Before the Expert Panel appointed under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

Under	the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024
And	
In the Matter of	an application for approvals by NZSki Limited to upgrade existing infrastructure at the Remarkables Ski Area, including a new passenger transport lift, carparking areas, and expanding the ski field into the adjacent Doolans Basin

Statement of Evidence of **Ross James Lawrence** on behalf of NZSki Limited in response to Section 53 Comments

Commercial

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Lane Neave
Level 1, 2 Memorial Street
PO Box 7348
Queenstown
Solicitors Acting: Joshua Leckie/Charlotte Coyle
Email: joshua.leckie@laneneave.co.nz/
charlotte.coyle@laneneave.co.nz
Phone: 03 409 0321

lane neave.

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Ross James Lawrence.

2. I have had a career in the ski industry spanning 40 years, employed full time for 37 years of that period. Initially 10 years at Whakapapa ski area, 2 years at Rainbow Valley ski area, 10 years at Mt Hutt ski area and most recently 16 years as the Ski Area Manager at The Remarkables ski area ("**RE**"). Each location experiencing growth and development during my tenure.

3. I have a Diploma in Agriculture and a Bachelor of Applied Management majoring in Strategic Management. I was awarded a New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the ski industry and alpine biodiversity.

4. I was initially involved with major development at Whakapapa ski area removing several surface lifts and replacing them with several aerial ropeways. During my tenure, Mt Hutt saw a major redesign removing six surface lifts and replacing them with two aerial ropeways. This changed the way the ski area trail network functioned and improved the experience drastically. RE has experienced major development over the last 12 years replacing two aerial ropeways and adding an additional aerial ropeway while relocating the base lodge facility to create an easier transfer for guests from road to on snow. All of this development included redesign of the trail network, which involved careful management of vegetation and the biodiversity across the landscape. The greatest achievement here involved installing a pipeline from Lake Alta across Conservation Estate into the Recreation Reserve terrain with very little impact on the environment.

5. As part of my role at RE, I have been involved with developing new alternate methods of collection and propagation of seed dispersal in the process of revegetation where earthworks have taken place within concession area development, to assist nature flora recover ahead of the natural cycles. Over my tenure at RE I've been able to appreciate and understand the local biodiversity on site to enable a close affiliation with this environment.

6. I am currently employed by NZSki Limited (**NZSki**) as a Senior Advisor for the Remarkables Ski Area Upgrade and Doolans Expansion project.

7. This statement is given as part of NZSki's response to comments on the Remarkables Ski Area Upgrade and Doolans Expansion (**Project**) made under Section 53 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**FTA**). This statement responds to specific comments raised by:

   (a) Queenstown Mountain Guides (**QMG**).

   (b) FTAA Section 53 Transportation review comments by Abley prepared for Queenstown Lakes District Council (Appendix 1). The specific comments in the Abley report my evidence responds to are outlined below.

      (i) The impact of the additional vehicular traffic associated with the expanded Remarkables proposal is substantial, adding over 9,600 vehicle hours of delay per annum to other road users along SH6. When accounting for three years of continued SH6 growth due to development along the southern corridor this increases to over 30,000 vehicle hours of delay per annum. The economic cost of this additional travel time delay and associated vehicle operating costs and emissions (due to idling time) equates to $680K in 2026 growing to $2.220M in 2029.[1]

      (ii) Noting our concerns in relation to congestion we do not support the addition of any additional private vehicle parking on-site (or corresponding additional traffic movements) until the traffic impacts are identified and be suitably mitigated. The mitigation should in our view include a permanent intersection upgrade at the SH6 Remarkables access which is suitably futureproofed for the Te Tapuae Southern Corridor Structure Plan and reflected in the condition set. We recommend a cap by placed on vehicle movements into and out of the ski field until such time as this is addressed.[2]

      (iii) The Remarkables access road onto SH6 is not functioning satisfactorily and currently falls well short of NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) guidance in terms of design standard. We do not support further traffic generation which would exacerbate the current level of queuing and delays being experienced, unless further mitigation (i.e. beyond the current traffic management measures) is identified and implemented to relieve congestion at the SH6 Remarkables access road.

