

Tasman Highway closure near Orford

Frequently Asked Questions
6 July 2021

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About the closure

When did the road closure start?

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

When will the road reopen?

The road will re-open at 7:00 am on Thursday, 8 July, with a reduced speed limit and traffic management.

What can I expect when the road reopens?

The road will initially open to one lane of traffic only, with a reduced speed limit of 40 km/hr for approximately 300 metres. This allows us to have the road open as soon as possible, while work that can be done safely under traffic management continues.

Why is the road only opening to one lane?

Investigations have shown that most of the damage to the road from the falling rocks is limited to the road surface without affecting the road base. This means that, while road repairs are required, they are not extensive and can be done under traffic management.

After the road is opened on Thursday 8 July, additional works will be completed under traffic management including: installation of mesh fence on the rockface, repairs to the stone wall next to the river, and finally, the resurfacing of the road

These works should take about 6 weeks to complete, and road users should allow about 10 extra minutes when travelling through the site.

Will the road be safe to travel on when it opens?

Yes - we have removed all high-risk rocks and are making immediate repairs to the road. The highway will be safe to travel on when it opens at 7:00 am Thursday 8 July.

The reduced speed limit and traffic management will be similar to traffic management at other roadwork sites across the state. This will allow road users to use the Tasman Highway through Paradise Gorge, while also allowing our workers to complete these final works safely.

Why was the road closed for so long?

Our first priority has always been the safety of road users and our workers, who have worked hard to complete this work quickly, and ahead of schedule.

The work is complex, with thousands of tonnes of rock and gravel removed from the site.

Did you make any other improvements to the Tasman Highway while the road was closed?

During the closure, we completed additional maintenance works on other parts of the Tasman Highway. These works include trimming vegetation, clearing drains, upgrading road edges and repairing gabion walls.

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

While we acknowledge the impact on the community and apologise to everyone affected, the closure needed to happen for public safety reasons.

A gravel 'cushion' was laid on the road to prevent it from being damaged by falling rocks and it remained in place until all rocks were removed. The gravel cushion, and the large rocks on it made the road impassable.

We are currently working to make immediate safety improvements to the road, before it reopens to the public on Thursday 8 July, initially to one lane of traffic only, with a reduced speed limit of 40 km/hr for approximately 300 metres.

When 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 have been sharing photos and videos throughout the works so the community can keep up to date with our progress.

When can I access the convict trail?

Our biggest priority during these works is to keep everyone safe. In order to safely manage the worksite, the convict trail across the Prosser River will be closed until the road has been re-opened.

We have been sharing photos and videos throughout the works so the community can keep up to date with our progress.

Alternative routes

What alternative routes are in place?

Until the road opens at 7:00 am on Thursday 8 July, 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.

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

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

We have done 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 are treating Lake Leake Road to prevent ice forming whenever ice or frost are 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 route.

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

Why is the speed limit reduced on Wielangta Road?

The speed limit on Wielangta Road has been reduced to 60 km/hr to keep everyone safe.

While it has had a higher speed limit in the past, Wielangta Road is a gravel road and is not suitable for large volumes of traffic. Due to the temporary closure of the Tasman Highway, more people have been travelling on Wielangta Road. Road users will have to share the road with more people than before, including heavy vehicles, and, because of the higher use, as well as the winter weather, sections of the road may deteriorate.

Some sections of the road are also quite slippery, and the speed limit in these sections has been reduced to 40 km/hr.

Many of the people who travel on Wielangta Road during the closure will not be familiar with the road and its conditions. People should drive with care and comply with the speed limits.

The lower speed limit will not significantly increase travel times, and it is needed to keep everyone safe.

About the Rock Removal works

What have you done to fix the problem?

All the high-risk rocks were dropped from the rock face and removed from the site while the road was closed. They have either been used for reinforcement on site or transported to a nearby quarry to be used on other road works in the area. We have assessed the condition of the road, as well as the stone wall next to the river.

After the road is opened to one lane on Thursday 8 July under traffic management, a mesh fence will be installed on the rockface, the stone wall next to the river will be repaired, and finally, the road will be resurfaced.

These additional works should take about 6 weeks to complete but can be done while one lane of the highway remains open. Road users should allow about 10 extra minutes when travelling through the Tasman Highway at Paradise Gorge.

How much rock was removed?

Around 2000 tonnes of rock was removed from a 75-metre-long, 20-metre-high section of the rock face.

Rock removal started on Thursday, 3 June and was completed on Sunday, 20 June.

What is being done to protect the environment?

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

We have worked to prevent gravel, soil, and other materials from falling into the river by laying geofabric on the road and drains, placing a gravel 'cushion' on the road to protect it from damage from falling rocks. A floating curtain was also installed in the river to capture any sediment.

We have been working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) throughout this project.

What are you doing with the rocks?

Some of the rocks have been placed next to the road in the river for reinforcement, with the remainder of the material transported to a local quarry to be used on other road projects.

Why couldn't you just push all the rocks into the river?

We have received advice that placing a large amount of extra rock in the river would change the flow of the river and may cause flooding in the area after heavy rainfall.

What about the stone wall?

There is some damage to the stone wall next to the Tasman Highway. This will be repaired once the road has been reopened under traffic management.

Unlike the stone wall alongside the Convict Trail on the northern side of the river, the wall along the highway does not appear to be convict built and is not heritage listed. However, the Department appreciates the wall has local significance, and had measures in place to minimise damage to the wall.

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

The work we have completed 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: www.transport.tas.gov.au/orford

We will also provide updates to media outlets.

Impacts on other services

What is the impact on buses?

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.

What is the impact 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 had alternative arrangements for school children affected by the closure.

The road will re-open during school holidays, which should minimise disruption to school children.

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

What if my business was affected?

Information and application forms about financial support packages for local businesses affected by the closure of the Tasman Highway can be found on the [Business Tasmania website](#):

If affected businesses 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

About the decision

What was the risk?

The Department received a report on 19 May 2021. The report did not specifically suggest the rocks would fall straight away but found that the rocks could have fallen any time in the next 10 years, and this could be brought on by severe weather such as strong frost or heavy rain.

There was 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 the road closure is impacting the community and apologise to everyone affected, but our highest priority will always be to keep people safe.

Why wasn't there more notice of the closure?

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

Once this advice was received, we began 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 the closure impacts the community and apologise to everyone affected, but the closure is essential to keep everyone safe.

How did you decide there was a risk?

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

These investigations used modern aerial photography and scanning technology which provided new information, that there was 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 developed and actioned 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.

Contact information

Information about financial support packages for businesses affected by the closure of the Tasman Highway can be found on the [Business Tasmania website](http://www.business.tas.gov.au/funding/business_hardship_critical_support_grant):
www.business.tas.gov.au/funding/business_hardship_critical_support_grant

If affected businesses 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.