

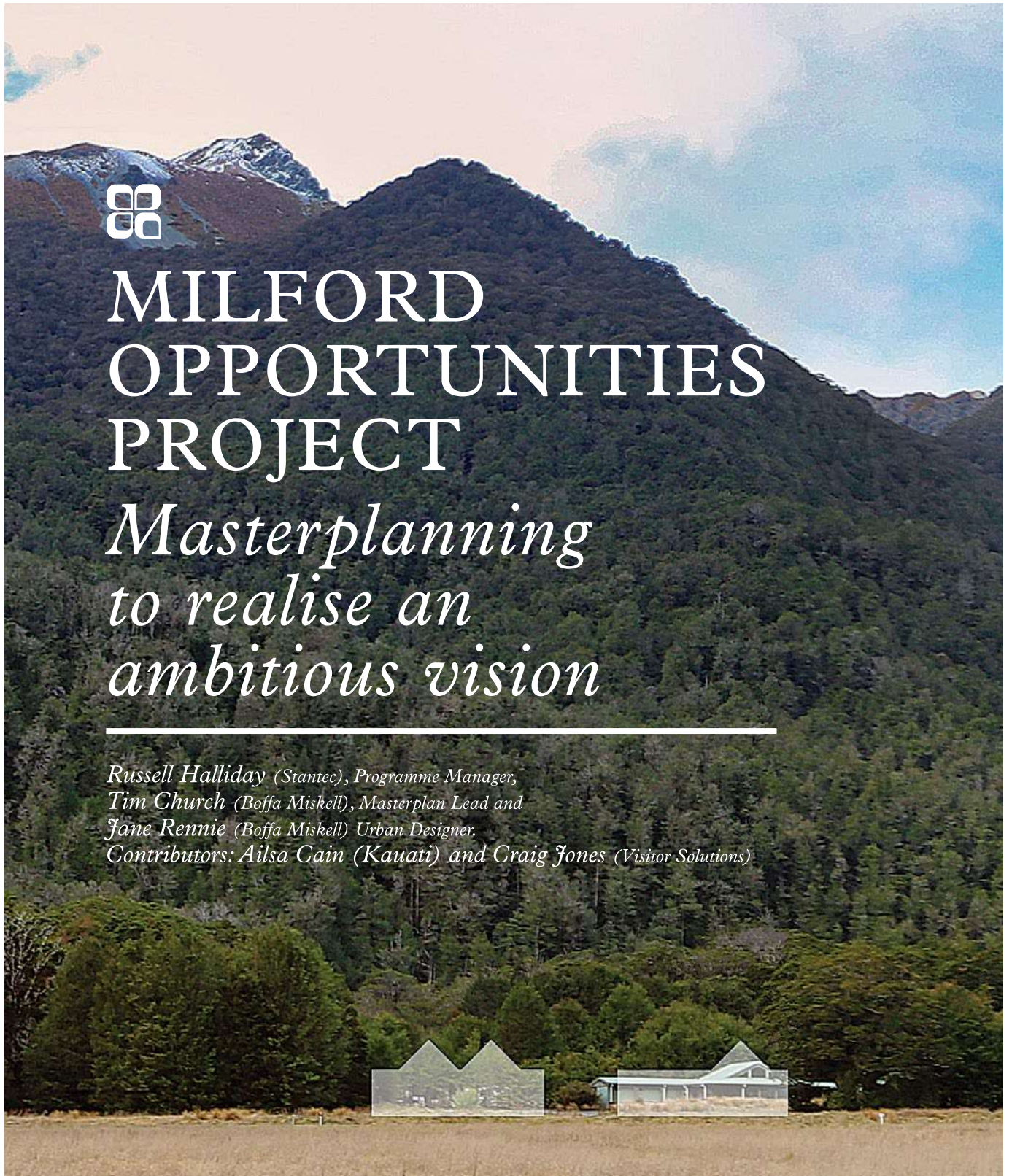


# MILFORD OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT

*Masterplanning  
to realise an  
ambitious vision*

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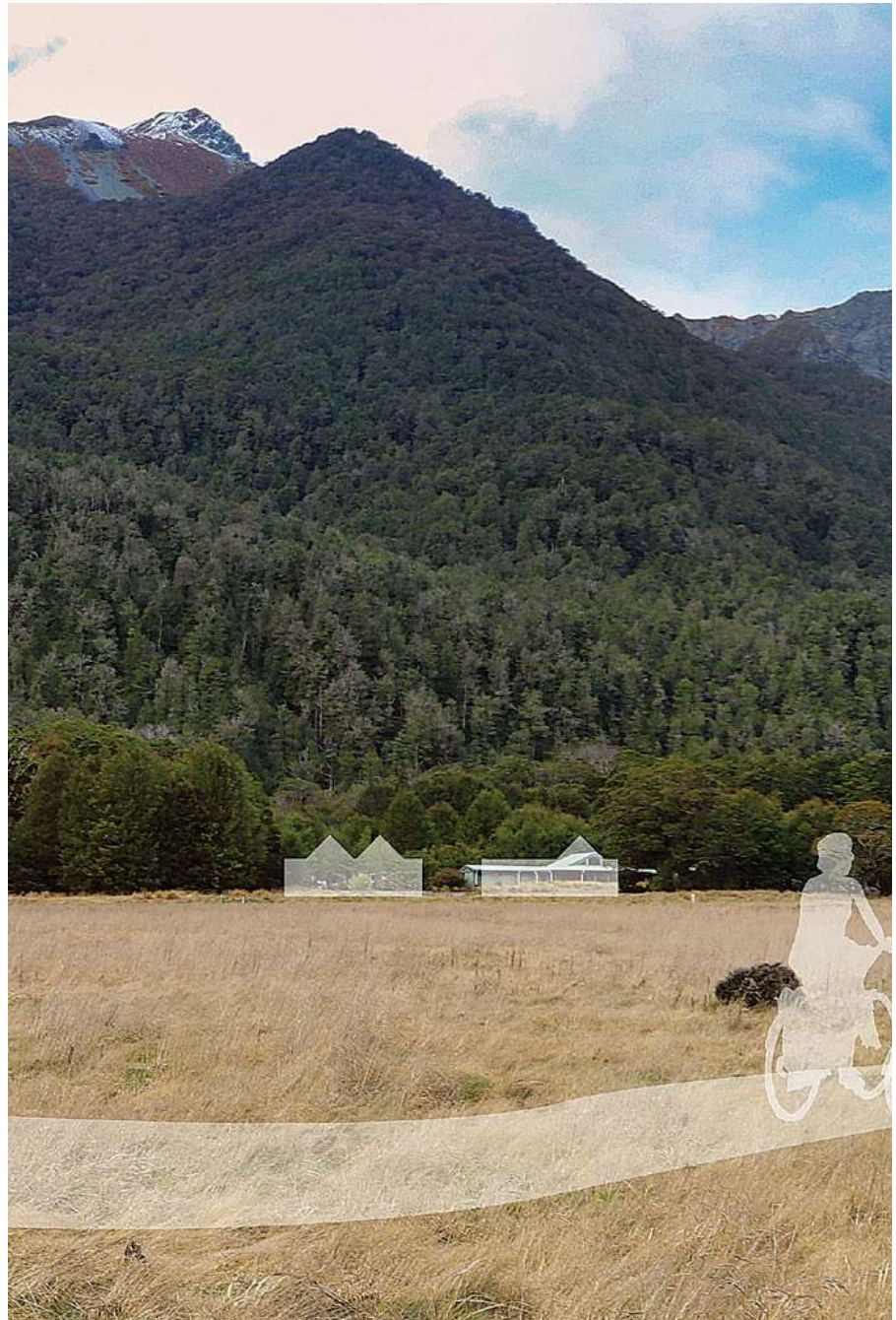


*Tangata Whenua exercise mana whenua over their ancestral lands; however, with that comes responsibilities. We must remember that people are part of the environment, and like the environment must be provided for – in other words, manaakitanga. A huge amount of mahi has gone into understanding the needs of people and place.*

