
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 17 January 2017

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

STATE HIGHWAY 1

1. When did State Highway 1 reopen?

State Highway 1 (SH1) re-opened on Friday 15 December 2017.

2. What does the road 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 Kaikoura 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 Kaikoura. At this stage, we expect planned closures will also be needed in these areas to safely complete remaining work.

3. Is the road open 24/7?

No. Two sections of the road are closed overnight (8.30pm to 7am) as a safety precaution for the public. They are between Clarence and Mangamaunu (North of Kaikoura) and between Goose Bay and Peketa (south of Kaikoura). The risk from rock falls and slips will be managed while resilience work is completed. Safety is our main priority.

Consider road closure hours before starting your trip and leave enough time to be clear of these sections so you can continue your journey.

Crews drive through both closure sites before 7am each day to ensure the road is safe for opening and another drive through is carried out each evening to ensure all traffic has cleared the road before nightfall. Road closure points are manned 24/7.

After summer, the opening hours of these sections will be reviewed.

It's important to note that the rail corridor is closely monitored and is able to run trains at night because it is a controlled network. KiwiRail's night-time freight services also allow rebuild work to continue where needed during the day.

4. Can I camp or stop along SH1 in the two closure areas?

There is no overnight camping in the two sections of road that are closed at night. They are the 21km between Clarence and Mangamaunu (north of Kaikoura) and the 8km area between Peketa and Goose Bay (south of Kaikoura).

In these areas there will also be no stopping outside of designated areas which are signposted.

5. What time do the gates to the two closure areas (north and south of Kaikoura) actually shut?

The gates at Clarence and Mangamaunu (north of Kaikoura) and Peketa and Goose Bay (south of Kaikoura) will close at 8.30pm each night – so at that point no more vehicles will be able to enter those sections of road. People already in there at 8.30pm should continue to make their way along the route heading out of the closure section. Crew will patrol through both closure areas to make sure all vehicles are gone before closing them for the evening.

6. 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.

Average current journey time is a minimum of 5.5 hours to drive from Picton to Christchurch on SH1 (one hour longer than pre-earthquake). However, you should allow plenty of extra time as delays are likely and can be caused by various reasons such as heavy traffic, a crash or bad weather.

The 'alternate route' (via state highways 63, 6, 65 and 7, through Lewis Pass) remains a good option for travel around the top of the South Island and is currently taking a minimum of 6.5 hours, although you should also allow plenty of time in case of delays on this route. There are ongoing improvements being made to this route as part of the Government's \$60 million package which continue over the summer season along with an ongoing summer maintenance programme.

Journey time estimates are as accurate as they can be, based on the Transport Agency's monitoring of the network and ongoing assessment of traffic patterns. Unexpected events such as a crash, high volumes of traffic, ongoing wet weather or seismic activity can cause delays so it's important that travellers allow plenty of time in case something happens and check.

You should regularly check the Transport Agency's dedicated web page - www.nzta.govt.nz/p2c or call 0800 4 HIGHWAYS (0800 44 44 49) for the latest information

before you travel and at key decision points on your route.

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

7. Is there ongoing work along SH1 in 2018?

Yes. The number of work sites reduced over Christmas but ramped up from 8 January 2018 to bring the road corridor back to its pre-earthquake condition.

The crews will also be working to deliver the Government's \$231 million 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.

8. Will the ongoing work cause delays on SH1?

While work crews are working at maximum capacity, any works affecting journey time are carefully planned to keep disruption to a minimum.

9. 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.

The alternate route via Lewis Pass currently has consistent travel times of about 6.5 hours between Picton and Christchurch although you should allow extra time in case of delays. 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.

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. It's important to remember, the safety of those using the highway and working on the road will always be our top priority.

We also expect traffic volumes to be high over summer and this is expected to make travel times slower on both routes. There are roadworks on state highways across the country as the summer months are ideal for sealing or resealing the road, fixing pot holes and repainting road markings due to the warmer weather and more daylight hours.

Keep checking the website www.nzta.govt.nz/p2c to make sure you have the most up to date information at least two hours before you travel and when you're on your journey. Any planned closure information will be available on the website as soon as it is available later in the year which may help when planning journey dates and times.

Whichever route you choose to travel, please allow plenty of time in case of delays so you can get to your destination safely.

10. 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). Bookmark these pages and keep checking back.

You can also:

- Follow us on social media. [South Island Facebook page](#), [Canterbury/West Coast Twitter](#) or [Top of the South Island Twitter](#).
- Sign up for 'OnTheMove' at www.onthemove.govt.nz to automatically get emails about major events (or issues that require caution) on any state highways you choose
- Email info@nctir.com if you want to receive updates on the earthquake recovery effort and the reopening of SH1. (Note: this email update is not real-time information)

Real-time traffic signage will be displayed at key decision points such as Waipara so that drivers don't head down a route that is closed ahead.

11. What is the speed limit on State Highway 1 between Picton and Christchurch?

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.

12. 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.

13. Will there be opportunities to take pictures and view the work that's been done?

Initially when SH1 opens over the holiday period the priority is to connect communities and keep traffic moving. Traffic will be at its peak during the holidays and delays are likely.

We understand that some motorists will be interested in getting a closer look at the work that's been done to reinstate the coastal corridor but drivers must drive at a safe speed and only pull over at safe locations so they don't affect the flow of traffic.

There will be areas where there is no stopping (where there is the most damage) and these will need to be observed to keep everyone safe.

