

Top ten reasons to object to the Fiordland Link Experience

1. World Heritage and our National Parks mean the world to us.

Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area is designated as such due to the overwhelming wild and unpopulated landscapes of Fiordland and Mount Aspiring National Parks, dense in native flora and fauna, and their neighbouring conservation areas. World Heritage sites belong to everyone, forever. "Heritage is our legacy and an irreplaceable source of life and inspiration." [UNESCO]. New Zealand is obliged to protect this heritage, and its Department of Conservation is obliged to preserve our National Parks and conservation areas and required to follow its management plans, such as the Conservation Management Strategy and the Fiordland National Park Management Plan, prepared in consultation with interested groups to preserve our wilderness. The Fiordland Link Experience contravenes these obligations. Snowdon Forest Conservation Area is managed by the Department of Conservation as a "remote visitor setting" to protect its natural and historic resources. To compromise any part of the World Heritage area simply for commercial profit, is unequivocally inappropriate and shocking.

2. The monorail and its terminus will cause permanent environmental damage.

A wide variety of landscapes exist in this area from grassed river valleys, mixed beech forest, to mountain peaks. This scheme would sacrifice 67 hectares of mature beech forest habitat in exchange for a mass tourism infrastructure more consistent with a city than a conservation area. The monorail would consist of massive concrete beams supported by concrete bases and piers every 20 metres. A permanent fully formed 'construction road' would run alongside it. This is clearly inconsistent with both the purpose for which the land is held, and the remote visitor setting. It is inconsistent with the current Conservation Management Strategy for this area. The hectares will not only be lost, they will split an ecosystem in half. The forest canopy will be laid opened up to accommodate both the monorail and the construction road and further destruction of trees on either side will be necessary to prevent the threat of trees from the mature beech forest falling on the line. The total amount of forest affected is significant larger than many of the individual conservation areas within Southland.

3. It's a terribly dangerous precedent.

If this scheme is approved, what next? It could be a precedent for further exploitation of conservation lands. For example, a clause in the Ngai Tahu Deed of Settlement relating to the beautiful, nearby Greenstone Valley says "If the Minister permits the undertaking of any development of any form of road or railway between Lake Wakatipu and the Milford Road through the Snowdon conservation area (the permitted development), the Minister will not withhold consent under clause 5.1 for any proposed development of the same kind or a similar kind by the Landholder on the Land if the area affected by the permitted development has ecological and recreational values of equal or greater significance to those developments, and the Landholder's proposed development has no greater impact on the environment than the permitted development."

4. The process of approving the Fiordland Link Experience is flying in the face of "due process" and existing constraints.

There are existing management documents that should be followed by the Department of Conservation when considering activity in its National Parks. These management documents, such as the Conservation Management Strategy and the Fiordland National Park Management Plan, have been prepared in extensive consultation with interested groups, such as recreational users and conservationists, and are extremely important to safeguard the protection of our wilderness. Yet prior to any public consultation, the monorail was already given initial approval to go ahead by the Department of Conservation. The Minister of Conservation has notified her intention to grant this concession subject to public submissions. To date she has chosen not to address the fact that due process was not followed by her department.

5. The Fiordland Link Experience will destroy the recreational experiences of many.

The areas affected by this scheme including Kiwi Burn, Mavora Lakes, the Upukerora area and the upper Whites-tone. They are used by all ages, especially local people, doing all kinds of Kiwi things in a traditional Kiwi way, ranging from the local kayak clubs meeting for kayak competitions, to families going on day hikes and holding barbecues. It is used for hunting, fishing, tramping,

horse riding, biking, running, and traditional family and group camping. The areas affected by this scheme are a rare thing; an accessible introduction to a remote back country experience that is perfect for children and their families without the greater demands and risks of expeditions deeper into Fiordland. The Snowdon area is well recognised as providing 'a variety of year round recreational opportunities suitable for family groups, trampers, fishermen and hunters.' (DOC Snowdon Forest brochure). Yet Riverstone Holdings want DOC to grant them a 'hunter exclusion zone' around their monorail, extending to at least 3,000 hectares. The construction of a terminus and monorail and constant arrival of coaches will destroy the ambience as well as the physical environment of this special area.