**Masterplan Foreword -  
Michael R Skerrett QSM, JP, Hon SIT  
Fellow, Kaumatua**

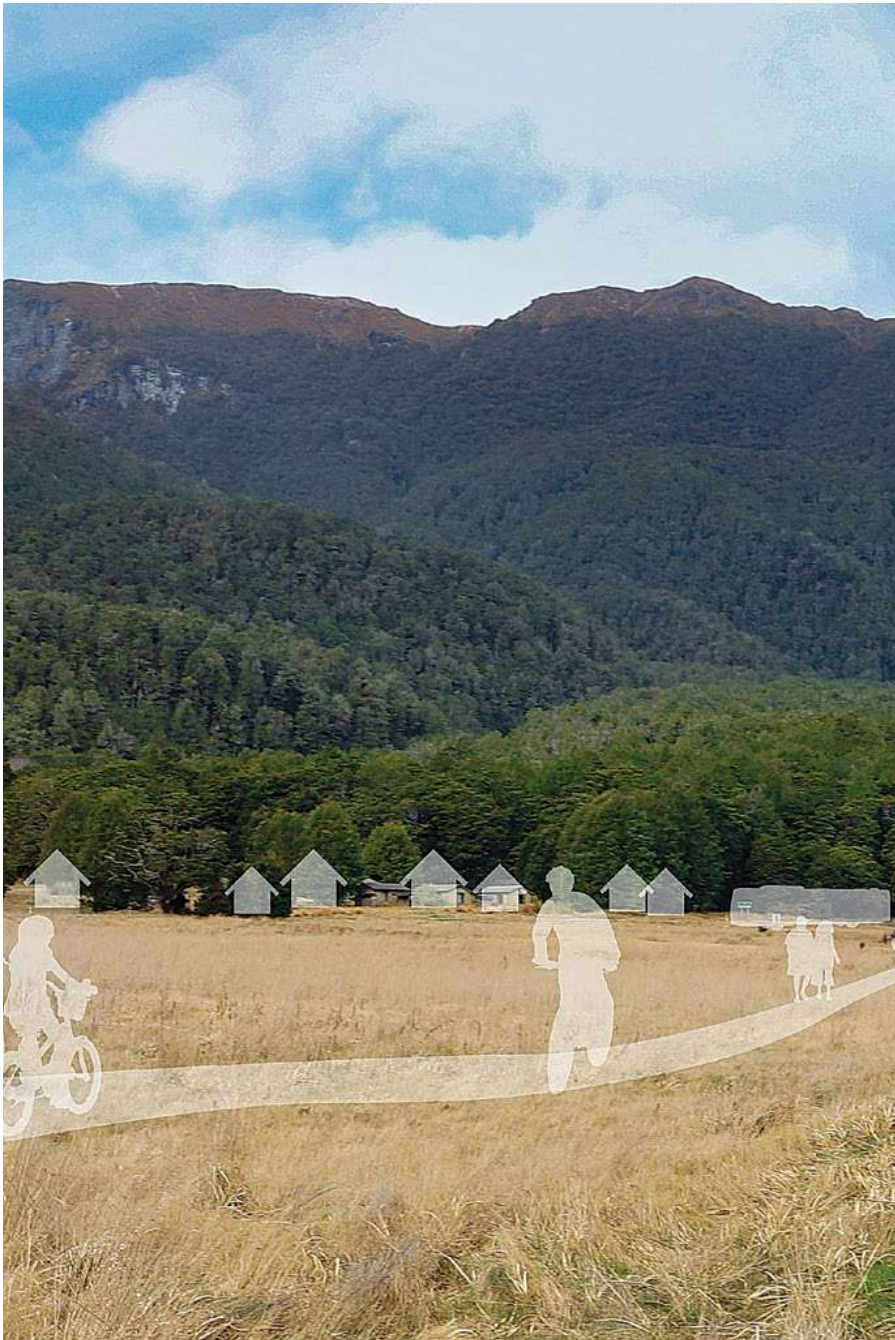
Over the last 15 years Milford Sound Piopiotahi had become ‘crowded, rushed, noisy and unsafe’ as Dr Keith Turner, the Milford Opportunities Governance Group’s chair, succinctly noted. Dig a little deeper and it becomes apparent that the immediate challenges were set in the context of piecemeal and incremental development creep over the longer term, much like the glaciers that originally formed this iconic landscape.

To address these shortcomings the Milford Opportunities Project (MOP) Masterplan



was created to help shape the future of Milford Sound Piopiotahi. Developing this Masterplan required significant collaboration and consultation between numerous stakeholders to meet and exceed the diverse expectations, particularly around economic growth, recreation, tourism, environment, and conservation.

