
Frequently Asked Questions - State Highway 1 road opening and the alternate Picton to Christchurch route via Lewis Pass

Live document to be updated regularly: Current version 3 September 2018

If you have any questions you'd like added to this document please email info@nctir.com

STATE HIGHWAY 1 (SH1)

1. Is SH1 open 24/7?

Yes, it has been since 30 April 2018.

2. Is there ongoing work along SH1 in 2018?

Yes. Work continues to ensure the route stays safe and resilient for the future.

Crews will also be working to complete the recovery, resilience, and safety and amenities improvements package on the 60km section of State Highway 1 between Clarence and Oaro which will ultimately provide a higher level of service on the road for people living in the area, visitors to the region, and those travelling through. This is scheduled to finish by December 2019, however, the work will peak between October 2018 and April 2019.

3. What does SH1 look like and what's it like to drive on?

While SH1 is open, the rebuild work is not completed and some areas are still construction sites. There are some unsealed surfaces, lane closures and stop/go at remaining works sites along the route.

SH1 to the north of Kaikōura looks quite different in many places; new sections of highway have been built, along with a new bridge at Irongate and the road has been moved closer to the sea at some locations.

There are speed restrictions and no stopping zones along the worst affected areas to the north and south of Kaikōura.

4. How reliable will SH1 be and should I consider using the alternate route to avoid missing my ferry/flight?

You have two choices for travel in the upper South Island and will need to decide which route is best for you. Whichever route you choose to travel, please allow plenty of time in case of delays so you can get to your destination safely.

If you need to make a ferry, flight or other booking you may decide to take the alternate route as it has a more reliable journey time.

5. How long will it take me to drive SH1, compared to the alternate route (via state highways 63, 6, 65 and 7, through Lewis Pass)?

Drivers now have two good options for travel between Picton and Christchurch - you need

to decide which route is best for your needs.

You should allow 5.5 hours to drive from Picton to Christchurch on SH1 (one hour longer than pre-earthquake). The 'alternate route' remains a good 24/7 option and you should allow around 6.5 hours.

We are rebuilding SH1 to be safer through the worst affected sections. If there is a lot of rain or another significant event, we may have to close the road for short periods of time. The safety of those using the highway and working on the road will always be our top priority.

6. What is the speed limit on SH1 between Picton and Christchurch?

The speed limit varies, but there are speed restrictions along the corridor. It is critical that these are adhered to so as not to damage work that has been completed to date. The speed limits will vary along the route depending on the condition of the road and the work going on around the corridor.

7. Why do I have to wait at a stop/go when it looks like there's no cars coming?

There are many reasons we set up stop/go controls at work sites, although they may not always be obvious to drivers. It could be that we're moving large construction vehicles within the work site, using a helicopter, or that crew are working on a rock face. We know it can be frustrating when you can't see what's happening, but we try to keep stoppages to a minimum.

8. What is that ute with the flashing light that leads cars through some stop/go locations?

Pilot vehicles are used to keep traffic moving at a safe and appropriate speed through the site. They're used at locations where additional support is needed, such as if crew are working close to the road and excessive speed could pose a safety risk.

9. How will I know what sort of delays there might be?

Unexpected events such as large weather events, a crash, high volumes of traffic or seismic activity can cause delays so it's important that travellers allow plenty of time in case something happens.

Visit www.nzta.govt.nz/p2c or call 0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 44 44 49) to stay up-to-date with real-time travel information.

10. Are you planning to close SH1 again?

There are no planned closures at the moment, as our work can currently be safely progressed while the road is open. Closure dates are publicised as soon as they are confirmed, to give as much notice as possible to drivers and the community. At least four weeks' notice will be given for any upcoming road closures. We also post information about planned closures here: www.nzta.govt.nz/projects/kaikoura-earthquake-response/planned-closures/

11. What do I do if SH1 is closed?

If SH1 is closed for any reason (or you're travelling on the alternate route) Kaikōura can still be accessed via the Inland Road (Route 70) from Waipara.

12. Is there anything I should know about driving at night on SH1?

People can expect to see:

- Multiple sections where traffic moves to a single lane, which will be controlled by traffic signals rather than current daytime Stop/Go controls
- New signage including 'no stopping' and 'rockfall' signs (in addition to existing mesh and physical barriers) to protect road users and alert them to potential danger
- Trains travelling day and night in either direction between Blenheim and Christchurch: drivers should take care at level crossings and check both ways before proceeding
- Different types of traffic using the route including an increase in heavy vehicles, for example trucks and buses. Cyclists are advised to only use the road during the day for their own safety - due to multiple traffic lights and rockfall/no stopping areas
- That there will continue to be no stopping or camping in the two most earthquake-damaged areas just north and south of Kaikōura.

Road crews will be carrying out regular observations and inspections of the route throughout the night.

