



IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

Although damage from the Mataura River flooding in early February was widespread, it could have been much worse, Southland District Council’s roading team leader Hartley Hare says.

A Southland-wide state of emergency was declared on 4 February, a day after heavy rains led to an emergency being declared in Fiordland.

The torrential downpour caused levels of flooding in the Mataura River catchment not seen since 1984.

Damage was widespread, with many farm fences levelled and roads and bridges badly affected.

The Benmore bridge, which was already closed, washed away, the bridge abutments at Gow Burn near Piano Flat were scoured out and the raging waters caused slips and erosion, tore up seal and gouged gravel roads.

The Lower Hollyford Road was extensively damaged and is closed at Marion car park, about 1.5km from the state highway intersection. Large sections of the road have been washed out or obliterated by landslips, and several bridges have been destroyed. Gunns Camp also suffered extensive damage.



◀ **Hartley Hare**



Damage to Council-owned roading infrastructure amounted to more than \$3 million.

Council immediately applied for emergency funding from the government co-funder, NZ Transport Agency.

Strategic manager transport Hartley Hare said Council had a “small provision” for emergency funding but Council would have to investigate other ways to fund its share of the repair costs.

Repair work should not impact too badly on road maintenance work already scheduled or the accelerated bridge replacement programme, which was scheduled to begin at the beginning of April, he said.

There were other contractors available able to pick up some of the repair work, which allowed Council’s maintenance contractors to carry on with their usual programmes. However, there was always a flow-on effect, Hartley said.

“It does put the pressure on. Even things like grading. There may be roads that need a higher priority because they’ve been scoured out in the floods so graders get redirected to those, which has a flow-on effect to other roads where we might not be able to provide the same level of service that we normally provide.

“In six to eight weeks, though, the guys do generally manage to catch up.”

Sometimes even faster. A case in point is the Edendale to Wyndham road. This is one of the most heavily used stretches of road in the Southland District network. About 350 metres of seal just outside the Wyndham boundary was swept away during the week of flooding in early February. By 21 February the road had been resealed and the road markings went on a week later.

“Overall, in the scale of the event, we’ve been pretty lucky with the amount of damage,” Hartley said.

Damage stretched along the Mataura River from northern Southland, where, for example, McLean Road near Garston was scoured out, down to Edendale and Wyndham, Fortrose and Matura Island.

The cost weren’t just related to repairs, Hartley said.

“There’s even the cost of going out and inspecting the roads. Even during the event, monitoring the roads – what roads are open, what roads are closed, as the floodwaters moved slowly down the Mataura from the northern Waikaia area to Seaward Downs and lower Matura you’re constantly watching it, so there’s all those sorts of costs too – going out, inspecting roads, closing roads, putting detours in place.”

Council staff and contractors worked long hours and “put in a big effort”, Hartley said.