[1] Section 53 – Transportation Review completed by Abley at [3].
[2] Section 53 – Transportation Review completed by Abley at [10].

(iv) Traffic Generation: Point 28 (a), (b), (c) of Ableyʼs report refers to questions on achieving the mode shift targets which are discussed further below.

SPECIFIC RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Current Operational Status

8. The following section provides a brief overview of REʼs current operational status and relevant background context.

9. The RE is accessed by a private road (the lower part owned by NZSki) off SH6 approximately 3 km south of Frankton. As outlined in the application (B-24A):

   (a) NZSki operates buses with a 44-person capacity between Queenstown and its ski areas at Coronet Peak and RE.

   (b) For the 2026 season buses were scheduled to depart from Queenstown to RE at 30-minute intervals from 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM and one later bus at 10:00 AM. Buses from Frankton are scheduled to depart at 30-minute intervals from 7:45 AM until 11:15 AM. Buses start to return from RE to Frankton from 1:30 PM.

   (c) All buses, unless full, stop at the SH6 base area car park area at the bottom of RE Access Road to collect additional passengers.

   (d) Timetables are reviewed annually to optimise upload efficiencies, and available bus capacities are optimised on a daily basis as required by customer demand, operational and fleet requirements, and broader network effects.

10. RE Roads Crew are made up of daily personnel of 12-14, managing all aspects of the road to maintain safe access, egress and parking throughout the day.

11. The Abley report at [65] notes that sufficient queue space should be provided between SH6 and the first conflict point within Car Park A for inbound vehicles. In response to this, a remote camera at the base of the road records and updates the Roads crew of vehicle movements travelling uphill is continuously monitored. The camera is situated 150m inside the point of entry off SH6. As part of the management plan staff monitor and action road closures once the vehicle count is at 85% capacity for car parks available at the ski area, both at road end and inside the entrance at the base of the road. Once car parking capacities are realised the management plan moves to 'one in one out' process whereby only when car park

spaces become available, they can be filled by incoming vehicles. Staff man each car park and coordinate vehicle parking via radio. Communication is relayed via web site updates and a visual sign board at the base of the road to public throughout the day providing current status. When parking capacities are realised personnel are also stationed at the base of the road to alert incoming guests of the current status.

12. The Abley report at Table assesses peak traffic from 8-9am and 5-6pm. In response, inbound traffic is at the greatest demand during the hours of 8am to 10am daily and 3.30pm to 4.30pm outbound and as snow and weather conditions favour. School holiday periods primarily in June/July are recognised high demand periods for patronage for the season which runs from June to October.

13. Capping of vehicle movements suggested by the Abley report at [6(a)] already exists and is managed as and when required so that no vehicles impact SH6 traffic beyond the point of entry onto RE road access. This has intentionally been managed post an incident of SH6 congestion in 2023 when vehicle movements were impacted due to road conditions changing dramatically on upper stretches of the access road (9km mark). A call was made to hold all traffic at the 2.5km mark. Inflow of traffic at that time (7.30am) was at peak and within ten minutes the back log had queued all the way down and onto SH6. Because of the everyday traffic heading south out of Frankton at the same time the back log quickly grew all the way back to the airport round about on SH6 causing major traffic jam on SH6.Once realised RE traffic was moved forward up the road and all back log traffic entering RE was parked at the base of the road until clearance had been given to allow traffic to flow to the base of the ski area. That incident resulted in a review of road management on RE road and this issue is now controlled.

14. Paragraph 28(c) of the Abley report notes that there is no evidence to support the increased in average vehicle occupancy. RE operates a system on anticipated high demand days that vehicles carrying 3 or more persons are allowed access to car parking closer to the base facility. We do this to encourage more people to fill each vehicle and therefore reduce vehicle demand. Vehicles carrying 2 or less persons are directed to park further away from the base facility in Carpark 4 and travel the extra distance via a shuttle service provided. This incentive for guests to fill the seats of their vehicles with persons has gained strong recognition and has been established for 5 years now. It will continue going forward as demand keeps growing. It is managed daily with personnel positioned in the lower car parks to prevent through traffic movements with a face to face conversation with occupants.

