

Donkey Steps Emergency Bypass Route Access Strategy Plan

Version 8
February 2024



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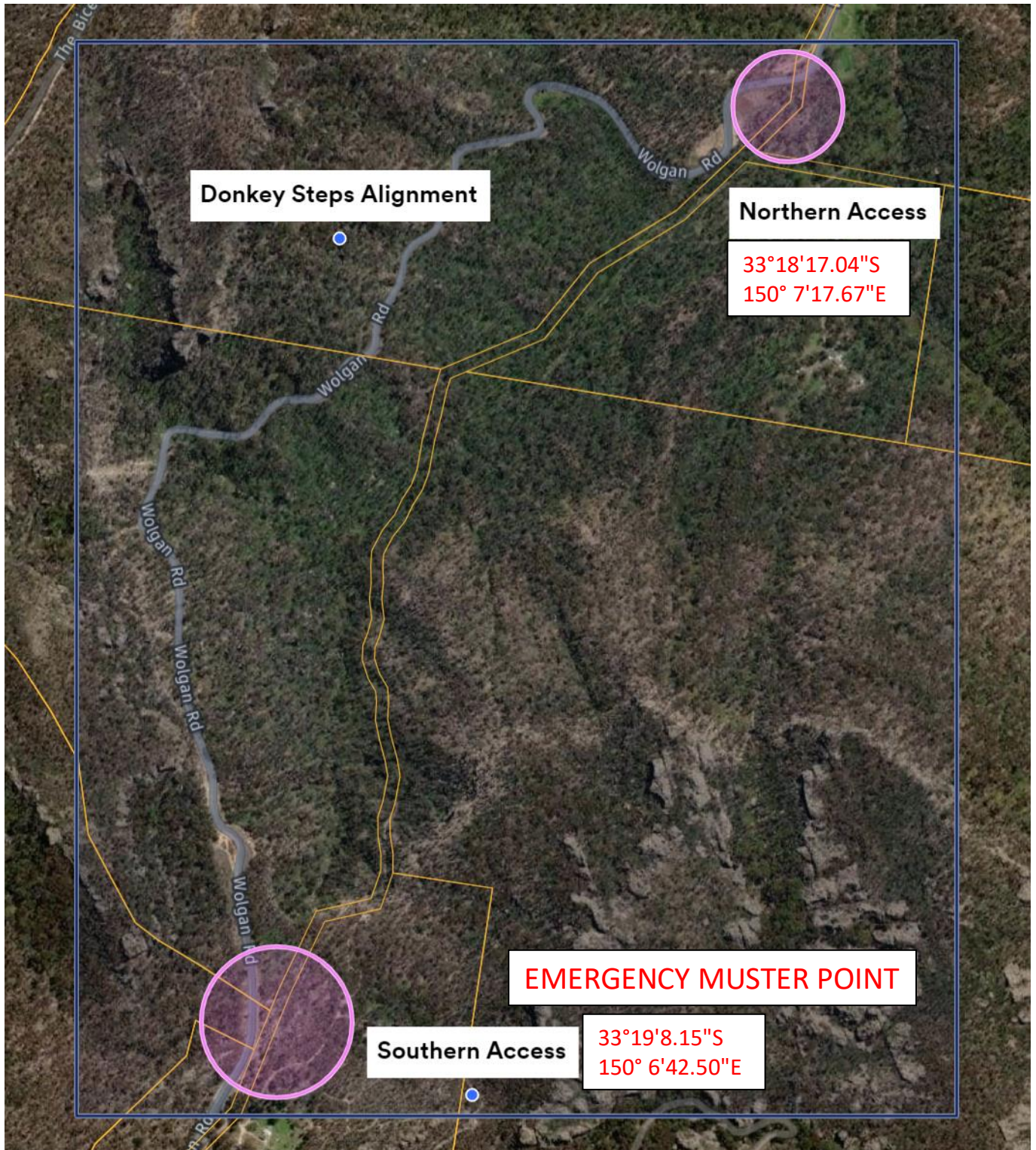
Introduction

Following the major rainfall event that occurred in November 2022 and a subsequent inspection by WSP Golder and Council, the Wolgan Road was closed due to the extreme risk of material slipping. After further consultation between Public Works, Lithgow Council and WSP Golder, it was deemed the risk cannot be managed through simple constructions means and remediation works ceased.