14. Is SH1 open to trucks?

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

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

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

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

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

17. Can I ride my motorcycle on SH1?

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

18. Can I cycle along SH1?

Yes. Cyclists will be able to cycle along the road where they did pre-earthquake; however, they must obey all signs and crew instructions. Cyclists may need assistance or be escorted in some areas.

19. Can I take the train?

KiwiRail is working hard to get the track ready for passenger trains but they won't be running until later in 2018. The Main North Line between Blenheim and Christchurch is now open to freight trains in a limited capacity at night so that the rebuild of the road and rail can continue during the day. The internationally acclaimed Coastal Pacific tourism experience will be up and running when the rail line is fully complete and all of the speed restrictions are lifted.

20. 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)

21. 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 (in normal conditions) 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.

Slow down, keep left and remember you need to share the road and take joint responsibility to ensure everyone gets to their destination safely this holiday season.

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.

22. When SH1 reopened did all trucks/traffic go back to using that route from the alternate route?

Opening SH1 gives people two good options for travel from Picton to Christchurch.

Some traffic has go back to using SH1 but that traffic on the alternate route will stay at a higher volume than pre-earthquake for some time, especially with SH1 closed at night in two sections. This may be because businesses or holiday makers will prefer to use the alternate route until SH1 has been open for a while and has a reliable journey time.

23. Following the SH1 reopening have the alternate route roads gone back to normal – no more worksites and delays?

There are still works sites along the alternate route as the Transport Agency works to improve the safety and resilience of the route as part of the Government's \$60m package of improvements. The investment includes resealing, repairing and strengthening the roads; road widening through narrow or winding sections; pull-over areas and slow vehicle bays for trucks, and bailey bridges.

There is also a summer road and roadside maintenance programme which ramps up on all state highways during the dry weather and longer daylight hours.

As part of the [Safe Roads programme](#) work will begin in February to improve road and roadside safety on State Highway 7 between Waipara and Waikari. Improved safety features will include side barriers, rumble strips, upgrade of existing barriers on three bridges, improved signage and high performance road markings along the whole route.

It's important to remember that all of this work on the alternate route is helping to create a safer and more resilient transport system.

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

Once SH1 becomes fully operational and traffic volumes have reduced to a stable level the Transport Agency will review speed limits on the alternate route again. Ideally this will be within six months of SH1 reopening, but it will depend on traffic volumes.

SAFETY

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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

28. Is the seal pupping/seal pool at Ohau Point accessible yet?

No. One of the ongoing worksites is around Ohau Point so access to amenity areas nearby will be restricted initially. As work continues, these areas will be opened up to visitors. More information: www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2017/seals-camping-and-short-walks-on-sh1-journey-through-kaikoura/

FREIGHT

29. What times is the road be open for heavy vehicles?

Two sections of SH1 are closed overnight over summer to all vehicles as a safety precaution. North of Kaikoura the road is closed overnight between Clarence and Mangamaunu. South of Kaikoura the night closure is between Goose Bay and Peketa. The daytime opening hours for these sections are 7am to 8.30pm. Consider road closure hours before undertaking your journey and leave enough time to be clear of them so you can continue on to your destination.

30. 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.

31. What heavy vehicles can use SH1 now?

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	Refer to other questions 38 and 42 below.
HPMV (H) vehicles and 50 MAX restricted to a height of 4.25m	Yes – with relevant permit	
Overweight vehicles or loads	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 or loads	<p>Yes - if you fall into Category 1 and do not exceed 3.1m wide</p> <p>No - if you exceed the Category 1 width limits or any other Category- must continue to use alternate route via Springs Junction.</p>	Please note the legislated travel restrictions during the holiday period.
----------------------------------	--	---

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

In February 2017, the Vehicle Dimension and Mass Rule 2016 allowed for an increase in dimensions of trucks from 2.5m width x 4.25m height; to 2.55m width x 4.3m height, allowing an additional 50mm to both width and height. The Transport Agency had planned to improve the current dimensions of the tunnels on SH1, however due to the earthquake this work was disrupted. All drivers need to be cautious going through the tunnels and stay to the centre of the lane.

Any trucks greater than 4.25m height that meet the new Vehicle Dimension and Mass rules will need to use the Inland Route to Kaikoura.

33. Have trucks using the alternate route gone back to using SH1 since it reopened?

Some have but the freight industry will make route decisions based on what is best for their operation. Many have informed us that they're likely to keep using the alternate route over the summer due to its reliable journey time. The night closure sections north and south of Kaikoura may also affect route choice.

34. Where will heavy vehicles be able to stop on SH1?

There are no truck stopping zones in the most earthquake damaged areas both north and south of Kaikoura as these are still construction zones. Any drivers wanting to stop in the area should stop in Kaikoura.

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. Work is ongoing to deliver on the \$60million improvements package on the alternate route which includes resealing, repairing and strengthening the roads; road widening through narrow or winding sections; pull-over areas and slow vehicle bays for trucks, and bailey bridges.

There is also a summer road and roadside maintenance programme which ramps up on the alternate route (and all state highways) during the dry weather.

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 Kaikoura 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 10k below the advisory speed on corners.

37. Will the new road be able to cope with a number of heavy vehicles using it?

The road will be able to accommodate heavy vehicles along with other traffic when it reopens. There are hundreds of heavy vehicles currently working to restore the route with no problems.

38. What will happen after work on SH1 ramps up again from 8 January?

The NZ Transport Agency will continue to engage with the freight industry in the new year to update on any changes.