

**BEFORE THE HEARINGS PANEL
FOR THE PROPOSED TE TAI O POUTINI PLAN**

UNDER the Resource Management Act 1991

IN THE MATTER of a hearing on a Plan Change under
clause 6 of Schedule 1 of the Act

BETWEEN **SKYLINE ENTERPRISES LIMITED**

Submitter

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ROBERT JAMES GREENAWAY

RECREATION AND TOURISM

Dated: 9 September 2024

Statement of evidence of Rob Greenaway

Introduction

- [1] My name is Rob Greenaway. I am a director of Rob Greenaway & Associates, a New Zealand-based consultancy specialising in recreation and tourism planning and research, and assessments of effect.
- [2] I graduated from Lincoln University in 1987 with a three-year Diploma in Parks and Recreation Management with Distinction and completed 18 months of postgraduate study in conservation management.
- [3] I was employed in the fields of recreation and tourism at Tourism Resource Consultants (1990-1995) and at Boffa Miskell Limited (1995-1997) before beginning to work independently in 1997.
- [4] I have completed more than 500 consultancy projects nationally since 1997 and have presented evidence at more than 120 resource management hearings. My main professional focus is on assessing the impacts of infrastructure development on recreation and tourism.
- [5] I hold the status of an Accredited Recreation Professional with Recreation Aotearoa (**RA**), the national professional body for the recreation sector, of which I am a past Executive member. I am a member and past Chair of the RA Board of Accreditation for member accreditation to professional status. I am also a member of the New Zealand Association for Impact Assessment.
- [6] In 2011, I was appointed as an inaugural Board member of the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Recreation Council, to assist Sport New Zealand with the implementation of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, amongst other things.
- [7] I was awarded the Ian Galloway Memorial Cup in 2004 by RA to recognise 'excellence and outstanding personal contribution to the wider parks industry'. In 2013, I was awarded the status of Fellow with RA.

Code of conduct for expert witnesses

[8] I confirm I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court of New Zealand Practice Note 2023 and that I have complied with it when preparing my evidence. Other than when I state I am relying on the advice of another person, this evidence is within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

Scope of evidence

[9] I have been engaged by Skyline Enterprises Limited (**SEL**) to provide expert recreation evidence with respect to the proposed Te Tai o Poutini Plan (**TTPP**), being the proposed combined District Plan for Westland, Buller, and Grey District Councils.

[10] This evidence is prepared in advance of the hearing planned to be heard by the Commissioners on 8-9 October 2024 at 97 Cron Street, Franz Josef, and in respect of a submission lodged on the TTPP by SEL.

[11] SEL seek the inclusion of a new Special Purposes Zone referred to as the Franz Josef Amenities Area Zone (**FJAAZ**) into the TTPP. The purpose of the FJAAZ is to identify and set aside an area that can appropriately facilitate the development of an aerial cableway through a future Discretionary Activity consent process supported by an associated objective and policy framework. Consequential amendments are also proposed to other chapters of the TTPP to facilitate future development within the proposed FJAAZ. These proposed amendments are detailed in the evidence of Mr Sean Dent.

[12] My evidence will address:

- (a) A summary of the findings of the report titled 'Recreation Amenity Assessment of the Franz Josef Aerial Cableway Project' prepared by Dr Galloway, and confirmation of my expert opinions based on the same.
- (b) Further evidence in respect of matters not addressed in the Galloway Report, including:

- (i) a summary of consultation undertaken by SEL to date in respect of any proposed aerial cableway project;
- (ii) overall conclusions in respect of the recreation benefits that may accrue from the relief sought by SEL; and
- (iii) conclusions in terms of the recreational benefits of the SEL relief in light of the planning and policy framework.

[13] In preparing this evidence I have reviewed:

- (a) The landscape evidence of Ms Nikki Smetham for SEL;
- (b) The planning evidence of Mr Sean Dent for SEL;
- (c) The economics evidence of Mr Fraser Colegrave for SEL;
- (d) SEL's original submission and its attached reports;
- (e) Further submissions on SEL's submission by Poutini Ngāi Tahu and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc; and
- (f) The plans and strategies referenced in my text.

[14] My evidence responds primarily to paragraph 48 in the *Te Tai o Poutini Plan Section 42A Officer's Report Franz Josef Area*¹ where the officer states:

I am also unclear on the level or otherwise of support for this proposal by the landowner, or the wider community and therefore what weight should be given to it.

[15] My analysis is based on meetings with tourism operators in Franz Josef and with the New Zealand Alpine Club (**NZAC**) and Federated Mountain Clubs (**FMC**), as well as literature review, including submissions on the draft Westland National Park Management Plan and review of the SEL submission and further submissions received. I append summaries of the consultation meetings.

¹ And paragraph 419 in *Te Tai o Poutini Plan Section 42A Officer's Report Special Purpose Zones – Airport Zone, Future Urban Zone – Hospital Zone -Māori Purpose Zone – Port Zone – Stadium Zone and Scenic Visitor Zone / Ngā Takiwa mō Kaupapa kē*

- [16] Dr Shane Galloway previously prepared an assessment of the potential effects of the aerial cableway on recreation amenity at the Franz Josef glacier. This is attached to SEL's original 2022 submission on the TTPP. I present a brief summary of his findings and my own expert conclusions on the same. Dr Galloway's report is appended at Attachment 1.
- [17] Mr Fraser Colegrave addresses in his evidence the role of tourism in supporting employment on the West Coast, and the industry's regional economic importance. I also provide some overall conclusions in respect of these matters within the areas of my expertise.
- [18] The further submissions to the TTPP made by Poutini Ngāi Tahu and Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc do not refer to recreation or tourism issues, and I do not consider them further.

Summary

- [19] In my opinion it is clear that a Franz Josef aerial cableway – giving easy access to an alpine setting with impressive glacier views – would be an iconic visitor experience for the West Coast, and an important motivation for increased regional tourism spend.
- [20] The cableway proposal supports regional tourism development expectations.
- [21] There is strong support for the proposal amongst the 'Glacier Country' tourism industry.
- [22] FMC and NZAC and other tourism operators have concerns over the need for safety management at the alpine terminus, considering the potential for the cableway to give access for inexperienced people to a very challenging alpine setting. Considering international examples, and the planning provisions proposed by Mr Dent, I believe that this issue can be managed.
- [23] While FMC and NZAC see potential for the proposal to displace some helicopter access and to reduce adverse noise effects, and to offer easy alpine access for their members, they remain in opposition due to the introduction of a commercial activity and structures in an otherwise

undeveloped part of a national park. Both clubs recognise the need for good consultation if the proposal reaches a consent application stage.

[24] In my opinion, the proposal has very strong merit from a tourism development perspective. Considering the position of FMC and NZAC, I recognise the need to balance the potential adverse effects of the proposal on existing recreation amenity in the Southern Alps with the benefits of providing an alpine experience for a domestic and international population who would not otherwise have such an opportunity in New Zealand.

[25] The latter debate has not yet been had, and it will not unless a consenting avenue is made available. I therefore support SEL's submission for the inclusion of an appropriate amenities area within Westland National Park. This will enable full consideration of the proposal and, should it be approved, generate an appropriate set of conditions to manage visitor risks and to minimise adverse effects on existing visitor amenity.

[26] Appropriate policies in the TTPP relating to the proposed FJAAZ will need to limit the potential scale of effect on recreation amenity in the Franz Josef catchment, and ensure an appropriate level of consultation with affected parties – which Discretionary Activity status would require. Policies in the TTPP should not enable the proposal without it being able to satisfactorily address the issues raised by, for example, FMC and NZAC in their submissions to the draft Westland National Park Management Plan (2018/19), which I summarise below. Recommended policy provisions are addressed in the evidence of Mr Sean Dent.

