads to diversity and manages the visitor experience.”

- Environmental and cultural values are tied in to the experience through the guides and visitor interaction with the industry.
- We have groups coming in early in the morning, outside of peak times, staying there for 5 hours, so how do you manage price [parking?] or transport if not self-driving?
- We may be able to work with other operators to pick up early clients?
- Consider pricing/timing required of the bookable parking – am versus pm. Queenstown visitors arrive 1pm. Te Anau arrive 10.30-11 am. Cascade Saddle [as P&R hub] has shorter turn around. Bookable system lets the people and industry figure out how to make it work.
- Industry would not be charged for parking but as industry grows how would you manage capacity.
- Rec fishers may need a separate consideration.
- Really good point about industry providing a variety of experiences according to the price you are willing to pay.
- With these two options we’re capping the number of car parks which in 10 years time when we get to 1.6m visitor will naturally drive more people onto buses etc. The system will grow with the numbers to change behaviour over time.
- The other options is you cap at 4000 and accept you can’t take 1.6m a year. Eventually bus park will be full. Where does it stop – it’s got to stop somewhere.

Option 4. Dynamic parking fees (industry responds)

Criterion

Rating

Visitor Experience



Congestion & traffic management



Commercial viability & feasibility



Environment & cultural values



Option 4. interventions

- Car parking fees are increased to encourage bus/guide use
- Find the visitors price point to change behaviour (e.g. \$150 - \$300 for 3 hr parking)
- Fees can be seasonal
- The number of car parks is capped to provide certainty
- It may require a booking system if demand exceeds supply
- The market delivers new transport options
- Assumptions:
 - Existing designated (~450) car parks or reduced
 - All car parks are paid, no free parking
 - Redundant spare paid car parks maybe required to manage varying demand
 - Pricing is based on an average 2.8 people per car

Discussion notes: *“It somewhat meets the visitor experience”*

- Number of car park limited – if you keep building car parks they just keep filling up – needs to be capped.
- Concern around where the money goes – if you put big dollar on it where does that go – how does it return to infrastructure.
- It somewhat meets the visitor experience criteria – people want to drive the road.
- Experience will improve in terms of revenue stream. Also from a safety perspective as people have booked parking meaning less rush.
- Congestion management - it absolutely nails it. In winter charge less. Can also put it up so some flexibility. But need to coordinate with cruises.
- It could be dynamic based on type of vehicle too. Eg. campervans which can cause issues, slow traffic, take up more space. Reduces footprint and gets people into managed car parks.
- A key issue would be how to deal with those who want free parking? Huge fines and tickets, tow truck.
- At Aoraki cars park along the roadside. Good to see what solutions they are looking at there. E.g. options for locals to have permits, NZ residents have ability to pay for access, discounts for regulars.
- Needs clear comms.
- Where do you intend to take the money? Our staff cop a huge amount of abuse with the current cost of parking. Don't want our staff to suffer.
- Rec fishers – tuna is running they are gonna go whether they have a park or not. Those who can't plan – it's not gonna stop them from going. Those vehicles and trailers are 2-3 times longer than a small rental.
- There needs to be information and ramifications for illegally parking. The system needs to manage that behaviour e.g. the bowl is exclusively for boaties.
- These are system probs – you do one thing create a prob somewhere else – needs to be worked through and communicated. If you put mitigations and controls in place – you can improve things over time. If someone is paying \$300 for a park – you'll need to make the fine \$1000!

Exercise 2. Individual preferences (10 min)

- (1 vote) Place on option you believe best meets the design criteria overall
- (2 votes) Place on the individual interventions you would most like to see carried forward
- You may place gold stickers across two options
- It does not matter which option an intervention belongs to
- Vote for the two interventions you think have the greatest merit
- You may place only one gold sticker on any individual intervention (can't give it 2 votes)
- You do not need to use both gold stickers

Note: Vote individually. No discussion during voting. There are no right or wrong answers

Exercise 2. Results:

Preferred transport solutions

- **Option 3 – Bookable parking (industry responds): 8 votes**
- Option 1 – Boat & bus ticketing: 6 votes
- Option 2: 0 votes
- Option 4: 0 votes