13. What driving advice should I follow on SH1?

Allow plenty of time in case of delays. Be prepared with food, water, and a fully charged cell phone.

For everyone's safety, strictly adhere to all road signage and speed restrictions. Follow any instructions by road crew.

It's important to 'drive to the conditions' and that means more than just the weather. It includes driving in an appropriate way for the road you're on, the vehicle you're in, the other traffic around you, and your level of experience.

Be patient, cautious and courteous. The road conditions will be unfamiliar to many drivers so a little bit of patience will go a long way.

Keep fresh by taking breaks, and support businesses in the local communities on the route.

14. Can I camp or stop along SH1 in the two areas just north and south of Kaikōura?

There is no overnight camping in the two most earthquake damaged sections just north and south of Kaikōura. There is also no stopping outside of designated areas which are signposted.

15. How can I be updated if information changes?

Keep checking the website www.nzta.govt.nz/p2c to make sure you have the most up to date information before you travel and when you're on your journey. The website includes links to real-time travel information maps or you can call 0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 44 44 49).

You can also:

- Follow us on social media. [South Island Facebook page](#), [Canterbury/West Coast Twitter](#)

or [Top of the South Island Twitter](#).

- Email info@nctir.com if you want to receive project updates. (Note: this email update is not real-time information)

16. Is SH1 open to trucks?

Yes, but restrictions will apply. See the freight section of these FAQs.

17. Can I take my caravan/campervan on SH1?

Yes. Heavy vehicles and trailers are able to travel on the route.

18. Can I take a bus/coach on SH1?

Yes. Buses and coaches are able to travel on the route.

19. Can I ride my motorcycle on SH1?

Yes. However, some areas where work is ongoing may have unsealed or gravel sections.

20. Can I cycle along SH1?

Yes. Cyclists must obey all signs and crew instructions. Cyclists may need assistance or be escorted in some areas. Cyclists are advised to only use the road during the day for their own safety - due to multiple traffic lights and rockfall/no stopping areas.

RAIL

21. Are there trains back during the day?

Yes, work trains and high rail vehicles are running during the day, so you must slow down as you're approaching a level crossing and be prepared to stop. Trains can come at any time, from either direction.

Freight trains will also start running every day from 1 October 2018, the day after the clocks go forward for daylight saving.

22. Can I take the train?

KiwiRail is working hard to get the track fully ready for passenger trains. The internationally-acclaimed Coastal Pacific tourism experience will be up and running from 1 December 2018, when the rail line is fully complete and all of the speed restrictions are lifted.

23. What has changed along the railway line?

As with the road, a lot of work has been done to reinstate the railway line. Generally, the rail line remains in the same place relative to the road along the route. However, in some areas through the narrow coastal sections road and rail have been moved closer together on a temporary basis until permanent re-alignments of road and rail are completed.

Travellers will notice the work to stabilise the slopes above the rail line and the fences and other structures now in place to protect both the rail line and road from further slips. They will also notice some of the rail tunnels are being extended with rock fall shelters.

Everyone should stay off the rail line at all times, only cross at official level crossings, and expect trains at any time in either direction.

ALTERNATE ROUTE (STATE HIGHWAYS 63, 6, 65 AND 7, VIA LEWIS PASS)

24. What is it like to drive the alternate Picton to Christchurch route?

Travelling the picturesque alternate route (via state highways 63, 6, 65 and 7, through Lewis Pass) between Picton and Christchurch takes on average 6.5 hours, but allow extra time as delays are likely. Journey time on this route is quite consistent.

The alternate route is challenging to drive in places - it is narrow and winding in many places, with single-lane bridges and there are speed restrictions. For everyone's safety, strictly adhere to all road signage and speed restrictions.

Drivers need to be patient, cautious and courteous - if needed, pull over and let traffic behind you pass when it is safe to do so to prevent drivers becoming frustrated and making poor overtaking decisions.

Do not drive when you're tired; tired drivers are slower to react, make poor judgement decisions and find it harder to concentrate. There are rest stops with fuel, food, coffee and toilets at Culverden, Springs Junction, Murchison and St Arnaud. Take your time: stop for regular breaks at towns along the route and make the journey part of your holiday.

Be prepared for unexpected delays with food, water, and a fully charged cell phone.

A busy work schedule is planned for the summer roading season, so expect to see stop/go signals along this route also, from October 2018 to April 2019.

25. Will speed limits on the alternate route go back to what they were before the earthquake once SH1 reopens?

The Transport Agency will consult around speed limits on the alternate route again in the new year (2019), once SH1 becomes fully operational and traffic volumes have reduced to a stable level.

SAFETY

26. Is SH1 safe to drive?

Safety is the number one priority.

Crews working on the road are monitoring work sites and traffic and ensuring that any issues are dealt with quickly.

27. Why is it safe to drive at night from 30 April but not before?

An extensive construction programme has been delivered over the last year and the critical safety work was completed by 30 April.