Galloway recreation amenity report

[27] Dr Shane Galloway's main findings – in his recreation amenity assessment attached to the SEL submission and appended here at Attachment 1 (the **Galloway report**) – included:

- (a) Visitor research² indicated that the natural environment, general scenery and the glaciers were the ‘most liked’ aspects of a visit to Franz Josef.³ However, the most significant ‘least liked’ aspects of the glacier experience were not being able to get close enough to the glacier, and crowding. Many respondent comments related to the quality of the glacier view including: the colour of the ice; the presence of rocks on the glacier; the dirtiness of the ice; the fact that the ice was retreating; the lack of visible ice; that it was not as good as on a previous visit; that it didn’t look as good as in photographs they had seen; and that it did not compare well to other glaciers they had visited. Visitor satisfaction had declined between two visitor surveys undertaken in 2009 and 2013, but remained high based on national benchmarks. In 2015, the ‘least liked’ aspect of a glacier visit was ‘not getting close enough’ – double the response for crowding.
- (b) ‘Last chance tourism’ is a motivator for people visiting glaciers, with the experience of seeing a retreating glacier a travel rationale.
- (c) The retreat of the glaciers means helicopter access is the main option for a direct glacier experience, and this limit represents a general loss of recreation amenity.
- (d) The aerial cableway proposal would offer an experience for those less able to access local trails, such as those with mobility issues.
- (e) The aerial cableway “could significantly contribute to and facilitate people’s appreciation of the park’s indigenous natural resources and foster the recreational attributes of the area.”
- (f) Carpark capacity in the valley would need addressing, with a park and ride facility an option (which is supported by Skyline).

² Espiner, S and Wilson J. (2013). *The Visitor Experience at Franz Josef Glacier, Westland Tai Poutini National Park, New Zealand*. Espiner Consulting for Department of Conservation and West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy. And Espiner, S.R., and Wilson, J.D. (2015). *Monitoring the effects of aircraft over-flights on visitors to the Franz Josef and Fox Glacier Valleys, Westland Tai Poutini National Park, New Zealand: A report presenting results from the 2015 visitor survey*. Report prepared by Espiner Consulting for the North and Western South Island Region, Department of Conservation

³ I have added some additional detail here from the 2013 survey that was not included in the Galloway report.

- (g) Visitor safety at the Crawford Knob terminus would need management, considering the potential to easily access potentially dangerous terrain; although enhancing access for skilled alpinists.
- (h) And in summary, “an amenity area in the national park with aerial cableway access has a great deal of potential to serve the conservation mandate of the land manager and provide an amazing experience for visitors to the national park.”

[28] I am not in full agreement with Dr Galloway’s findings regarding the potential scale of effects of the proposal. He concludes that, “Overall, I view any negative impacts to recreation amenity as less than minor from the completed project.”⁴

[29] However, Dr Galloway does not consider effects on the recreational values of the upper valley, specifically the users of Almer and Castle Rocks Huts, and people currently accessing the snowfields in the upper Franz Josef Valley. These are remote settings which require some effort to access, and are better considered in Ms Smetham’s *Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects* (2019) (attached to SEL’s original submission) and her current evidence. She notes, in the former, that, “Those who seek a remote wilderness experience that is overwhelmingly natural may perceive the [aerial cableway] as an intrusion with adverse effects on visual amenity.”⁵ However, she states in her evidence that the limited number of locations with views obtained from distances between 0 and 3.0 km will result in overall low adverse effects on landscape values.

[30] I take comfort from that assessment, but I also note the potential for low to moderate effects on visual amenity from the likes of Sentinel Rock and walkways on the valley floor as expressed in Ms Smetham’s 2019 report; and her conclusion for Almer Hut, “where effects on remoteness may be considered substantial depending on individual preferences.”⁶ However, considering potential adverse *and* positive effects (improved alpine access for the latter, which I discuss later in my evidence) I expect

⁴ Galloway Report at p11.

⁵ There are no page numbers in the landscape report, but it is page 59 in the digital page count in the original SEL submission.

⁶ Digital page count 71 in the SEL submission.

that there is the ability to maintain adverse effects on recreation at the minor level.

Subsequent research and consultation

[31] I was asked to review the Galloway report and to complete the additional research and analysis appropriate for evidence preparation and hearing of the SEL submission. The Galloway report's main omissions relate to the need for consultation with local tourism operators, reference to existing material prepared by, in particular, FMC and NZAC in relation to the cableway proposal as it appeared in the draft Westland National Park Management Plan (2018/2019),⁷ reference to regional tourism development strategies, and more consideration of all the recreation settings in the Franz Josef Valley, as I have discussed above. I summarise my additional findings below.

Tourism operators

[32] A meeting invitation was sent by SEL under my direction to all tourism service providers and other relevant community representatives in April 2024. This was attended by the 13 individuals listed in Attachment 2, in addition to three members of the project team for SEL. Attachment 2 includes a full summary of the meeting. The key points were:

- (a) From a tourism development perspective, the proposal gained very strong support, including from helicopter operators who could be viewed as competition for the cableway. However, it was considered that while there may be some loss of clientele from helicopters to the aerial cableway, helicopter services would remain a premium product. There are many days when, due to poor weather, a helicopter trip is not an option, and the cableway would enable a quality alternative experience.
- (b) Opinions ranged from the proposal being a game-changer and life-saver for Franz Josef tourism, to it being a more moderate positive extension to existing services, but not a make-or-break opportunity for regional tourism. There was, however, universal interest from

⁷ The Plan review was paused February 2019 following the close of submissions to consider the implications of the Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Supreme Court decision. See <https://www.doc.govt.nz/westland-review>

tourism operators in seeing the development occur as soon as possible.

- (c) The receding glaciers are seen as a threat to tourism in 'Glacier Country' and there is a focus on diversifying the tourism products available – away from the glacier focus. However, the cableway proposal would sustain the core product (a glacier visit).
- (d) There was interest in ensuring visitor safety with inexperienced visitors in an alpine setting.

[33] No one at the meeting was opposed to the proposal.

FMC and NZAC

[34] An online meeting was held with the General Manager of NZAC and the President of FMC, who also hold other outdoor management roles. Attendees, in addition to me, were: Karen Leacock – GM NZAC and Board Member Mountain Safety Council; Megan Dimozantos – President FMC, Deputy Chair Land Search and Rescue Board (LandSAR); Grant Hensman – Director Skyline Enterprises; and Geoff McDonald – CEO Skyline Enterprises. The meeting summary is included in Attachment 2.

[35] FMC and NZAC reiterated the concerns that were expressed in their submissions to the draft Westland National Park Management Plan, while recognising the right of SEL to submit on the TTPP in support of the proposed amenities area.

[36] FMC's submission to the draft Westland National Park Management Plan made the following points in relation to the proposed amenity area:

- (a) The proposed aerial cableway would improve recreational access for mountaineering, and remove the need for aerial access to some areas, but would place the 12-bunk Almer Hut under pressure.
- (b) There would be the risk of more 'backcountry accidents' with ill-prepared parties too easily accessing technical alpine terrain.

- (c) While the cableway could reduce the need for helicopter access there was no parallel proposal to reduce the number of permitted helicopter landings in the catchment.
- (d) Profits from the operation of the proposal would be private, whereas they would better be returned to conservation projects.
- (e) Glacier retreat will mean that inevitably the glacier will eventually not be visible from the cableway terminus.
- (f) The cableway infrastructure will be at risk from natural events.
- (g) The proposal will compete with international alternatives and will not be compatible with the concept of 'untamed wilderness' as promoted for the West Coast.
- (h) Construction effects will affect tranquillity values.

[37] NZAC made similar points, adding:

- (a) There was inadequate information provided about the aerial cableway proposal to fully consider its effects.
- (b) The provision of an amenities area could allow for a range of development options, and implicitly direct the Department of Conservation to enable some form of commercial access. NZAC preferred that the Department await more detail and propose a management plan-change by way of partial review. Policies would need to be more specific about what could be developed in the proposed amenity area.
- (c) The proposal will have adverse visual amenity effects and detract from the wilderness qualities of the existing recreational uses of the catchment – particularly heli-hiking and glacier guiding.

[38] Both FMC and NZAC were keen to maintain dialogue with SEL about the proposal as it progresses, but noted that they were unlikely to shift their opinions.

Department of Conservation

- [39] A representative of the Department of Conservation attended the tourism service providers meeting summarised in Attachment 2. They directed the SEL team to the submissions made on the proposed amenities area in the draft Westland National Park Management Plan.
- [40] As a regulatory body, the Department has not promoted a pre-emptive position on the amenities area proposal as sought in the SEL submission. The proposal was, however, included in the draft Westland National Park Management Plan for consideration. I am not aware of any final position having been adopted by the Department considering that further development of the draft Westland National Park Management Plan has been paused. The Department did not submit on the TTPP in relation to SEL's submission.