15. With respect to comments from Abley at [27] regarding the proposed mode share targets not being measured or monitored, the bus service operates on a prebooking basis. Guests book a seat for a selected time and date to travel and where they will

be picked up from on a regular service route to the ski area. The final pick-up location is at the base of the RE road so guests can leave vehicles there or be dropped off and then take a seat on a bus up the road. The bus service patronage to RE has increased to currently sit at 28%% of guests preferring to travel on this service rather than self-drive. There has been a steady upward trend to utilise the bus service since it was initiated 12 years ago when it originally catered to 19% of guests.

16. Current pricing for the bus service for the upcoming 2027 season is $38 per person. Season pass holders receive a discount priced at $23 per person. The bus service has been set up as a support service to facilitate guest access to snow. Costs of this service including labour, fuel, fleet repairs and maintenance are covered however it is not profit orientated.

State Highway 6 / Remarkables Intersection

17. The Abley report raises at [38] that the network has in the last two years passed a ‘tipping point’ where network performance and traffic congestion during the ski season has deteriorated markedly. Accordingly, the Abley report considers that any further increase in SH6 traffic or ski traffic will be accompanied by further increases in delays and deteriorating traffic conditions.

18. With increased urban growth and expansion along the 'southern corridor' it is evident that access from and egress onto the highway is becoming a safety concern for guests and staff of RE on a daily basis. Compounding this is the timing of peak flows for both southern corridor traffic and patronage to and from the ski area being at the same periods of the day.

19. In my opinion, traffic heading south between 7am and 9am is made up of a majority of trades persons, with the expansion of building residential properties along the southern corridor, heading out to work or outbound tourists to Te Anau/Milford. Then returning to Queenstown between 4pm and 5.30pm. At the same time residents from existing housing on the Southern Corridor are travelling to work in Queenstown in the morning and returning in the evening. The increase in traffic flows is forecast to continue to increase with associated residential development occurring into the next 10 years as set out in the evidence of Mr Chris Rossiter. At the same time RE patronage has returned to pre covid levels and the further development associated with the Doolans Project means that access/egress from SH6 requires a safe means of entry and exit.

20. RE has set up, with NZTA approval, a temporary management plan facilitating left turn only on exit from the ski area road onto SH6 to eliminate right turning traffic across busy and often at capacity 100km/hr highway. While business levels are what they are at RE currently, this plan works for the ski area with minimal end of day

queues forming in comparison to when vehicles were allowed to right turn. It is recognised it is only a temporary solution while NZTA further assess long term solutions for the southern corridor traffic flows. The south bound traffic from Frankton in the late afternoon is already heavily congested, often moving at 30-40 kilometres per hour with residents returning home along the southern corridor. Traffic exiting RE 'merge like a zip' using the left turn only. Because the traffic heading south is already at a much slower pace than the 100 kilometres per hour speed limit, the potential for vehicle incidents has been reduced making the exit a safe manoeuvrer.

21. QLDC proposes that RE fund a traffic light installation to facilitate safe, timely and managed entry and exit onto SH6. I do not consider that funding arrangement proportional or appropriate to the primary driver of the current issue, as the traffic congestion issues are primarily caused by developments occurring along the southern corridor.

22. I note that SH6 is an NZTA, not QLDC responsibility. Currently there is no clear and certain direction or future plan for the corridor which is already exceeding capacity by either NZTA or QLDC. Mr Chris Rossiter's evidence expands on this point. RE is open to the idea of a left turn only continuation on exiting RE road and widening the north bound lane to include a centre lane right turn, therefore allowing north bound through traffic to continue unhindered while right turning traffic have a specified lane to pull into and turn from. The impact RE business has on SH6 is also only evident during peak periods between July and September. If any proportionality was agreed this should also be factored into any le costing framework of such an expansion in road width and road marking accordingly.

