

Tasman Highway closure near Orford

Frequently Asked Questions

3 June 2021

Contents

About the decision.....	2
What is the risk?	2
Why wasn't there more notice?	2
How did you decide there was a risk?	2
When was the Department first advised of the danger?	2
Why haven't the rocks been removed before now?.....	2
About the closure.....	3
When did the road closure start?	3
How long will the road be closed for?.....	3
Could the closure be delayed?.....	3
Do you really have to close the road 24/7?.....	3
Can you leave one lane open?.....	3
Can I access the Prosser River?	4
Can I access the convict trail?.....	4
Can I come and watch the rocks being removed?.....	4
Alternative routes	4
What alternative routes are in place?	4
What will the road closure add to the journey time between Hobart and Orford?.....	4
Can I use Wielangta Road as an alternative route?.....	4
What are you doing to keep Lake Leake Road and Wielangta Road safe during the closure?.....	5
Can heavy vehicles use Lake Leake Road as an alternative route?	5
Has Wielangta Road been upgraded?.....	5
Can you put a ferry service on?	6
About the Rock Removal works	6
What are you doing to fix the problem?.....	6
How much rock needs to be removed?.....	6
Why aren't you using explosives to dislodge the rocks?	6
What is being done to protect the environment?	6
What about the convict wall?	7
I have heard that there are old explosives in the rocks.....	7
Is the work being done a permanent fix or a short term solution?/.....	7
How can I get updates about the work?.....	7
Impacts on other services	7
What will the impact be on buses?	7
What will the impact be on emergency services?.....	7
What about schools?.....	8
Contact information.....	8

About the decision

What is the risk?

At this stage there is no specific suggestion the rock will fall now, but the latest assessment suggests that it will fall any time in the next 10 years and this could be brought on by severe weather such as strong frost or heavy rain.

There is a large volume of rock which could cause extensive damage if it were to fall and would be a significant risk to anyone using the road at the time.

We recognise this will impact the community and apologise for the inconvenience, but our highest priority will always be to keep people safe.

Why wasn't there more notice?

Recent detailed investigations of the rock face showed that there is a high risk that rocks could be dislodged by frost or significant rain.

Since this advice was received, we have been developing a plan for the safe and efficient removal of the rock, while minimising the length of road closure as much as possible.

The weather forecast for the weekend of 29 and 30 May became more certain over the week of 24 May, with frost predicted in the Orford area on that weekend. The forecast frost meant the decision was made on the morning of Wednesday 26 May to close the road and announced early that afternoon.

We recognise this will impact the community and apologise for the inconvenience, but the closure is essential to keep everyone safe.

How did you decide there was a risk?

The Department recently ordered further detailed investigation of the area to help better understand any risk.

This investigation used modern aerial photography and scanning technology which provided new information, that there is a risk that rocks could be dislodged after frost or heavy rain.

When was the Department first advised of the danger?

The Department first received notification from its consultants of the increased risk level late Wednesday afternoon, 19 May 2021. There was no frost or significant rain forecast at that time.

Why haven't the rocks been removed before now?

We have been monitoring the rocks in the area for some time and the information available did not show any significant risk of rockfall, including from the large boulder currently restrained by cables.

To ensure we had the best information available, earlier this year we implemented additional regular inspections of the boulder and also commissioned new technological investigations.

While the initial investigation found that the boulder had not moved and there was no increased physical risk, the aerial survey, which was completed very recently, raised the risk for rockfall of nearby and supporting rocks.

Once this advice was received, we have been developing a plan for the safe and efficient removal of the rocks.

Unfortunately, even if this risk had been identified earlier, the same removal works would be required, so the impact to the community from the road closure could not have been avoided.

About the closure

When did the road closure start?

The road was closed at 11:55 pm Friday, 28 May.

How long will the road be closed for?

Work to reduce the risk and fix the problem is expected to take several weeks, weather permitting.

The Department will advise the community once there is a confirmed timeframe and will also provide regular updates to keep the community informed throughout the project.

We recognise this will impact the community and apologise for the inconvenience, but the closure is essential to keep everyone safe.

Could the closure be delayed?

The closure needed to happen to remove the immediate hazard to the public travelling through the area.

Do you really have to close the road 24/7?

While we acknowledge the impact on the community and apologise for the inconvenience, the closure needs to happen for public safety reasons.