Summary of effects on existing recreation and tourism values

- [41] I present here only a brief summary of the potential effects of an aerial cableway on existing recreation and tourism values in the Franz Josef valley. The FJAAZ could potentially allow consideration of a range of access formats in the valley, and the aerial cableway concept is only at a very early stage of development. A full review of impacts would accompany an eventual consent application attached to a more complete concept.
- [42] As identified in my previous sections relating to tourism operators and FMC and NZAC, there is a tension between the value of the proposed cableway as a tourism asset, and its potential effects on existing recreation values. There are four main visitor groups to the Franz Josef Glacier:
- (a) walkers on easy trails to and near the river and glacier viewpoint,
 - (b) walkers on other trails in the lower valley, primarily Roberts Point Track and the Alex Knob Track,
 - (c) guided heli-tourists with or without glacier landings, and

(d) independent alpinists accessing the snow and ice fields in the upper valley.

[43] Figure 1 shows the location of these different activities relying on a Strava heatmap.⁸ The heatmap indicates the relative level of activity in different settings relying on a proportion of visitors (often a surprisingly high proportion, as described in the footnote) recording their activity on a social media app. The 'hotter' the lines shown in the heatmap, the more activity. Figure 1 shows data from 12 months of records up to July 2024, indicating the location of guided heli-walks on the glacier west of Crawford Knob, alpine snow activities leading to and from Almer Hut, and the main walking tracks in the lower valley. The approximate location of the FJAAZ is overlaid. I have included this graphic merely to give an indication of the location of the main activity areas in the valley and their relative levels of use. This type of information would be further explored in a consent application.

[44] The Department of Conservation has installed pedestrian counters on several of the tracks in the lower valley. Their uncalibrated data are available online but have not been updated for several years in most areas. The records are also generally incomplete due to issues with the counters, and some modelling is performed to fill the gaps. This tends to

⁸ Strava is a social media application which uses GPS records from subscribers' smartphones and other devices uploaded to a central database, allowing speed and time comparisons with other cyclists, runners, walkers and trampers (for example), and the monitoring of individual activity or training targets. While the service is popular with professional athletes, its membership is dominated by casual recreation participants. Strava indicated that it had 50 million international users in early 2020 (80% outside the US) with an additional million joining per month, and in 2024 the company reported 120 million users. It is popular amongst regular cyclists and runners, but is also used by a wide variety of other pursuits, such as rowing, swimming and skiing.

An international comparison between different forms of data-gathering in 2016 showed a range of 1% to 12% of users recording their activity on Strava; and that this is growing. Comparisons between track counter data and Strava records undertaken by the author of this report in Nelson suggest levels of Strava adoption as high as 73% for cyclists (the Coppermine descent) and 26% for pedestrians (predominantly runners going uphill at Codgers). More accessible tracks appear to have a lower uptake of around 40% for cyclists and 7% for pedestrians. Such response rates would compare favourably to an on-site intercept survey of users in an outdoor setting, particularly since the Strava data are collected over all seasons and all day (an intercept survey would normally only cover relatively short time periods and be confined to specific interception points). Nevertheless, caution needs to be applied to the use of Strava data as they show participation by only Strava members. There will be an inherent bias to the more competitive and tech-savvy, and some data accumulate from users staying logged in when they are doing other activities, such as driving. Some records are also offset by tens of metres due to either poor GPS reception or map projection errors. However, most records appear in their correct locations.

Strava is therefore a little like a tag and release programme. Strava essentially tags several thousand active people in an area and monitors where and how they recreate.

Heatmaps indicate the cumulative activity of Strava subscribers in any setting. The brighter the colour, the more activity there.

Figure 1: Strava heatmap for all activities, 12 months of data to July 2024



give high variability from year to year. The highest annual visitor record for each location, where there is a full year of counts, is:

- (a) Valley Walk to glacier view: 615,474 (2009/10) and more recently 327,636 (2016/17)
- (b) Alex Knob Track: 7,660 (2019/20)
- (c) Roberts Point Track: 16,129 (2016/17)

[45] The greatest patronage is clearly on the main walk to the glacier view in the lower valley. The two main walks on the valley sides – Roberts Track and Alex Knob – are undertaken by the more physically capable, and in my opinion, these users may be more sensitive to landscape changes in the valley.

[46] The visibility of the proposed aerial cableway and the effects on visual amenity and natural character are described in Ms Nikki Smetham's landscape report attached to the SEL submission and in her evidence. I have summarised her main findings of relevance to recreation in my response to the Galloway report (from my paragraph [29]).

[47] I note that many of those walking to view the glacier are the target clients of the proposed aerial cableway, and that the cableway would be, in my opinion, an icon destination for the West Coast. While there may be adverse effects on some visitors to the setting in the lower valley as described by Ms Smetham, the net effect will most likely be an increase in visitor satisfaction, considering the nature of the new experience and its ability to solve many of the existing 'least liked' qualities of the current glacier experience (my para [27](a)).

[48] Effects on visitors to the upper valley are likely to be mixed. As described in the submissions of FMC and NZAC to the draft Westland Management Plan and expressed in the meetings as summarised above, there is the tension between providing for improved access to the Southern Alps for mountaineers, and effects on the undeveloped natural setting near Crawford Knob, as well as safety concerns resulting from providing easy access for neophytes to a hazardous alpine setting.

[49] Mr Sean Dent attaches to his evidence a set of provisions proposed to be included in the TTPP to enable the FJAAZ. This establishes a high bar for any relevant consent application via the Zone Objectives and Policies, including reference to visitor safety. In my opinion his relevant provisions are appropriate:

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| FJAAZ – P24 | Any proposal for an Aerial Cableway shall provide walking access from the upper terminus structure to the Almer Glacier/Salisbury Snowfield for competent private alpine enthusiasts, guiding Concessionaires and their clients. |
| FJAAZ – P25 | Any proposal for an Aerial Cableway with walking access from the upper terminus structure to the Almer Glacier/Salisbury Snowfield will incorporate a management regime to prevent unauthorised access by the general public. |

[50] Consultation indicates that heli-guided activities and an aerial cableway could easily work as complementary tourism services.

[51] Residual effects on existing recreation values are best addressed via a comprehensive consent application process relying on the TTPP provisions proposed by Mr Dent, and public notification. The decisionmakers will need to weigh the benefits of tourism development – with an enhanced visitor experience for what I expect will be the majority of visitors to the valley – and adverse effects on other users who are seeking an experience in a relatively undeveloped setting. The consideration of alternative destinations for these latter experiences will need to be taken into account (including Fox Glacier).