Mode Shift and Occupancy Targets

23. The Abley report at [26]-[28] raises concerns with the proposed mode shift and occupancy targets proposed. It notes that private vehicle mode share exceeded 70%, which is higher than the 65% assumed in the Baseline scenario. One of the proposals of the Project is to increase patronage on buses – mode shift. It is recognised that car parking facilities at the ski area will become limited and the option to redirect guests onto a bus service is the most efficient and effective way to enable growth and support self-drive guests. Currently RE bus patronage sits at 28% of all visitation. 85% of that is from the Queenstown area. 15% is picked up from the base of the road. Increased bus numbers are required and will be made available as business levels demand.

24. The best mode of transport would be to carry guests from point of pick up, in town, all the way to the ski area base in a single journey, and RE do want this to be the case. However, ongoing because traffic delays on the existing infrastructure on SH6 and Frankton road currently limit the efficiency of this approach. As a result, our best

means of transporting guests in one movement is to minimise transport delays by focusing operations where we can facilitate one mode of transport. Once arterial route traffic is stable additional direct buses will operate from the point of pick up (in town) to the ski area base.

25. One of the impediments to achieving greater bus capacities from Queenstown central is the existing delayed/queued traffic along Frankton Road. Bus scheduling is very hard to maintain in a timely fashion when traffic is stalled along this access route and without any alternative. To incentivise guests to travel on buses with a direct means of travel to and from the ski area clear, clean traffic flow is imperative.

26. Additional parking areas are proposed at the base of RE road to facilitate another 500 plus vehicles, however this is balanced against the loss of 160 upper carparks from Carpark 1 and Carpark 3 due to the additional infrastructure required for the Project. The bus service required to meet incoming demand on busy days will require buses departing this car park every 5 minutes over an hour period to meet uphill demand. The critical mass here is maintaining car parking operations to facilitate timely parking of vehicles while buses are moving through the car park on entry and exit. This becomes an operational process which already occurs in existing car parks on site.

27. Private vehicle numbers on site are dictated by spaces available. Once parking spaces are full the road is closed to all uphill access. The only means of access then is by bus and managed by RE personnel on site. This will automatically cap numbers of visitor and vehicle numbers on site.

28. Still to be investigated to facilitate maximum patronage are options of:

    (a) 'Pay to park' which incurs a cost to guests in upper car parks.

    (b) Option of Free bus transfers from the base of the road. Which already happens with full upper car parks.

    (c) Seasonality of patronage, moving guest patronage to less visitor number days. Demand is high early season pricing for mid/late season will move the dial. Market to snow coverage, longer sunnier days mid late season.

    (d) Lift price to accommodate seasonality. Price by the hour or half day are options.

    (e) The regional bus service (ORC) currently operating must look at how it operates to remove single occupancy vehicles from the network. Providing a reliable service along the southern corridor would assist in reducing single occupant drivers. Here I'm referring to non-ski traffic.

(f) The bicycle trail network once operational will assist in removing single occupant drivers from the southern corridor travelling to and from employment in Queenstown.

(g) Moving requirement of 3 persons per vehicle could move to a minimum of 4 persons per vehicle to park in upper car parks.

(h) Possible NZSki bus service to and from southern corridor suburbs directly to the ski area and return to save guests using their own transport means.

29. All of the above are options to further discuss and consider, all or some form of, over the next 3 years and prior to the Doolans trail network becoming operational.

30. The 44 seat bus fleet numbers 23 currently. To account for increased visitation another 18 additional buses are required. To procure and build these custom builds using our existing bus builder will take several years (6 years). Guest numbers are forecast to increase up to 6,000 visitors per day. This will not be realised in year one of operation with the Doolans open. It may take 3 to 4 seasons to realise that growth and demand for additional buses.

31. Mode share requires other supporting services within Queenstown to be readily available, reliable and convenient. For example, delivering guests, by bus, to the Frankton Hub relies on the service beyond this point to be on time, timely and convenient. Having other bus services from this point allows NZSki buses to return sooner to the hill to pick up more guests for their return trip to town.