The Masterplan process was tasked to respond to the year-on-year increase of visitors to Piopiotahi Milford Sound and the negative effects occurring from the rapid expansion of visitation. 14 areas of concern were identified and needed addressing through the master plan. These ranged from:



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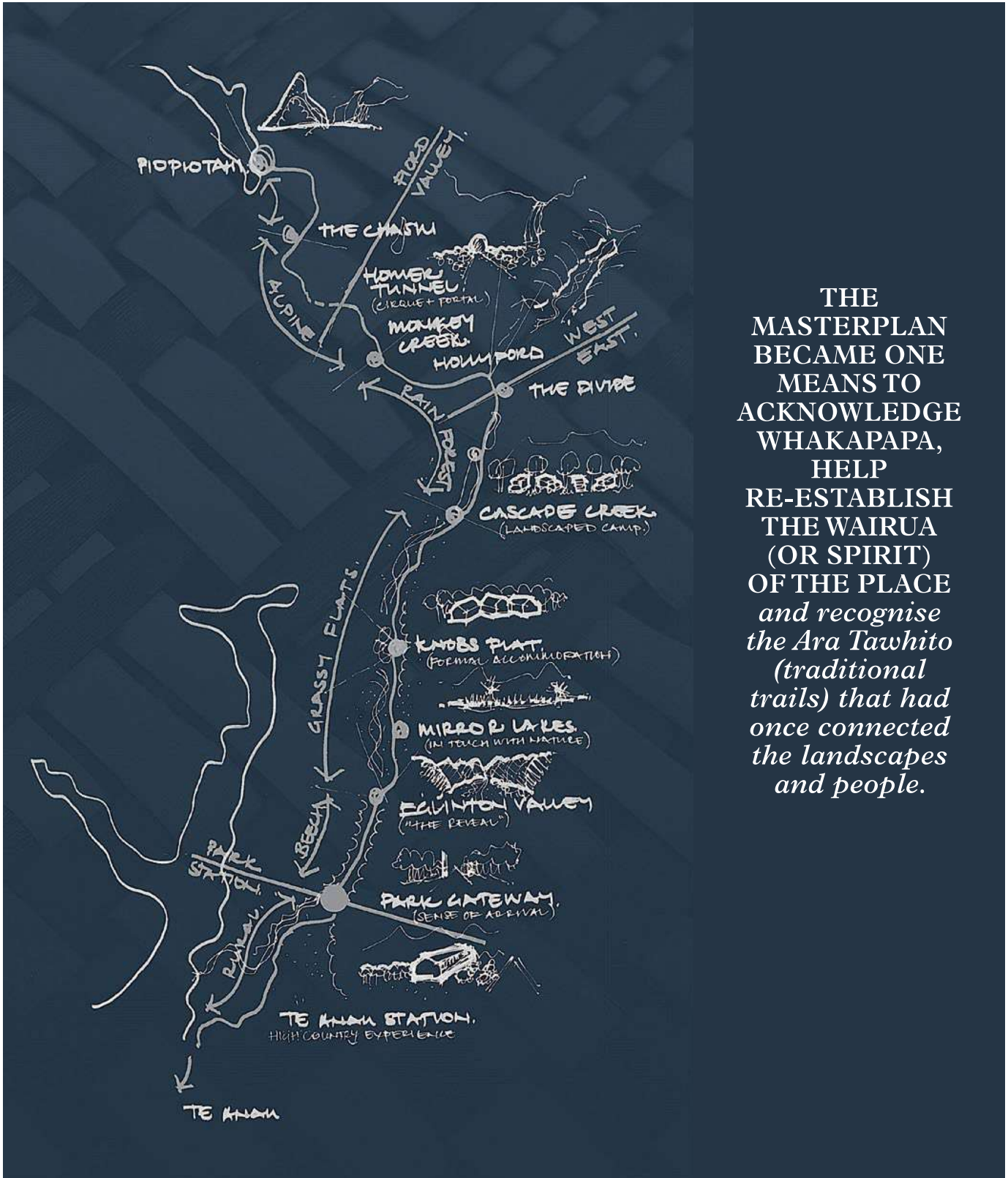
New Zealand Transport Agency  
administered road in Aotearoa New  
Zealand.