Te Tai Poutini Destination Management Plan and Regional Policy Statement

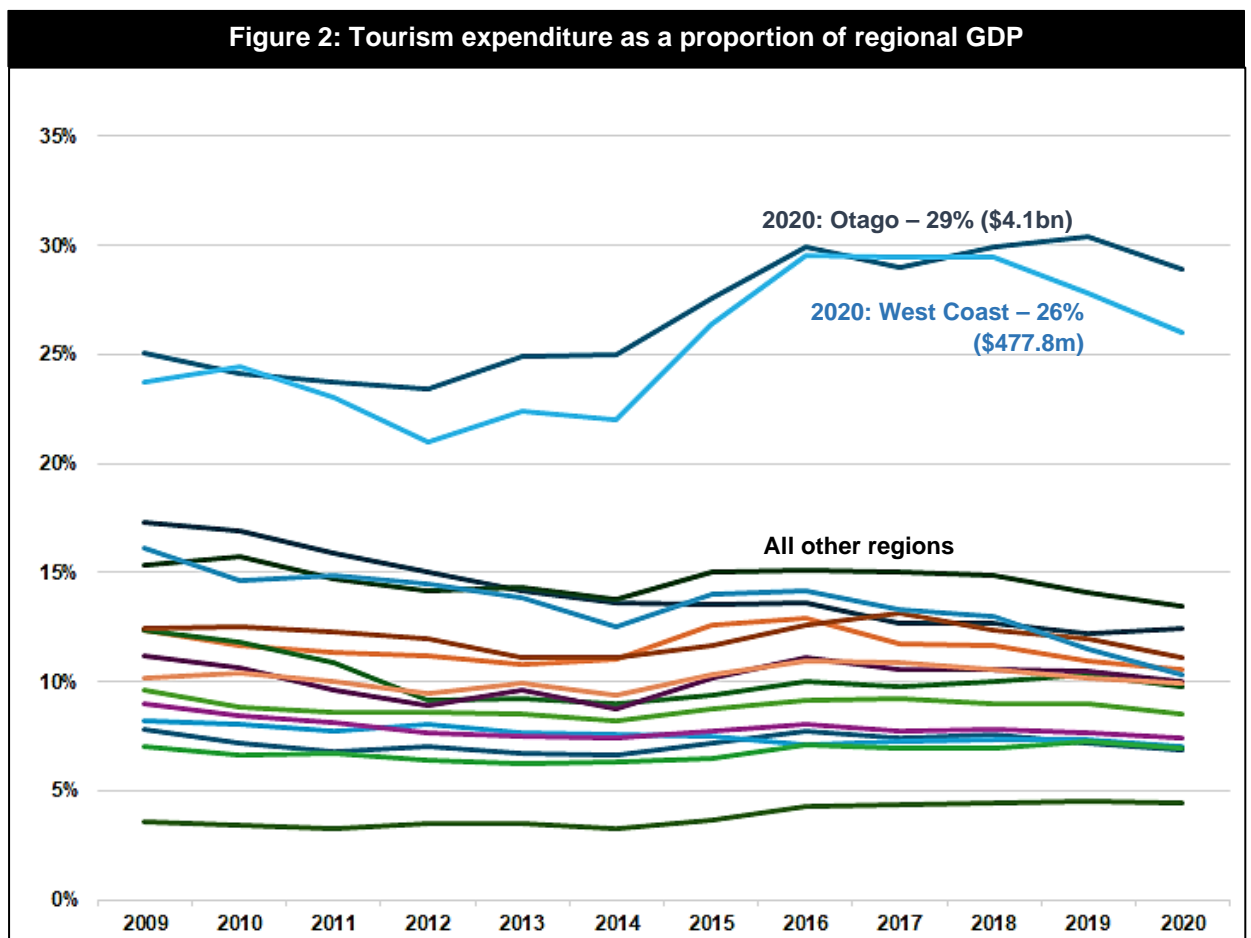
[52] The *Te Tai Poutini Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 (DMP)* is Development West Coast’s primary tourism development strategy. For the Westland District, the DMP notes:

With 1118 rooms, [Westland] has 57% of the commercial accommodation capacity on Te Tai Poutini. Westland, more specifically Glacier Country, is also home to 64% of the activities and attractions providers on Te Tai Poutini....

Of the estimated \$10.2B spend on the South Island, Westland District achieved the highest proportion of international spend per TLA of all

South Island regions, with 207M (66%) from international visitors and 106m (34%) from domestic visitors.

[53] For further context, Figure 2 shows tourism expenditure as a proportion of regional GDP up to 2020 – the latest data currently provided by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).⁹ This shows Otago and the West Coast as significantly more dependent on tourism income than all other regions in New Zealand, contributing just over a quarter of regional GDP for the West Coast. Mr Fraser Colegrave gives further economic context in his evidence.



[54] The DMP notes (p11):

Access in a region like Te Tai Poutini is an enabler for both visitors and communities. With the tyranny of distance, accessing an untouched natural environment like Te Tai Poutini can seem like a never-ending task. Supporting operators to increase connectivity physically and digitally is key to visitor growth. Supporting the development of infrastructure to allow greater connectivity with communities and assets

⁹ See <https://www.teic.mbie.govt.nz/ste/regions/relianceOnTourism/>

(such as the Oparara Arches) is also vital to developing the visitor experience proposition and increasing the length of stay.

- [55] The challenge for the proposed aerial cableway will be to deliver on various ambitions in the DMP, particularly within its 'economic pillar', while sustaining the DMP's other social, cultural and environmental objectives. The vision for economic development in the DMP is (p38):

A tourism industry that is resilient and future-proof, that can respond to challenges and take advantage of opportunities, creating jobs and economic benefits for communities.

- [56] The DMP also focuses on the concept of 'regenerative tourism' whereby a tourism activity leaves its host environment in an improved condition, which goes beyond the concept of sustainability (ensuring the activity sustains its ability to operate with no or manageable effects on the social and natural environment).

- [57] While the DMP does not reference the West Coast Regional Policy Statement (**RPS**), the DMP's economic objectives are consistent. For example, *Significant Resource Management Issues for the West Coast* include (RPS Table 1 p7, and p15):

The West Coast is at risk of experiencing population decline. It is critical that our planning documents address this risk by enabling the appropriate use and development of natural and physical resources whilst promoting their sustainable management.

- [58] The RPS has a strong focus on maintaining 'resilient and sustainable communities' (section 4), noting that (p14):

To be resilient and sustainable, our communities require a skilled workforce in more consistent and reliable employment, a decent household income and local access to modern health, education and recreation services. Our regional community cannot grow and prosper without new economic development that is driven by infrastructure, innovation, capital, international connections and a skilled workforce. Without this, there is a very real risk that this region will start to experience population decline and the loss of core services.

- [59] Considering this issue, the RPS notes that dairy, tourism and mineral extraction underpin the regional economy, and that diversification is

needed (p14). However, Policy 1, s4 focuses on supporting both new and existing economic activities:

To sustainably manage the West Coast's natural and physical resources in a way that enables a range of existing and new economic activities to occur, including activities likely to provide substantial employment that benefits the long term sustainability of the region's communities.

[60] And in Section 5 of the RPS:

The West Coast has a significant proportion of public land administered by the Department of Conservation. The use and protection of public conservation land, is central to the long term sustainability of West Coast communities. Development of new tourism related infrastructure within public conservation land will provide incentives for growth and investment in the wider region.

[61] In my opinion, the aerial cableway clearly supports the economic objectives of the DMP (also as evidenced by local tourism operators' opinions expressed in our meeting) and the RPS, but it will need to be managed within a framework that supports the DMP's wider social and environmental vision, as well as those expressed in the RPS.¹⁰ These are the issues which would be considered in a consent application process.

[62] Mr Sean Dent further considers the higher order policy direction and provisions in the TTPP, and considers the aerial cableway and how the FJAAZ would achieve those objectives.

Conclusion

[63] In my opinion, the aerial cableway proposal is worthy of consideration through a consenting process, supported by a suite of plan provisions which recognise its recreational and other potential benefits. Mr Dent indicates the necessity of amending the TTPP to enable this consideration, and the required provisions. I support his evidence.

[64] There is a clear need to consider a range of social, environmental, cultural and economic values when assessing the merits of the proposal,

¹⁰ For example, RPS *Significant Resource Management Issues for the West Coast* Table 1: "Activities which contribute to people's wellbeing may adversely affect outstanding natural features and outstanding natural landscapes."

and I have set out many of the relevant recreation and tourism issues in this evidence. A notified consent would allow all affected parties to expand on such concerns in a hearing process, and support the RPS expectations for effective consideration of “new tourism related infrastructure within public conservation land”.

[65] I note the concerns of FMC and the NZAC in their submission to the draft Westland National Park Management Plan, that providing for the FJAAZ will inevitably lead to the development of some form of access infrastructure within it. However, in my experience, not all discretionary resource consent applications are successful, and are considered on their individual merits.

[66] Mr Dent’s proposed provisions to enable the FJAAZ are also quite restrictive in the form of access which can be developed within the Zone (an aerial cableway). I am confident that Mr Dent’s proposed provisions will enable full consideration, within a public forum, of the merits and effects of the proposal on recreation amenity. The potential for significant benefits to regional tourism are clear. There are also potential benefits for alpine recreation, and these will need to be balanced against some potential adverse effects on remote recreation values in the upper valley.

Dated: 9 September 2024

Rob Greenaway

**Attachment 1: Galloway Report, as attached to 2022 SEL submission
on the TTPP**

Recreation Amenity Assessment of the Franz Josef Aerial Cableway Project



Prepared for:
Skyline Enterprises Limited
Level 3, O'Connells Mall,
Camp Street
Queenstown
9348
New Zealand

Prepared by: Dr. Shayne Galloway

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grr.org.nz

Recreation Amenity Assessment for the Franz Josef Aerial Cableway Project

This assessment of the effects on the recreation amenity of a proposed aerial cableway in the Franz Josef Glacier/Ka Roimata o Hinehukatere valley of the Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park is provided at the request of Skyline Enterprises Limited (SEL). The aerial cableway would be accessed from the parking area in the Waiho Valley and access views of the Franz Josef glacier complex with a Mid station at Coulter Ridge and a terminus at Crawford Knob (Elevation 1670).