Interventions receiving votes

- **Cap the number of car parks available to provide certainty for new transport options (Option 3): 7 votes**
- **Self-drive visitors must book and pay for a car park in Milford Sound Piopiotahi (Option 2): 7 votes**
- Set proportion (e.g. 40%) of boat bookings must include bus transport (Option 1): 4 votes
- Boat & bus combo ticket requirement targets peak periods (Option 1): 3 votes
- No formal Park & Ride (in addition to existing options from Te Anau and Queenstown) (Option 3): 2 votes
- Car parking fees increased to encourage bus/guide use (Option 4): 2 votes
- Te Anau-based transport options marketed to support future growth (Option 2): 1 vote
- Self-drive visitors must book a car park in Milford Sound Piopiotahi (Option 3): 1 vote

Exercise 2. group reflections

- Option 2. has no blue ticket. It's fundamentally complicated.

- There are private operators and government workers here –it would be good to see what different options were chosen by two groups. You've got knowledge of your industry we have knowledge of ours.
 - Lots of blues on boats managing capacity [Option1.] and bookable parking with industry-led P&R [Option 3.]. Both options are led by the tourism industry.
 - It could be a combination of the two. A hybrid of them is probably the preferred option.
 - If you dealt with something along those lines and also consider rec fishers – you're probably looking at something that will work quite a long way into the future.
 - It feels like there's a hybrid solution in here.
 - Need to think wider. Less cars means more large vehicles. We need to understand where they come from and think about how we can transition to that.
 - A traffic engineer would stress test these in terms of some models.
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Discussion on capacity

The elephant in the room is just how many people go in there in future. Ultimately, car parks or bus parks, it doesn't matter, it will need supporting infrastructure.

At some point you have to go what is too much?

- We can't just keep building car parks, can't keep hosting more and more. Let's be proactive well before things grind to a halt.
- We can't just fix numbers through a mode-shift to coaches. At some point it will be bursting at the seams for longer periods.
- This forum through the board has a good opportunity to raise this is not what we want – an open flood gate – we could start thinking about putting some constraints around this.
- You've got a bit of experience with the Cadrona side of things with capping numbers. The pros and cons of it. Dealing with someone at the bottom of the road without a pass on a bluebird day.

It's all well and good talking about capping numbers but do we need to do more research around how many is really too many?

- For some people 1.6m is nowhere near too many.
- We need to take it outside of this room and what we think. Take it back to "what is the experience our visitors want?" Not necessarily our own views.
- Need to make sure we're not shooting ourselves in the foot and saying Milford's closed.

What if it's about taking a staged approach – maybe we cap to let industry catch up as numbers grow. Allow time to build towards growth while safeguarding the experience. Sustainable growth!

- The reality is, at those busy times the whole South Island is at capacity.
 - Do the politicians know we don't just want the floodgates open?
 - As a collective we can perhaps push for staged growth. Unmanaged growth could lead to a really bad outcome. Impacting our reputation locally and nationally.
 - Numbers would not necessarily be capped but managed to protect the experience.
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Appendix 1. Assessment criteria

Criteria	The extent to which the option...	Considerations
Visitor experience	Supports a safer, high-quality, seamless, and culturally rich visitor experience that celebrates the place	✓ Offers a range of experiences and supports recreation access ✓ Safe, easy to use, end-to-end journey with a quality arrival experience in Milford Piopiotahi ✓ Supports local gateways ✓ Tells our story and ensures we are a standout destination* ✓ Enables visitors to act as guardians** *Murihiku Southland Destination Strategy **Tiaki Promise
Congestion and traffic management	Shift to shared transport options enables smooth traffic flow and efficient traffic management	✓ Reduces congestion and traffic management issues at key locations ✓ Manages XXX (number of) private vehicles in Milford Piopiotahi at set times ✓ Smooths intra-day demand ✓ Targets peak period issues ✓ Prioritises high-occupancy transport and guided tours
Commercial viability & feasibility	Economically sustainable, cost-effective, and deliverable.	✓ Financially sustainable and/or enables private sector delivery ✓ Aligns with existing tourism operators and business models ✓ Accommodates seasonal demands and growth forecasts ✓ Is scalable, adaptable and resilient to future needs/pressures ✓ Simple and effective
Environment & cultural values	Protects the natural values, minimizing environmental impacts and partners with mana whenua to embed values and cultural presence	✓ Upholds Fiordland National Park values and World Heritage Status ✓ Minimises footprint on landscapes and ecology ✓ Reflects Ngāi Tahu Treaty settlement and cultural values ✓ Reduces visitor footprint