Predator Reduction Programme

32. Dr Bramley has reviewed possible offsetting framework options in his Statement of Evidence. I think it appropriate to recognise RE's current Predator Reduction Programme evolved out of in-house initiatives not set in any conditions prior to the 2023 Shadow Basin lizard find. These initiatives were born out of national initiatives for a predator free NZ.

33. RE initiated trapping of predators in 2016 operating 50 A200 traps, situating them above 1600m asl within the boundary of the ski area. After a 6-month period there with little success the traps were moved down the access road to around the 400m – 700m asl elevation and have remained there since with far greater success. Adding to the units RE has acquired 10 A24 automatic traps which continue to eradicate possums. In total 1,293 predators have been removed, 378 of those in the last twelve months.

34. The trap lines have been monitored monthly to rebait and reset as required. 3 live traps were purchased 2 years ago and set between 900m asl and 1700m asl. So far 3 cats have been caught and removed from site.

35. During investigations into development of Shadow Basin trail network in 2022 McCanns Skink and Pallid Skinks were identified within proposed development terrain. They were relocated to a safe area at the same elevation and aspect and 20 bait stations set up around their perimeter to attract any mice or rats. These are rebaited annually.

Co-existence of Concession Holders

36. RE recognises it operates on public land that is made available to all users and aligning its obligations to provide access to the public at all times unless temporary closures must be implemented for reasons of safety. RE works hard to maintain access during winter months while carrying out daily operations including avalanche control inbounds. We have worked with all local community groups and other concessionaires to provide safe access through the ski area at times of high risk due to snow conditions. Daily reports stipulate what restrictions are occurring for guests and are updated as those conditions change. Public including back country concessionaires have access through the ski area and at times, on high-risk days check in with Ski Patrol on site to attain current conditions and pass on their intentions.

37. QMG comment on *'concern about stranded assets as climate change reduces snow reliability'.* RE has outlined in the application all assets will be removed should the business become untenable.

38. QMG refer to the loss of backcountry terrain available. I do not agree with this. Currently QMG utilise a road partially owned by RE to gain access to the back country referred to. That will still be available. RE also provides a single ride lift pass to assist back country access sooner and with ease. The proposed Doolans Gondola will provide even better access to the 'back country' for all concessionaires.

39. QMG have stated the loss of the Doolans basin is significant to their operation. I disagree with this statement, Wye Creek catchment which sits right beside the Doolans Basin to the west and has very similar terrain for winter experiences in a remote setting backing onto front country operations, is just as easily accessed.

40. Other winter sports users include a Festival for Ice and Mixed Climbing held every August for the last 10 years. This event is not managed and intended for ski guests but because of the local alpine terrain appropriate for ice and mixed climbing fraternity. No restrictions are put on this group other than abiding to our safety

protocols while travelling through the ski area and respecting the skier traffic at the same time. Because of the close proximity to RE operations, we provide first aid support in case of emergency via our medical team on site. This event can attract up to 800 participants over a 4-day event.

41. Summer periods with any development or daily maintenance operations happening it is RE's responsibility to provide safe access through the site for public and concessionaires utilising access to get to Lake Alta or other hiking areas in the alpine environment. The same protocols are in place to enable this.

Conclusion

42. Transport of our guests has proved its worth and is growing in capacity and demand over the last 12 years. While car parking capacity at the ski area is limited, we recognise and understand that mode shift is required to carry the balance of increased patronage safely to and from the ski area. There are various options available to move the dial on guest approach to means of travel and over the next three to five years RE will establish more capacity from Queenstown to RE by bus.

43. The growth along the southern corridor requires a deadline for planning for implementation of safe ease of access throughout which falls on the hands of NZTA and QLDC. RE is not averse to continuing discussions towards a common goal that provides an efficient and effective outcome for all road users where RE guests are affected.

44. Over the last 10 years RE has reduced predator impact at the ski area and continues to work with the local community to continue to reduce this further.



Ross James Lawrence

3 November 2026