Context

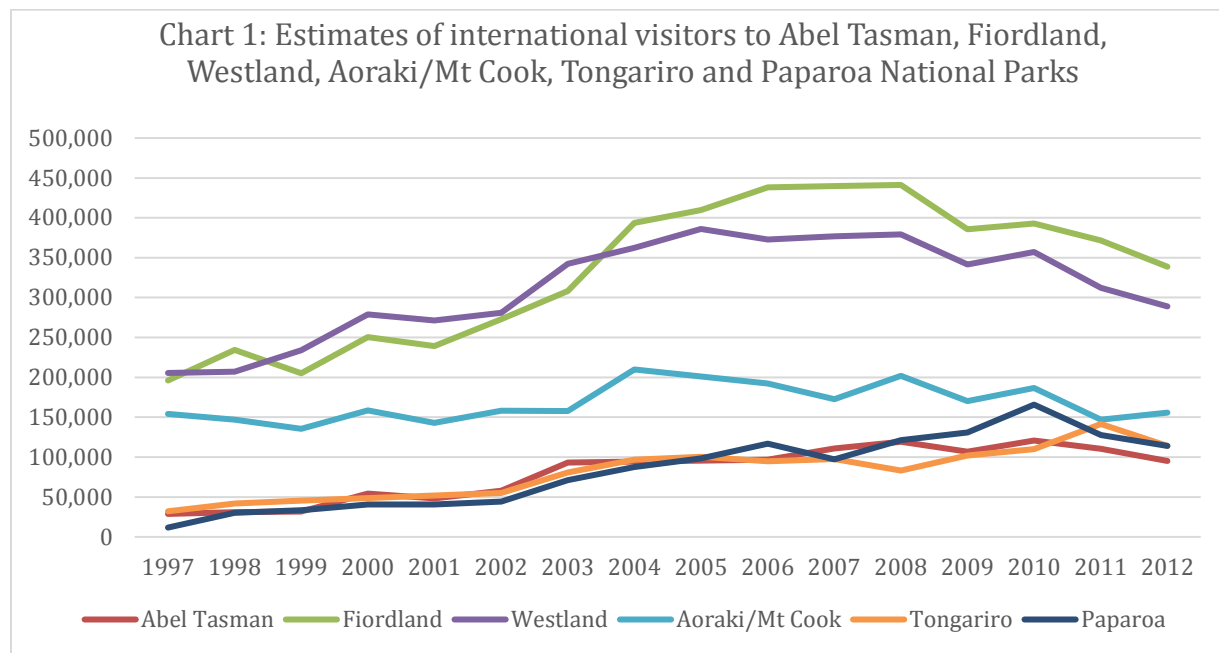
Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Area spanning 2.6 million Ha and is recognized globally for its superlative views of glaciated landforms and the glaciers themselves among many other unique characteristics.¹ Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park receives a significant portion of international visitation and a larger share than other national parks according to Department of Conservation estimates dating from 1997-2012 (Chart 1).² The only national park receiving more international visitation is Fiordland National Park. According to a 2013 Visitor Survey, visitors to the Franz Josef Glacier listed the natural environment and glacier related aspects as their most liked aspects of the visit with ‘being close to glaciers,’ and ‘seeing [glaciers] at close range’ and other interactions with the glaciers such as ‘hearing ice cracking’ listed among the aspects listed by visitors. Conversely, visitors listed the separation and distance from the glacier as their least liked aspects of the visit with comments such as: ‘limited access, not able to get close enough, etc.’ among the responses.³

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/551>

² <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/managing-conservation/recreation-management/visitor-statistics-and-research/national-parks-visitor-statistics/>

³ Espiner, S and Wilson J. (2013). The Visitor Experience at Franz Josef Glacier, Westland Tai Poutini National Park, New Zealand. Espiner Consulting for Department of Conservation and West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy.

Interest in visiting the glaciers is likely to continue as described in a series of research publications on the concept of ‘last chance’ tourism.⁴ Essentially, the research has revealed the ‘fundamental importance of viewing the glaciers as a significant travel motive for visitors, suggesting that there is a “last chance” aspect to this experience given the rapid retreat of the glaciers.



⁴ Emma J. Stewart, Jude Wilson, Stephen Espiner, Heather Purdie, Chris Lemieux & Jackie Dawson (2016) Implications of climate change for glacier tourism, *Tourism Geographies*, 18:4, 377-398, DOI: 10.1080/14616688.2016.1198416.

‘Last chance tourism’ at the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, Westland Tai Poutini National Park: Stakeholder perspectives. Jude Wilson, Emma Stewart, Stephen Espiner, Heather Purdie, LEaP Research Report No. 34 September 2014.

‘Last Chance Tourism’ at the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, Westland Tai Poutini National Park: A survey of visitor experience. LEaP Research Report No. 33 July 2014.

The impact of climate variability on tourism businesses and tourism infrastructure providers in Glacier Country. Jude Wilson, Land Environment and People Research Paper No. 4 January 2012 ISSN 2230-4207 (online) ISBN 978-0-86476-282-5 (online) Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand.

‘Last Chance Tourism’ at the Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers, Westland Tai Poutini National Park: A survey of visitor experience. Jude Wilson, Stephen Espiner, Emma Stewart, Heather Purdie, Land Environment and People Research Report No. 33 July 2014 ISSN 1172-0859 (Print) ISSN 1172-0891 (PDF) ISBN 978-0-86476-362-4 (Print) ISBN 978-0-86476-363-1 (PDF) Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand.

The Assessment

In order to develop this assessment, I visited the site on 24 February 2017 by helicopter and walked the trails from which the aerial cableway would be visible. I have also conducted a preliminary review of the available literature on Franz Josef and glacier-based tourism.

Initially, a number of details regarding the design and operation of the aerial cableway, as well as potential changes in available recreation amenities, activities, and services in the Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park that arise from the existence of an aerial cableway as described given that much of the design had yet to be completed. These questions have been clarified significantly in the ensuing time.

Since our initial involvement, two aspects of the project have evolved. These are the development of the project's design characteristics inclusion of a Mid station in the aerial cableway and the inclusion of a Discussion box on the proposed amenities area (p122-126) in the Draft Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park Management Plan published in September 2018 which provides some background, describes the statutory framework and necessary processes for the creation of an Amenity Area, and describes the context of the aerial cableway and its likely facilities.

In brief, aerial cableways can only be authorised in a National Park if they are in a defined amenities area. The amenity area is set aside for the development and operation of recreation and public amenities for the use and enjoyment of the National Park where appropriate and cannot be located outside the national park and where adverse effects on the rest of the national park can be minimised.

The recreational issue this proposal addresses arises from the retreat of the Franz Josef glacier to the point where little of it can be viewed from the established trails originating from the valley floor and access to the glacier itself is restricted to aircraft only as the foot and climbing routes have become unsafe and are closed. This represents a significant loss of recreation amenity in the national park as flights to the glacier are relatively expensive and limited in number. Questions

arising from the Discussion box about this proposal from a recreation perspective include: does the proposal replace the lost amenity and/or add to the recreation amenity in the national park; can the amenity be located outside the park; and where can adverse effects – on recreation amenity - on the national park be minimised?

In order to address these questions, I describe the existing recreation amenity, activities and visitation levels at Franz Josef followed by a description of the site visit. With this in mind, the aerial cableway project as currently understood, may be examined from multiple perspectives of recreationist, concessionaire, and resource manager in terms of their effects on recreation amenity.

While it is limiting to provide definitive advice based on a generalized design, it is possible to suggest that there is a strong case to be made that an amenity area with an aerial cableway would have limited negative effects on some facets of recreation and public amenity in the national park. At the same time the project would provide substantial positive effects to other facets of the recreation amenities as well as benefits to the Department of Conservation's mission under the Conservation Act in that it could significantly contribute to and facilitate people's appreciation of the parks indigenous natural resources and foster the recreational attributes of the area.