A gravel 'cushion' has been laid on the road to prevent it from being damaged by falling rocks and it will remain in place until the rock removal work is complete. The gravel cushion, and the large rocks that will be dropped from the cliff face make the road impassable.

We apologise for the inconvenience, but this route will be impassable until the works are completed. Our biggest priority during these works is to keep everyone safe.

Can you leave one lane open?

The road closed at 11:55 pm Friday 28 May 2021 and will only open once all the rock has been removed. The process of rock removal will make the road completely impassable until works are completed.

Site monitoring and preparation work is underway. Work to establish safe access at the site and prepare for the rock removal began on Saturday 30 May.

We apologise for the inconvenience, but this route will be impassable until the rock removal work is complete.

Can I access the Prosser River?

Our biggest priority during these works is to keep everyone safe. In order to safely manage the worksite, MAST issued a notice that made the Prosser River a prohibited area from 11.55 pm Friday 28 May 2021 until further notice.

We will share photos and videos throughout the works so the community can keep up to date with our progress.

Can I access the convict trail?

Our biggest priority during these works is to keep everyone safe. In order to safely manage the worksite while we are removing the rocks, the convict trail across the Prosser River is closed.

We will share photos and videos throughout the works so the community can keep up to date with our progress.

Can I come and watch the rocks being removed?

Our biggest priority during these works is to keep everyone safe. There is no public access to the worksite. The Department is regularly updating the Transport website and RoadsTas Facebook page with photos and video footage from the site.

Alternative routes

What alternative routes are in place?

Road users wanting to travel to the area must seek alternative routes, including Lake Leake Road.

While Wielangta Road can be used, it is a gravel road and is not suitable for large volumes of traffic.

Detour signage is located at key points along the Tasman Highway, including at Sorell, and the Lake Leake Road junction between Swansea and Bicheno.

What will the road closure add to the journey time between Hobart and Orford?

The detour will add about 2 hours to the journey from Hobart to Orford.

For people accessing Swansea from Hobart, it should add about 30 minutes to their journey. We understand the impact that these longer detours will have on the community and apologise for the inconvenience, but our priority will always be to keep everyone safe.

Can I use Wielangta Road as an alternative route?

While Wielangta Road can be used, it is a gravel road and is not suitable for large volumes of traffic.

We have placed detour signage at key points along the Tasman Highway, to advise people to use Lake Leake Road as the most appropriate alternative route.

There is no mobile phone coverage for most of Wielangta Road.

During periods of higher use and bad weather, sections of the road may degrade and require repairs.

We are continually monitoring both Wielangta Road and Lake Leake Road during the closure through both regular and ad hoc inspections.

While the journey along Wielangta Road may be shorter in terms of distance, Lake Leake Road will be a smoother, safer, and easier journey.

If you do use Wielangta Road, please drive to the conditions, and obey the posted speed limits and warning signs.

What are you doing to keep Lake Leake Road and Wielangta Road safe during the closure?

We have done some immediate maintenance and improvement works on both Lake Leake Road and Wielangta Road, including putting extra road markers and signage in place, and grading and laying new gravel on Wielangta Road.

We will also be treating Lake Leake Road to prevent ice forming whenever ice or frost have been forecast, and we have snow ploughs on standby if there's a chance of snow falling.

Our contractors are regularly inspecting these roads, and will log any issues for immediate repairs.

If you notice a hazard or issue on the State road network or on Wielangta Road, you can call our hotline on 1300 139 933, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The call centre operator will take down details of the issue and log it in our system for repairs.

Can heavy vehicles use Lake Leake Road as an alternative route?

Most freight that usually travels on the closed section of the Tasman Highway will be able to use the Lake Leake Road detour.

Heavy vehicle operators who have concerns or questions about available detours should contact hvaccess@stategrowth.tas.gov.au for a conversation about their particular circumstances.

Has Wielangta Road been upgraded?

Given the potential of it experiencing increased traffic during the closure, we are working with Wielangta Road's owners and doing some immediate maintenance and improvement works.

The works include grading the road, laying new gravel in sections, and putting extra road markers, barriers and signage in place. We have also reduced the speed limit on Wielangta Road and have transport inspectors in place at either end of the road to monitor traffic and provide information to the community.

While Wielangta Road can be used, it is a gravel road and is not suitable for large volumes of traffic. During periods of higher use and bad weather, sections of the road may degrade and require repairs.

We are continually monitoring both Wielangta Road and Lake Leake Road during the closure through both regular and ad hoc inspections.

