

## **KE-TAG – roading update**

The NZ Transport Agency is putting significant resources into managing the roading impacts of the earthquake. They are part of the TIA-led Kaikoura Earthquake – Tourism Action Group (KE-TAG) and are also part of the Regional Economic Recovery Group of Officials, led by the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment.

Tourism, visiting drivers, holiday season travel, the associated traffic flows and safety are all on the Transport Agency's agenda.

The Transport Agency expect State Highway 1 south of Kaikoura to be open to limited traffic this side of Christmas, however further seismic and weather events may have an impact. State Highway 1 north of Kaikoura is far more problematic and could be closed for a year.

For the Picton to Christchurch journey, the main alternate route is State Highways 6, 63, 65 and 7 via Murchison and Lewis Pass. (Although tourists should also consider travelling down to Greymouth and using Arthurs Pass to cross to Christchurch, a two-day journey).

The capacity of the Lewis Pass is up to 15,000 vehicle movements a day. The Transport Agency forecast a peak next week of about 8000 vehicles per day. Just under 20% are likely to be trucks and other large vehicles.

There are pulses of congestion at predictable time periods each day, driven by the ferry timetables. Outside of these periods, traffic is generally flowing smoothly. There is no mobile coverage for about 80 km of the route and there are a number of one lane bridges.

The Transport Agency has developed a management plan for the alternate route via Lewis Pass. Up to \$20 million is being spent immediately to increase the number of slow vehicle bays, improve alignments and sight lines, especially for some one-way bridges, and introduce lower speed limits on some sections. This may add 15-30 minutes to the total trip but will improve safety and overall traffic flow.

A comprehensive communications plan will be implemented across the South Island to keep travellers informed of the latest travel information and any changes to the route. It will also include safety messaging and use print, radio, digital and road side communication channels. The initiatives from the Visiting Drivers Project successfully introduced in Otago, Southland and the West Coast will also be used on the alternative route between Picton and Christchurch to assist travellers.

Police have applied extra resources to this route and are developing accelerated procedures for dealing with incidents that inhibit traffic flows. Helicopter medical support services are being reviewed with a view to a rapid response capability to assist people quickly if an incident occurs.

The Transport Agency has ongoing engagement with freight operators. Some trucking companies have changed their operations to use two drivers between Picton and Christchurch on the alternate route as it is not always possible to complete a return trip in a day and comply with driver hours. Fuel companies have increased deliveries to key stops along the route. The Buller District Council is looking to fast track additional safe off-road parking at Springs Junction.

It is a comprehensive response and the Transport Agency will stay engaged with the tourism industry right through summer, via KE-TAG.

*9 December 2016*