Current Status of Recreation Amenity in the Waiho Valley, Franz Josef and Terrain Above

From the lower moraine of the Franz Josef glacier the Waiho Valley opens into a wide flat area covered in native bush with the Waiho River meandering through it. The drive into the valley features expansive views of the bush with steep glacier carved escarpments rising to either side, often disappearing into mist and cloud above.

From the access road and parking area, several trails are available: Alex Knob Track, Sentinel Rock Track, Franz Valley Track and Roberts Point Track. With the exception of the Alex Knob Track, these trails have limited visibility of the glaciers, but do have a high-quality west coast bush environment. Sentinel Rock, Franz Valley Track, and Roberts Point Track experience very high levels of use.

On the day of the site visit I observed a full parking area and, during our walk to Sentinel Rock, busloads of tourists. I experienced the access road, parking lot, and trails all as crowded spaces. During our overflight of the valley we were able to observe a constant stream of people on the Roberts Point Track and the Franz Valley Track. I observed the platform at the terminus of the Roberts Point Track to be filled with people on both occasions where we over flew it. Visitor numbers being what they are it is reasonable to assume that this occurs more often than not. Parking is limited and the road in can be limited to one lane due to seasonal maintenance, rock fall, vehicle accidents. etc. The sight and sound of helicopters is frequent with rising levels of visitor annoyance reported⁵⁶⁷. A toilet facility is also available at the parking area.

Walking access onto the glacier is no longer possible or permitted, leaving access by air transport as the only viable means. Given the rate at which the glaciers are receding it is very likely that they will no longer be visible from any but the Alex Knob Trail - which appears to be a demanding recreational experience - or from the air, which entails costs and risks of their own.

Design and Operation

The following reflects my understanding of the design and operation parameters for the proposed aerial cableway. The design of the aerial cable way has developed significantly over the last 24 months – giving a fairly clear picture of how it will appear in the landscape.

Design

- The aerial cableway would provide a 15- to 20-minute trip from the Waiho Valley floor to Crawford's Knob. This journey provides ample opportunity for viewing, photography,

⁵ Espiner, S.R., and Wilson, J.D. (2015). Monitoring the effects of aircraft over-flights on visitors to the Franz Josef and Fox Glacier Valleys, Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park, New Zealand: A report presenting results from the 2015 visitor survey. Report prepared by Espiner Consulting for the North and Western South Island Region, Department of Conservation, New Zealand.

⁶ Espiner, S.R., and Wilson, J.D. (2014). Monitoring the effects of aircraft over-flights on visitors to the Franz Josef Glacier Valley, Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park, New Zealand: A report presenting results from the 2014 visitor survey. Report prepared by Espiner Consulting for the North and Western South Island Region, Department of Conservation, New Zealand.

⁷ Espiner, S.R., and Wilson, J.D. (2013). Monitoring the effects of aircraft over- flights on visitors to the Glaciers, Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park, New Zealand: A report presenting results from the 2013 visitor survey. Report prepared for the West Coast Conservancy, Department of Conservation, New Zealand.

etc., as well as potential for audio interpretation of the geological and ecological history of the glacial system.

- Bottom terminal: facilities here include buildings for ticketing/sales, workshop facilities, cableway operations, staff offices, and a covered waiting area. Recreation amenities include:
 - Parking (visitor and staff)
 - Retail: souvenir sales, photographs, vending machines
 - Comfort station
 - Signage and interpretative panels
- Mid station: structures here would include a transfer area and shelter, operations and staff facilities.
 - Comfort station
 - Walkways/potential access to other recreational pursuits
 - Signage and interpretive panels
- Top station description: Aerial cableway landing and operations facility. Recreation amenities include:
 - viewing platform with 200-person capacity and access to walking trails to other viewpoints and/or pursuits.
 - Comfort station
 - Information desk
 - Signage and interpretation
- The aerial cableway infrastructure (towers, cables and cleared bush) would be visible at points along the drive into the parking lot, from the parking lot, and from trails starting from the parking lot.
- Moving aerial cableway cabins would attract the eye - particularly where the cabins are visible against the skyline. Some views from the Alex Knob Track would cast the aerial cableway against the skyline.
- The aerial cableway would at some point cross the Roberts Point Track.
- The aerial cableway infrastructure would be treated with non-reflective finishes and with a colour scheme which blends - or does not sharply contrast - with the natural background colours.
- The aerial cableway design would allow for access to those with physical disabilities.

Operations

- Weather restrictions - it is assumed that aerial cableway operations would depend on weather conditions and have restrictions similar to those in place on commercial ski fields. Similarly, operations would be seasonally affected.
- Access from top - I assume that access would be available to ride the aerial cableway down to those who have not ridden the aerial cableway up.
 - This could include alpinists across a range of activities and points of origin, foreseeable tourism operations which involve a helicopter ride up, a hike to the top of the aerial cableway, and a return via the aerial cableway, and others.
- Cost to participate - My presumption is that cost per person to access the aerial cableway would be significantly less than existing helicopter access and allow for a greater amount of time to enjoy and appreciate the glacial environment. Currently access to the glaciers via helicopter ranges from \$240 for a 20-minute scenic flight up to \$450 for a 40 minute scenic flight for adults and somewhat less for children. The Helihike experience at \$429 per person for four hours does appear to be a better value in terms of time per dollar, however some restrictions on physical ability would limit participation⁸. This pricing may present a barrier to participation for visitors on restricted budgets.
- Perceived Risk - Some individuals will perceive the helicopter ride as a risky experience and abstain from engaging with the activity - particularly in light of relatively frequent incidents of helicopter mishaps in the media. An aerial cableway ride may present less of a high-risk profile and encourage participation for those sensitive to the risk of a helicopter experience.

Impact on Current Recreation Amenity

- Improved access to views of and information about Franz Josef glacier – it is clear from the research conducted on ‘last chance tourism’ that visitors are curious and seek to know more about what is occurring with glacial retreat and climate change while others want to see them before they are gone.
- Improved access to the snowfields beyond the top landing.
- Potential for additional trail connections to Mid station area.
- Reduced cost to experience the glacier over existing modes.

⁸ <http://www.glacierhelicopters.co.nz/prices/>

- Conceivably the impact of helicopter noise annoyance would be reduced in the national park should an aerial cableway go into operation.
- The aerial cableway would not generate high or annoying levels of noise to non-participants.
- The aerial cableway, when visible, would contrast with the natural surroundings.

My observations

- From a recreation perspective, generally an aerial cableway would add a significant amenity to the West Coast experience for tourism and for activities accessible via the aerial cableway.
 - It could significantly contribute to and facilitate people's appreciation of the parks indigenous natural resources and foster the recreational attributes of the area
 - The aerial cableway ride itself would provide an impressive recreational experience
 - There would be opportunities for DOC to provide resource education and interpretation throughout the aerial cableway experience
 - It provides access to view the upper snowfields and multiple glacial features not only to those who would normally walk the trails, but also to those who are not able to walk the trails - mobility issues, small children etc.
 - The aerial cableway experience of the natural resource would be more engaged with the natural resource than the helicopter experience of the natural resource
 - The aerial cableway experience could present fewer objective safety hazards than those of helicopters and offer a lower risk profile for park management.
 - The aerial cableway experience would be more economically accessible than the helicopter experience and therefore more people would make use of it.
 - It provides access to and from other alpine routes in the area
 - It would create need for ancillary services in recreation transport

- If designed properly it could have minimal visual and auditory impact on the current amenity values in the park. Done well it would quickly become a major draw for the area.
- The aerial cableway would cross and to some degree impact the experience on the Roberts Point Track. I view this impact to be less than minor, given other sources of noise in the valley.
- Issues around access to the aerial cableway base station would have to be resolved. The parking lot and the road in already appear to be at maximum use. I would consider various options here such as busing visitors in from town as traffic as parking issues detract from the experience.
- There are some interesting opportunities/issues for mountaineering access to the aerial cableway from other mountaineering routes in the area, ski mountaineering, poled walking routes.
 - These sorts of activities would have to be managed for obvious health and safety reasons, however there are management strategies readily available.
 - Denying access to the aerial cableway for these sorts of activities would alienate existing user groups of the national park.
 - Providing short trails or walks from the top of the aerial cableway would increase the ability for people (non-alpinists) to interact with the resource
 - Weather conditions will impact this aerial cableway and safe usage parameters would have to be in place

Conclusions

From a recreation perspective, a great deal has been lost in the past 100 years with the retreat of the West Coast glaciers. Early visitors to the West Coast would have experienced the glacier on, or near, the valley floor. Until recently, visitors could walk to the base of the glacier, alpinists could climb the glacier to the snow fields above. Today, the only access is via helicopter or fixed wing aircraft, both of which present their own impact profile to the national park experience.