6. What experience anyway?

Riverstone Holdings Ltd originally argued that the Fiordland Link Experience would be quicker than the existing road from Queenstown to Milford Sound and presented this as a major reason for the scheme. However, Riverstone Holdings now admits its multi-modal journey is unlikely to be quicker. Riverstone Holdings argues instead that the "visitor experience" of their multi-modal trip will be worth the scheme going ahead. We disagree. Rushing through a beech forest on a train will not give an enhanced visitor experience. Visitors will not get any sense of the beauty of the bush as it whizzes by at 90 km/hr, and certainly will not have the "close-up environmental experience" Riverstone would have us believe. Getting on and off different transport modes will be exhausting for the disabled, elderly or those with children. Conversely, at present, visitors can board a scenic coach with large windows from either Queenstown or Te Anau and be taken directly on the existing road to Milford Sound through beautiful countryside with incredible mountain vistas. This provides a wonderful and relaxing experience, only interrupted by en-route historical villages providing well-established and high quality food and toilet facilities.

7. It's not a sustainable, public transport solution.

The project is not a sustainable transport solution. There are various projects that could easily reduce the number of vehicles on the existing road from Te Anau to Milford Sound, such as park and ride schemes (advised by the Southland Integrated Transport Study), and coach companies offering 'driver goes free' tickets to car drivers who take the coach. There is even an existing tried and tested train route parallel to the existing road route on the first leg of the journey from Queenstown towards Te Anau, up a wide, safe valley. Sadly closed years ago along most of its length, the line is partially serviced by a tourist steam train but could be restored as a public modern railway providing transport for local people between Southland and Otago, as well as part of a transport link

for tourists bound for Milford. The monorail, by comparison, is a private venture for private profit contrary to the principles of the freedom of access.

8. Queenstown is not the gateway to Milford Sound, so there's no need to force more routes between the two.

Te Anau, a beautiful township on the edge of Lake Te Anau, services visitors to Fiordland. It provides the perfect stop off point for people wishing to visit Milford Sound, accessible from Te Anau by coach in two hours. Te Anau provides accommodation, restaurants, shops and even a cinema. The money-driven obsession that is currently trying to link Queenstown and Milford Sound, through treacherous mountains in an earthquake zone and world heritage area, is particularly incongruous when Te Anau already exists as a service town and base for Milford-bound tourists, with easy access to Te Anau from Queenstown by car or bus, and possibly rail in the future, up a wide valley that doesn't run through National Parks. Te Anau is also easily accessible for visitors arriving from Invercargill or Dunedin.

9. It just plain scares us.

Would you want to travel on a mono rail through an earthquake zone on hillsides prone to land slips?

10. There's not even an economic benefit to the local economy.

The construction of the Fiordland Link Experience, at massive cost, will mean temporary work for some people. It will also bring financial benefit to Infinity Investment beyond that initially perceived. This is because the Fiordland Link Experience is planned to terminate at an Infinity Investment owned hotel at Te Anau Downs, which stands on its own, 29km from the nearest town (Te Anau). (From Te Anau Downs it is over 90 km further to Milford Sound.) But conversely it will detrimentally affect the economies of tourist towns and villages on the existing road route from Queenstown, which not only passes through Te Anau but also Five Rivers, Athol, Garston, and Mossburn. These historic settlements all provide cafe and accommodation facilities and local employment. The monorail would also detrimentally affect existing coach operators who use this route and have invested in scenic coaches, providing a good visitor experience. The monopolistic Fiordland Link Experience may encourage more visitors to leave the region entirely after taking the controlled Queenstown to Milford Sound day trip, rather than undertaking an extended visit to explore the many other beautiful sites in the region that are accessible from Te Anau, such as Lake Te Anau, Lake Manapouri, and the Southern Scenic Route.