Any safety issues will be logged during these inspections and then fixed, and we have a grader on standby to make immediate repairs when required.

To report a safety hazard on Wielangta Road or Lake Leake Road call 1300 139 933.

Can you put a ferry service on?

We spoke to local ferry operators to see whether a ferry service was feasible. Their advice was that a ferry service was not feasible and wouldn't save any time on a trip between Triabunna and Hobart.

The coastline is subject to very rough weather, and the journey would be unpleasant. A ferry trip between Triabunna and Dunalley would take between two and three hours, followed by a 50-minute trip by car to Hobart. All up, the trip by ferry and car from Triabunna to Hobart would take between three and four hours. The trip from Triabunna to Hobart via Lake Leake road would take about three hours in total.

About the Rock Removal works

What are you doing to fix the problem?

Rock movement monitoring and preparation work is complete. Work to establish safe access at the site and prepare for the rock removal began on Saturday 30 May.

How much rock needs to be removed?

We are looking at a section of the rock wall about 75 metres long, and 20 metres high.

We won't know how much rock needs to be removed from this section until the rock removal is underway, which makes it impossible for us to give a firm timeframe at this time.

Rock removal is expected to start on Thursday, 3 June, weather, and other conditions permitting.

We know the public is eager for more information about how long the closure will be in place and will keep the community informed at every stage of the process with regular updates.

Why aren't you using explosives to dislodge the rocks?

The rock we need to remove is just one part of a complex rock formation through the gorge. It is important that we remove the rock safely, efficiently, and without causing damage to the surrounding environment.

The best way to do this is to dislodge the rocks using airbags, and then to use chemicals to break up large chunks of rock once they have been dropped.

What is being done to protect the environment?

We are doing whatever we can to protect the natural environment.

We are preventing gravel, soil, and other materials from falling into the river by laying geofabric on the road and drains, before placing a gravel 'cushion' on the road to prevent it from being damaged

by falling rocks. In case materials do fall in the river, we are also installing a floating curtain in the river to capture any sediment.

What about the convict wall?

While the retaining wall is not state heritage listed, the Department appreciates it has local significance and is carefully planning to protect the wall and the road surface from damage, including by installing concrete barriers and a gravel 'cushion' on the road to prevent the road and retaining wall from being damaged by falling rocks.

I have heard that there are old explosives in the rocks.

We do not have any evidence to indicate that explosives are present in the area, and no drill holes or explosives have been found at the site. Appropriate measures have been put in place to ensure the work takes place safely. We will continue to monitor the situation and stop work if any evidence of explosives is found.

Is the work being done a permanent fix or a short-term solution?

The work we are doing at the moment is to remove the immediate risk posed to traffic travelling through the area if rocks were to fall onto the Tasman Highway. We're also working to develop a long-term management plan for the area to ensure it remains safe and accessible.

How can I get updates about the work?

We will be publishing information about the works on the following platforms:

- The Transport website: www.transport.tas.gov.au/orford
- The RoadsTas Facebook page: www.facebook.com/roadsTAS/
- The Tasman Highway closure email newsletter. A sign-up link is in the 'Contact' tab on the project webpage: <http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/orford>

We will also provide updates to media outlets.

Impacts on other services

What will the impact be on buses?

We are working closely with bus companies, the heavy vehicle industry, the Department of Education, tourism operators, businesses, and local residents to understand their needs and provide and work through alternatives.

For information about public bus services and school bus service in the area please visit the Public Transport service updates page on the Transport website: www.transport.tas.gov.au or call 03 6166 3343 and select option 3.

What will the impact be on emergency services?

We have been working with emergency services and they have their own procedures in place.

What about schools?

We have been working closely with the Department of Education, who are putting in alternative arrangements for school children affected by the closure.

You can find more information by phone on 03 6165 6466, or through your local school's Facebook page.

Contact information

If local businesses affected by the closure have any questions or would like further information they are encouraged to contact Business Tasmania on 1800 440 026 or ask@business.tas.gov.au

To report a hazard on the state road network, or for information about the closure, contact 1300 139 933.

To receive email notifications throughout the project visit the RoadsTas Facebook page, or sign up to our mailing list on the Transport website: www.transport.tas.gov.au/orford

For information about public bus services and school bus services in the area please visit the Public Transport service updates page on the Transport website: www.transport.tas.gov.au or call 03 6166 3343 and select option 3.

For information about schools, call 03 6165 6466, or visit your local school's Facebook page.