Given the impacts of climate change, the ability to experience a glacier and learn about their importance to our global ecology rises in importance as a tourism destination. An aerial cableway as proposed would have the effect of increasing access to the glacier while reducing

the cost and risk of such an experience. It would not replace aircraft access and its associated noise, but this impact may be reduced while giving visitors a choice they do not currently have.

Impact to the existing recreation amenity on the valley floor would not be significantly affected by the existence of the cableway. Overall, I view any negative impacts to recreation amenity as less than minor from the completed project. However, the access road would likely see increased traffic to take advantage of the cableway. While this is an issue for traffic engineers, from a recreation perspective there is a potential loss of enjoyment accrued through queuing and lack of parking.

I do think that an amenity area in the national park with aerial cableway access has a great deal of potential to serve the conservation mandate of the land manager and provide an amazing experience for visitors to the national park. In response to the questions raised above regarding the suitability of this proposal vis a vis the Discussion box, I have come to the following conclusions:

Does the proposal replace the lost amenity and/or add to the recreation amenity in the national park? In short, I doubt that anything can replace the recreational experience of close contact with a glacier on or near the Waiho valley floor. However, an aerial cableway as described does add a significant recreation experience – one that would remain significant were the glaciers still at full length and health. The journey from valley floor to Crawford’s Knob on the aerial cableway traverses the history of the glaciers and arrives at their present state and my impression is that this journey will inspire awe and wonder and provide visitors with close contact to our diminishing glacial resources. It will also make possible other recreation amenity via the access it provides to the upper neve.

Can the amenity be located outside the national park? The glaciers are in rapid retreat and are not viewable much of the time and access is increasingly limited and relatively expensive. The glaciers are not accessible outside the national park for the vast majority of visitors and so I would argue that it cannot be located outside the park and achieve the same result.

Where can adverse effects – on recreation amenity - on the national park be minimized? The main impact on the national park experience I can foresee from this proposal lies in access to the base building. While not directly a part of the proposal, the road access into the valley floor parking area struggles at times to cope with the current visitation numbers and is susceptible to environmental and weather effects. In my view this is a current negative impact on the recreation experience that is unresolved by the Department of Conservation that will be further degraded should the aerial cableway result in higher visitation numbers. In my view visitation will increase as a result of the aerial cableway.

Aircraft noise has long been an issue at Franz Josef and while the aerial cableway is not intended to replace flights to the glacier, I imagine that a proportion of visitors will choose the cableway due to cost and perceived risk factors. I have no way to estimate what the extent of the effect on aircraft noise in the park will accrue and it will be an interesting relationship to observe once the aerial cableway is operative.

The addition of an aerial cableway at Franz Josef glacier in Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park is a bold move and one that merits strong consideration. As a recreation amenity, I view this as a world class opportunity as befits a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of New Zealand's greatest taonga.

Attachment 2 - Meeting summaries

Franz Josef Community Meeting 15 April 2024, 5.30pm

Attendees:

- Allan Glen, 10 Cottages Motel
- Anna and Richard Tunnah, Glacier Shuttles
- Helen Lash, Westland District Council - Mayor
- Janelle Shaw, Business Manager Franz Josef Glacier Guides
- Jen Williams, Inflite Experiences
- Lesley Lister, Franz Josef Community Council - Deputy Chair
- Lisa Stevenson, West Coast Wildlife Centre
- Logan Skinner, Franz Josef Community Council
- Richard Benton, West Coast Wildlife Centre
- Rob, Scenic Hotel
- Sebine Grift, Franz Josef Community Development Officer
- Wayne Costello, DOC
- *Rob Greenaway, RG&A*
- *Grant Hensman, Skyline Enterprises*
- *Sean Dent, Southern Planning Group*

Grant: Introduction

Four pillars to the aerial cableway proposal. We need to get all four right:

- Cultural
- Environmental
- Engineering
- Economic

Aerial cableway / gondolas must be in an 'amenity area' that is provided for in the DOC West Coast Te Tai o Poutini Conservation Management Strategy (CMS), Wetland Te Tai Poutini National Park Management Plan, and Te Tai o Poutini Plan¹¹. The current situation is that:

- The Proposed Te Tai o Poutini Plan is under review and it needs to have an amenity area at Franz Josef included to allow a future resource consent application for a cableway to be considered. Including an amenity area is Skyline's submission to the Plan, with hearings for this matter to occur later this year – although a firm date has yet to be set for the hearing. Skyline is in the process of preparing evidence to support its submission.
- Skyline understands that the DOC CMS/National Park Management Plan will be reviewed in the near future, and provision for an aerial cableway would need to be included in these documents as well. Preparing the

¹¹ Te Tai o Poutini Plan (TTPP) is the combined District Plan for the Buller, Grey and Westland District Councils. It will replace the current individual district plans. TTPP sets out the objectives, policies, rules and methods to manage land use activities and subdivision across the districts. TTPP also includes online maps to show zoning, and where various rules apply. See: <https://tppp.nz/>

CMS and progressing the National Park Management Plan will be a public process.

- Once amenity areas are provided for in the CMS/National Park Management Plan and Te Tai o Poutini Plan, there still needs to be consent and concession applications for the project – both expected to be public processes.

To date most of the work has been on assessing the geology of the area. Competent rock has been identified for the base towers.

There are no plans to modify the carparking configuration. There will be no increase to the carpark footprint in the Park. A park and ride is the best solution to cope with new carparking demand. From a consenting point of view it would be not sensible to advocate for more parking areas in the Park.

The aerial cableway would go over the trees (not through them).

Wind can be an issue for aerial cableways but doesn't appear to be a deal-breaker in this case.

Skyline wants to understand how the aerial cableway could affect recreation and tourism.

Question and answer session:

- Is there something comparable internationally: Cairns gondola is similar – has been operating for 30 years in a world heritage park. There are plenty of examples in European alpine areas.
- The 2019 proposal never had a firm number for potential clients. Skyline looked at the number of people who stopped at Franz Josef and then the number who went to the carpark. Pre-covid, Franz had 600,000 visitors per annum walking the track up the Waiho Valley from the carpark, and a percentage of these will use the cableway.
- Principle is that visitors would go up to a viewing platform. No restaurant or other facilities are proposed at the top. There will have to be shelter in case of emergency. Might be a timber platform out to Crawford Knob – the proposal is quite different to Skyline in Queenstown. This is a new venture for Skyline which has nothing else/no other land on the West Coast. An investment for Skyline when the environment is constantly changing.
- What was the previous land purchase outside Franz Josef? This land is owned by Totally Tourism, not Skyline. Grant and Skyline are no longer involved in Totally Tourism.
- The aim is to service the larger tourism region of the West Coast – but aim to keep local businesses involved – the biggest supporters will be businesses in town.
- Rockfall investigation: Initially Skyline looking at a spot lower down between Crawford Knob and the glacier, but because of the geology of the area decided that the cableway should terminate further up and that a better location for the platform is Crawford Knob.