In addressing these complex problems, the Governance Group, who consisted of Ngāi Tahu, central government, local government, and private industry representatives, set an ambitious vision for the project – ‘*Piopiotaahi – New Zealand as it was, forever.*’

The impact of the February 2020 storm events and Covid-19 sharpened a focus on the need for meaningful change. It was not sufficient to simply ‘plaster over the cracks’ but to take a more fundamental, systems-based approach drawing on a hybrid of best practice masterplanning and Business Case methodologies to identify best-fit solutions. This approach meant considering the broader context of the Milford Corridor,

- impacts of visitor numbers on core wilderness experience and conservation values,
- limited acknowledgement of Ngāi Tahu identity and cultural heritage,
- numerous natural hazards including the potential for an Alpine Fault

- earthquake, tsunami risk, rock fall, extreme flooding, and avalanches,
- poor quality infrastructure including the Milford Sound aerodrome not in a sustainable condition, and
- Milford Road is ranked third for personal risk of any Waka Kotahi



THE MASTERPLAN BECAME ONE MEANS TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHAKAPAPA, HELP RE-ESTABLISH THE WAIRUA (OR SPIRIT) OF THE PLACE and recognise the Ara Tawhito (traditional trails) that had once connected the landscapes and people.



**THE DIFFICULTY OF MANAGING MILFORD SOUND PIOPIOTAHİ IN A HOLISTIC WAY HAVE BEEN EXACERBATED BY THE FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE *and constraints on individual agencies such as DOC. The proposed framework will create a new fit-for-purpose statutory entity.***

all the way back to Te Anau, and reviewing how this extraordinary place is governed and managed. ‘Seven Pillars’ cut across the various technical workstreams, which included planning, cultural, landscape, engineering, conservation, economics, tourism, legal and governance expertise and provide touchstones to ensure the integration of ideas and balancing of specific interests within the broader goals of the project.

A vital aspect included strengthening the partnership with Ngāi Tahu as mana whenua/mana moana through the Governance Group. Early and ongoing engagement with the kaitiaki Papatipu Rūnanga was critical. It reinforced to us that the cultural heritage of Ngāi Tahu is of fundamental importance to Te Rua o te Moko/Fiordland as is the Ngāi Tahu expression and exercise of tino rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. The Masterplan became one means to acknowledge whakapapa, help re-establish the wairua (or spirit) of the place and recognise the Ara Tawhito (traditional trails) that had once connected the landscapes and people.

Innovative strategies have been identified within the masterplan to address significant challenges that are facing communities of various sizes across Aotearoa New Zealand. These strategies reflect the interdependent

nature of planning for successful places and communities, in several key areas:

- Recognising and developing integrated landscape, conservation and cultural experiences. Developing visitor experiences that respond to landscape, natural ecosystems and cultural heritage in a mutually-supportive way moves beyond sustainability towards truly regenerative environments.
- Establishing a new governance model. The difficulty of managing Milford Sound Piopiotahi in a holistic way have been exacerbated by the fragmented governance structure and constraints on individual agencies such as DOC. The proposed framework will create a new fit-for-purpose statutory entity.
- Facilitating broader Murihuku and Southland benefits. When implemented, the masterplan will shift patterns of visitation to Milford Sound Piopiotahi and nearby visitor attractions to enable Te Anau and Southland to receive more economic benefits from tourism, enabling investments in infrastructure, services and amenities that will benefit both tourists and residents alike.
- Introducing a managed access and transportation model. To enable more

meaningful experiences, improve safety, and decarbonise the corridor, controlling access to Milford Sound Piopiotahi will bring multiple benefits, including establishing Te Anau as the start and end point of most visits to the area.

- Charging an international access fee. Analysis identified that the current model does not recover the costs of infrastructure and services, despite large visitation numbers. The international access fee will ensure continued accessibility for Aotearoa New Zealanders while ensuring a revenue stream that enables investment and long-term management of the resource.
- Establishing a new Te Anau Hub and enhanced developments. Te Anau has historically been bypassed by most visitors, and the creation of key infrastructure, in particular a consolidated visitor hub for information, ticketing, parking and bus transfer, will allow for an expansion of supporting services in Te Anau such as accommodation and service facilities, and grow opportunities for other visitor experiences in the area.
- Developing multiple experiences along the corridor structured around

## PURPOSE, VISION, SEVEN PILLARS AND MASTERPLAN OBJECTIVES

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the Masterplan is to:

*Ensure that Milford Sound Piopiotahi maintains its status as a key Aotearoa New Zealand visitor 'icon' and provides a 'world class' visitor experience that is accessible, upholds the World Heritage status, national park and conservation values and adds value to Southland and Aotearoa New Zealand Inc.*

### VISION

Our vision is to ensure:

# PIOPIOTAHİ – NEW ZEALAND AS IT WAS, FOREVER

### SEVEN PILLARS

To support this vision, the solutions to address the key issues in the Masterplan are focused around Seven Pillars that represent the project's **desired future state**:



#### MANA WHENUA VALUES WOVEN THROUGH

Iwi's place in the landscape and guardianship of mātauranga Māori me te taiao (Māori knowledge and the environment) are recognised. Authentic mana whenua stories inform and contribute to a unique visitor experience.