More than 30,000 square metres of steel mesh has been wrapped around slips south of Kaikōura and new infrastructure such as bridges and seawalls has been built to the north.

All of this construction work is designed to ensure the route stays safe and resilient for the future, with work continuing through 2018 to finish and improve the corridor.

28. If there is another earthquake, (or weather event) will that close SH1?

SH1 may need to close temporarily if there is ongoing bad weather or an unexpected event; however, this could apply to any state highway. For real-time travel information between Picton and Christchurch you should check www.nzta.govt.nz/p2c regularly.

29. If there is an earthquake while I am driving on SH1 what should I do?

If there is an earthquake while you're on SH1 and driving through one of the work sites you must follow road crew instructions at all times.

The Official New Zealand Road Code advice about driving during an earthquake is as follows:

In a severe earthquake driving can be very difficult because the road may be shaking or moving up and down beneath you.

If you think that an earthquake is happening while you're driving, you should:

- pull over and stop
- stay inside your vehicle until the shaking stops. Your vehicle will provide you with some protection against falling objects.

After the earthquake:

- if power lines have fallen onto your vehicle, stay inside it until help arrives
- if you continue driving straight after the earthquake, be on the lookout for slips or other road damage and obstacles
- turn on your radio and listen for news about possible road closures and other information.

ENVIRONMENT

30. Is the seal pupping/seal pool at Ōhau Point accessible yet?

The Ōhau Stream walk remains closed until further notice because it is unsafe due to earthquake damage, and public access is currently restricted in this area due to construction work. The Department of Conservation will assess the feasibility of repairing earthquake damage and reinstating the track nearer to completion of the highway reconstruction work in this area.

More information: www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2017/seals-camping-and-short-walks-on-sh_1-journey-through-Kaikōura/

FREIGHT

31. How long will it take heavy vehicles to drive between Picton and Christchurch on SH1?

It is expected to take heavy vehicles an hour longer than pre-earthquake. However, you should allow plenty of time in case of delays which can happen for many reasons such as a crash or wet weather.

32. What heavy vehicles can use SH1?

TYPE OF HEAVY VEHICLE	CAN USE SH1?	ANY RELEVANT INFORMATION OR NEW RESTRICTIONS?
Standard heavy vehicles up to 46 tonnes GCM restricted to a height of 4.25m	Yes	
HPMV (H) vehicles and 50 MAX restricted to a height of 4.25m	Yes – with relevant permit	There may be additional speed restriction on overweight permits covered by a blanket addendum sent to permit holders.
Over-dimension vehicles and loads	Yes – if you fall into Category 1 and do not exceed 3.1m wide No – if you exceed the Category 1 width limits or any other Category – must continue to use alternate route via Springs Junction.	

33. Why is the route restricted to a height of 4.25m?

The Transport Agency had planned to improve the current dimensions of the tunnels on SH1, however due to the earthquake this work was disrupted.

Any trucks greater than 4.25m in height that meet the new Vehicle Dimension and Mass rules will need to use the Inland Route to Kaikōura until further notice - this includes after SH1 opens 24/7. We will let the freight industry know when the tunnel dimensions have been increased but it is expected mid-2018.

All drivers need to be cautious going through the tunnels and stay to the centre of the lane.

34. Where can heavy vehicles stop on SH1?

There are no truck stopping zones in the most earthquake damaged areas both north and south of Kaikōura as these are still construction zones. Even when the route reopens 24/7 there will be no truck stopping zones. Any drivers wanting to stop in the area should stop in Kaikōura.

Operators and drivers must plan rest breaks to comply with the Worktime Rule provisions, the lack of rest and stopping areas cannot be used as a reason to not comply with these provisions.

35. Will the alternate route continue to be maintained?

Yes, the route will continue to be maintained as part of the ongoing state highway maintenance programme. There will be extra resource on the alternate route over winter, and if SH1 has to close.

36. What is SH1 like for heavy vehicles to drive?

There are some unsealed surfaces, lane closures and stop/go at remaining works sites along the route. SH1 to the north of Kaikōura will look quite different in many places; new sections of highway have been built, along with a new bridge at Irongate and the road has been moved closer to the sea at some locations.

All drivers will need to take care, obey signage and adhere to all temporary speed limits.

Truck drivers need to take extra care when coming in and out of the construction zones and keep at 10kmph below the advisory speed on corners.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. When did SH1 reopen?

SH1 re-opened to daytime traffic on 15 December 2017. On 30 April 2018 the road reopened at night - making it a 24/7 route once again.

2. Why was SH1 closed at night prior to 30 April 2018?

Before this date, two of the most earthquake damaged sections of the road were closed overnight (7.30pm to 7.30am) as a safety precaution. They were (south of Kaikōura) between Clarence and Mangamaunu and (south of Kaikōura) between the SH1/Leader Road intersection, which is north of Cheviot, and Peketa.