- 5.7km is too big for one cableway, so the trip up will be in two parts. Mid-way point – what happens there? Could hop off the aerial cableway but that depends on the system used. One system could transfer the carriage to the second cable and passengers would not disembark unless weather dictated, or they may need to transfer to a second unit.
- Construction time: An idea is to put first leg in and operate this while building the second leg. Building the whole thing could take 2.5 years and one leg 1.5 years. Expertise to build is in NZ though Skyline may have to bring in international experts.
- Is this undertaking by Skyline only? Currently Skyline is the promoter but this could change in the future if new investors are required or interested.
- Timeline: Sean noted that the amenities area needs to be shown in the Te Tai o Poutini Plan and CMS/National Park Management Plan and this could take 3+ years. After this, the real work starts for the consents. Total time could be 10 years.
- Is fast tracking possible? At a high level yes it could and there are two ways it could happen - projects are picked now and are in the Schedule of the new Fast-track Approvals Bill, or an application is made once the Bill comes into effect. Strong community support will be needed to get the project into the fast tracking queue.
- Was Franz Josef always preferred? Skyline did look at Fox but the problem was the geology and finding a suitable line for installing the towers – none are evident. The most viable corridor known is at Franz.
- How can other operators best support Skyline? The opportunity to submit on the Te Tai o Poutini Plan has closed. Submissions in support of the proposal for the CMS review and later consent and concession applications would help.
- The group noted that widespread support from the community exists
- Would an extra electrical sub-station be required? Not sure. Think at the moment that there is enough power at Franz. Power would have to be conveyed to the mid-station.
- Funding: Skyline looking to fund it by itself, but may include other parties when the final numbers come out, or if other parties have an interest.
- Helen Lash: Provincial Growth Fund is looking at resilience projects on the Coast, and is interested in projects to directly boost the South Westland economy – this project would meet the criteria: Grant: Skyline hasn't thought about this as yet but are open to further discussion – will talk to fellow directors and come back to Mayor.
- Rob Greenaway: What will Franz Josef look like without a development like this and a receding glacier?
 - o Wildlife Centre has had a good summer and many people staying two or three nights, so the current situation isn't dire. People will add a trip to Ōkārito and Fox and outdoor walks. A lot more Europeans travelling as NZ dollar is strong. Getting back to pre-covid levels of visitors. People are now booking up to a year out. General perception is that Franz Josef is not just the glaciers, it is a total outdoor experience. The whole Coast is growing in popularity. Getting to the glacier is now more exclusive as can

- only get there by helicopter. Very expensive and limited number of trips to the glacier.
- Affordability is an issue for people – if the project is still 10 years off then how will a family afford it: will have to be a commercial return.
 - Anecdotally, tourists in Franz Josef are not all going up the valley as heard it wasn't worth it so a new cableway will pick up different visitors. Some visitors are anti-helicopters, and people in Queenstown were anti going so far as Franz – so the cableway project is a way to re-invent Franz Josef. With no glacier Franz Josef could become another Hari Hari (not everyone in the room agreed with this).
 - Glacier country tourism group has done a lot of work to pivot away from glacier reliance. Want more walks and outdoor activity – DOC has helped with maintaining good short walks. Improved awareness means that people are staying longer in Franz Josef than previously. Post covid, the coaches are smaller or have fewer occupants and stay two nights. Also a lot more cyclists and campervans. Coast has 'natural wilderness' and people aren't rushing through like they used to. After covid have seen a lot more Kiwis travelling in NZ. The Coast highest performing tourist region in NZ currently.
 - General agreement that the aerial cableway would be an icon destination on the Coast and a significant asset for Franz Josef – certainly supporting long-term sustainability for tourism in the region. No disagreement that the proposal would not be significantly positive for tourism.
- Resistance would be environmental (possibly from those not living here) – a national park is considered conservation wilderness.
 - People to work on and build the cableway – immigration laws may change – a project like this could bring families to stay short or long-term in the District.
 - Heli tours – is there a stress between helicopter activity and the cableway? Might get a conversion although many people would do both. Potential to grow the pie. If can't fly due to weather then could spend the money on cableway. Skyline are offering a different product. Franz Josef community is small and people naturally work together. Cableway is a light touch product – smaller environmental footprint – and this may impact on helicopter use (general agreement that the two services would be complementary).
 - Heliport is busiest un-manned air space in southern hemisphere.
 - Can you use information from overseas that show how impacts can be minimised? Franz Josef is an activity 'hub' and you expect to see things happening and to have lots of activities and services.
 - Tourism is changing in NZ – smaller groups and want to be more connected to nature. Internet has had an impact – visitors are more confident at doing own travel - FIT rather than coach tours. NZ\$ is now attractive for tourists. There is a growing opportunity.

- Would a cableway encourage a return to mass tourism? Have to manage the product so that Franz Josef doesn't become another Queenstown. View of the room was that in Glacier Country the cableway will slow the journey down and will benefit the surrounding towns. It will give people another reason to stay longer. See it as an icon activity.
- If the glacier keeps retreating, will the cableway trip be worth doing? The cableway will get people up close to the snow. Cableway lets you get up to a raw alpine environment quickly and safely – there's nowhere else in NZ where you can do this beyond developed ski fields. Fits well with other initiatives - ZIP, Predator free. Sell a whole new experience for an alpine experience (not just seeing a glacier).
- Consideration needs to be given to the safety of visitors in an alpine setting. Skyline needs to be sure that everyone who goes up also comes down.

7.10pm end

Summary sent to attendees by SEL 30 April 2024

Franz Josef Aerial Cableway Online Meeting 3 May – NZAC, FMC

Attendees:

- Karen Leacock – GM NZAC, Board Member Mountain Safety Council
- Megan Dimozantos – President FMC, Deputy Chair LSAR Board
- Grant Hensman – Director Skyline Enterprises
- Geoff McDonald – CEO Skyline Enterprises
- Rob Greenaway – RG&A

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- Skyline understands that the DOC CMS/National Park Management Plan will be reviewed in the near future, and provision for an aerial cableway would need to be included in these documents as well. Preparing the CMS and progressing the National Park Management Plan will be a public process.
- Once amenity areas are provided for in the CMS/National Park Management Plan and Te Tai o Poutini Plan, there still needs to be consent and concession applications for the project – both expected to be public processes.

To date most of the work has been on assessing the geology of the area. Likely competent rock has been identified for the base towers.

There are no plans to modify the carparking configuration. There will be no increase to the carpark footprint in the Park. A park and ride is the best solution to cope with new carparking demand. From a consenting point of view it would be not sensible to advocate for more parking areas in the Park.

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¹² Te Tai o Poutini Plan (TTPP) is the combined District Plan for the Buller, Grey and Westland District Councils. It will replace the current individual district plans. TTPP sets out the objectives, policies, rules and methods to manage land use activities and subdivision across the districts. TTPP also includes online maps to show zoning, and where various rules apply. See: <https://tppp.nz/>

Wind can be an issue for aerial cableways but doesn't appear to be a deal-breaker in this case.

Skyline wants to understand how the aerial cableway could affect recreation and tourism.

Discussion

Megan – will this be a Fast Track application as this would reduce opportunities for public input?

A: Not considered at this stage – the project has a long lead time.

Megan and Karen – strong concern regarding the project encouraging access to a dangerous alpine environment. Brewster Hut is an example of where inexperienced people end up in trouble and end up requiring SAR help – the proposal would be 'Brewster Hut on steroids'. Would need a tight management approach. While both NZAC and FMC members would appreciate the alpine access provided by the proposal, the risk to alpine neophytes could be far too high. In the four criteria, where does public safety sit? What legislation will be relevant to managing public safety? With freedom of access to national parks a given, how can you control or vet people? The number of people with requisite skills to access alpine settings would not be enough to make the proposal viable – even if you could identify who those people were.

A: Yes – an important part of planning for the proposal. Will take the many international examples of this type of alpine access into consideration. Consultation through the consenting process will be necessary – the project won't proceed without issues like that being worked through and agreed to. The first step, however, is getting an amenity area in the District Plan – otherwise there's no avenue for the proposal.

Karen – NZAC is not hugely keen on more helicopter access. Almer Hut access is a goat track – so an aerial cableway would be good for some members. However, the Club is unlikely to deviate from its original submission to the National Park Management Plan draft. That was well-consulted on with members at the time, and prepared by a respected team.

Megan – FMC is probably the same. The concerns in FMC's submission are still valid, but FMC appreciates that Skyline has the opportunity to make the submission to the District Plan as it has, and engage in future application processes. FMC is keen to keep the dialogue going and happy to engage in good faith. Very pleased that Skyline has engaged in this way today.

Karen – ditto. NZAC keen to keep talking as things progress. Please keep the clubs advised.

Grant & Geoff – will definitely do. Skyline recognises that this will be a long-term project with a lot of work to complete before consent and concession applications are made – if the submission for an amenity area is successful. Skyline will need the input of the likes of FMC and NZAC over time – noting that there may be areas of disagreement – but Skyline really needs to address those core concerns.

Rob to forward a meeting summary (this document).