#### A MOVING EXPERIENCE

Visitors experience the true essence, beauty and wonder of Milford Sound Piopiotahi and Murihiku Southland through curated storytelling, sympathetic infrastructure and wide choices suited to a multi-day experience

#### TOURISM FUNDS CONSERVATION AND COMMUNITY

The visitor experience will become an engine for funding conservation growth and community prosperity.

#### EFFECTIVE VISITOR MANAGEMENT

Visitors are offered a world class visitor experience that fits with the unique natural environment and rich cultural values of the region.

#### RESILIENT TO CHANGE AND RISK

Activities and infrastructure are adaptive and resilient to change and risk, for instance avalanche and flood risks, changing visitor trends, demographics, and other external drivers.

#### CONSERVATION

Manage Te Rua-o-Te-Moko Fiordland National Park to ensure ongoing protection of pristine conservation areas, while enabling restoration of natural ecological values in other areas.

key nodes. The current "sprint to the boats" required by the Queenstown-based bus model provides little time for visitors to experience Milford Sound Piopiotahi at their own pace and has resulted in little focus being given to numerous other spectacular

and significant destinations along the corridor. The masterplan identifies a series of investments in the corridor that will offer enhanced experiences made viable by the reconfigured access model.

- Encouraging sustainable practices,

green technology and the minimisation of natural hazard risk. A light environmental footprint will be pursued through initiatives such as emissions-free transport, a consolidation of built infrastructure to protect sensitive ecological



**SPECIFIC TO MILFORD SOUND PIOPIOTAHU AND TE ANAU, THE PROJECT ALSO UNTANGLES COMPLEX GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES OF OVERLAPPING GOVERNMENT AND AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES and will reposition Milford Sound Piopiotahi as Aotearoa New Zealand’s “crown jewel” visitor experience, not only for international visitors but also for New Zealanders.**



### MASTERPLAN OBJECTIVES

The development of the masterplan was also guided by a series of wide ranging masterplan objectives. For the purposes of evaluation of the options these were refined into the following five overarching objectives:

1. The role of Ngāi Tahu as mana whenua and Treaty partner is acknowledged, and Te Ao Māori values are embedded throughout.
2. Milford Sound Piopiotahi is protected now and into the future, recognising its World Heritage status.
3. The visitor experience is world class and enhances conservation and community.
4. Infrastructure is effective, efficient, resilient and sustainable (including access methods).
5. Visitors benefit the communities of Te Anau, Southland and Otago.

### HARNESS INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Leading technology, innovation and infrastructure is employed to ensure a world class visitor experience now and into the future.

conservation areas, the restoration of modified landscapes, and the mitigation of natural hazards through design decisions and infrastructure improvements.

- Reorganising Milford Sound Piopiotahi to remove visitor conflicts.

Visual impacts of cruise ships will be removed, noise and space impacts of air operations will be reduced, and visitation will be spaced out throughout the day to improve the quality of the visitor experience.

- Modernising infrastructure. New

investments will create a cohesive sense of place in keeping with the world-class setting while also reducing visitor risk and increasing the range of options for visitors to appreciate the natural grandeur and cultural significance of Milford Sound Piopiotahi.

These strategies aim to protect the essential character of place, weave mana whenua culture and history through the experience of place and people, reverse the erosion of ecological values in sensitive natural environments, adapt tourism management to address climate change and the post-pandemic environment, and harness the economic opportunities of tourism to benefit local communities. Specific to Milford Sound Piopiotahi and Te Anau, the project also untangles complex governance challenges of overlapping government and agency responsibilities and will reposition Milford Sound Piopiotahi as Aotearoa New Zealand’s “crown jewel” visitor experience, not only for international visitors but also for New Zealanders.

It seems fitting that one of the oldest and leading tourism experiences in New Zealand is now one of the first to actively explore a transformational change towards regenerative tourism.