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MONORAIL WILL HELP CREATE WORLD-CLASS TOURISM INITIATIVE

New Zealand needs to make a greater investment in top-tier tourism infrastructure in order to improve the experience of visitors and underpin the long-term future of the industry, according to the developers of the Fiordland Link Experience.

The Fiordland Link Experience, created by Wanaka-based Riverstone Holdings, is planned as a unique way of bringing tourists to what has been described as the eighth wonder of the world, Milford Sound. The journey combines a catamaran across Lake Wakatipu, an all-terrain vehicle ride on existing backcountry roads through tussock grasslands and mountain rivers, and a 43km monorail trip through native beech forest ending on the shores of Lake Te Anau at Te Anau Downs, 91kms from Milford Sound.

The Fiordland Link Experience journey effectively halves the current coach trip taken from Queenstown to Te Anau Downs by most tourists who visit Milford, and will spread the peak visitor flow into the area. But Riverstone Holdings chairman Bob Robertson says saving time, although helpful, is not the objective behind the new venture; creating a world-class experience is.

“The existing Milford Sound trip from Queenstown takes about 12 hours, leaving at 7am and not getting back before 7pm,” says Bob Robertson.

“The problem is that you spend almost 10 hours on a bus mainly travelling through farmland for just two hours at the destination – and worse, you take the same route twice. Most visitors find the journey arduous and many simply sleep through it.”

“This is a very good example of the problem we face with our international tourists. We have done a great job marketing “100% Pure New Zealand” by showing tourists fantastic scenery – mountains, rivers, and bush typically filmed by helicopter – which people think they can experience when they arrive in New Zealand.”

“However, the reality is that most visitors are spending hours on the road through farmland and urban areas, hardly getting the experience they were sold.”

“This is just not sustainable and is perhaps one reason why we are seeing a declining rate of growth in our tourism numbers when other countries are developing their tourism experience.”

Mr Robertson says it is important that tourists feel they can be part of the region’s awesome

landscape, getting close to the significant features rather than just sitting on another bus looking at, but not experiencing, the unique parts of our countryside.

“The Fiordland Link Experience is a journey that enables tourists to intimately appreciate our lakes, rivers, mountains, and native bush. It is not just another mode of travel to get from A to B in the quickest time possible; it is designed completely for enjoyment recognising that the journey is just as important as the end destination,” says Bob Robertson.

“This trip will be a world-class experience, and a reason in itself to come to New Zealand. Education on the environment, conservation initiatives, history and culture of the area will be built into the experience.”

Mr Robertson says the industry badly needs investment in this kind of visitor development, which combines a sustainable approach to the environment with a unique experience visitors can't get elsewhere.

“It is well known by local operators and increasingly by international tourists that the Milford Sound experience is becoming tired and it certainly needs refreshing,” says Bob Robertson.

“It is also becoming unsustainable, with increasing volumes of tourists travelling in a convoy of buses arriving at Milford at roughly the same time, making the whole area appear a lot more congested than it should be.”

To provide sustainable tourism, Bob Robertson says the industry needs investment in world-class infrastructure. This infrastructure needs to be able to accommodate large numbers of people and provide an outstanding experience without leaving outsized environmental and carbon footprints generated by old and tired technology.

“The Fiordland Link Experience is a great example of an infrastructural development that can carry twice the existing numbers – over a million people – yet still allow tourists to get up close and personal with our native bush – gliding silently at farm fence height, without leaving any impact behind.”

“This will be the longest monorail journey in the world, and is a safe and very comfortable way to travel. It is low impact and quiet, using electrically operated vehicles drawing power from totally renewable sources, such as the wind farm at Mossburn,” says Bob Robertson.

Mr Robertson says the Fiordland Link Experience will also make a significant contribution to the local economy, with additional tourism ventures planned in concert with the development, including the creation of a mountain bike track along the monorail route – with an additional extension from Te Anau Downs to Te Anau. The new trail is planned as a major leg of the proposed Three Lakes Ride between Lake Wakatipu, Lake Te Anau and Lake Manapouri.

“This trail is exactly the kind of experience envisaged by the Government in its long-term visitor strategy, providing an active world-class experience in its own right.”

“Transport will be available between the end of the monorail track at Te Anau Downs and Te Anau township, with visitors able to connect with the monorail’s regular schedule when they wish – allowing them to take time out during their journey to experience attractions elsewhere in Fiordland.”

The new service will also open up options to connect with coaches or pick up rental vehicles to travel the Southern Scenic Route.

Mr Robertson says New Zealand needs three or four new world-class ventures to keep inbound tourism numbers to New Zealand growing.

“We believe the Fiordland Link Experience – combining an incredible monorail journey and unique modes of transport, with the experience of Milford and the wider region – will become a magnetic attraction and will draw people to the country,” says Bob Robertson.

“But New Zealand needs several of these large initiatives to gain back our status as a leading tourist destination, offsetting the attraction of other countries around the world that have invested in significant new tourism developments to capture a larger share of the international tourism market.”

“We can no longer just rely on our fantastic scenery – we have to make sure every aspect of the journey is an ideal experience of our country – and we need infrastructure like the Fiordland Link Experience to achieve this.”

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