The Donkey Strops Track was then identified as an alternative access to the Valley. Significant civil works informed by in-depth engineering and environmental assessment were completed in early December 2022 with the track ready for use in January 2023. But the form and the environmental conditions dictate that there be additional safeguards for, and limitations applied to its use – this Access Strategy.

This document was developed to summarise the access strategy plan for Donkey Steps for Wolgan Valley stakeholders and to provide clarity surrounding the access arrangements.

Location of Donkey Steps Trail



Southern Access & Northern Access - Circled in pink

(SOUTHERN ACCESS POINT NOMINATED AS EMERGENCY MUSTER POINT)

Yellow road alignment – Donkey Steps

Operational Management

Allowable Vehicles

The road will be in place for use by residents, local businesses and emergency services only. Should any business (such as Emirates) have bespoke access requirements, a separate, complimentary strategy may be considered in consultation with the relevant stakeholder.

The Donkey Steps trail, due to the nature of the road terrain and limitations to width of the road will be a one-way, 4WD and AWD access only. 2WD access is not encouraged, however is possible with excellent site conditions, driving expertise, and a nearby emergency point of contact. Access by motorbike is not permitted.

Please note that use of the route by pedestrians and cyclists is ***strictly prohibited*** while the route is in use by vehicles. This limitation is in place due to the narrowness of some sections, and the risk of injury or death in the event of a pedestrian/cyclist and vehicle interaction.

Heavy Vehicles

Following consultation with industry and transport consultants, use of the Donkey Steps is limited to **Four-Wheel Drive Heavy Vehicles Only**, with a **Maximum of 6 Tons GVM** and a **Maximum length of 8 Metres**. (4WD Cat 1 Fire Tankers would be exempt of this requirement, no Firefighting Bulk Water Tankers should be used).

All drivers must be experienced in all-terrain access requirements and seek Council approval before access.

Heavy vehicles may only use the route between 10am and 2pm, outside regular peak hours, to minimise interaction with regular traffic.

It is acknowledged that there is a multitude of heavy vehicle types. For other vehicles that fall outside this standard, application for exemption must be made to Council. These applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. See the '*Process for Exemption*' section below for further detail.

AWD Vehicles

AWD access is permitted. 2WD access is not encouraged and should only be attempted where there are excellent site conditions, driving expertise, and a nearby emergency point of contact.

Trailers

There are a wide variety of trailers that can be towed by a standard 4WD or AWD, from a 6x4 unbraked box trailer, through to 3.5 tonne, 22-ft caravans. There are also a variety of purposes for towing, including recreational, business, and anything in between, and the vehicles used for towing can differ greatly too. In short, understanding the significant grade of the route, there are too many variables to apply a one-size-fits-all solution and thereby mitigate all risk.

For this reason, only trailers up to 1.5 tonnes (trailer + load) may be towed along the route without approval. Vehicles with any trailer may only use the route between 10am and 2pm, outside regular peak hours, to minimise interaction with regular traffic.

For all other towing requirements, application for exemption must be made to Council. These applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. See the '*Process for Exemption*' section below for further detail.

Comms Devices

Each vehicle *must* be fitted with a UHF CB radio before using the track, unless in convoy with a vehicle that has a radio. In circumstances where a vehicle without a radio is travelling in convoy with a vehicle equipped with a radio, the vehicle without a radio must travel at the front of the convoy.

UHF Etiquette

Even with traffic lights operating, before travelling along the Donkey Steps route, each vehicle/convoy must:

- a) Turn on UHF and listen for traffic. Park in a safe area while doing so.
- b) Wait for green on the traffic signals
- c) Announce your location.
- d) Announce vehicle type and colour.
- e) Announce you have commenced travel.
- f) Announce once you have completed your journey and have reached the bottom/top of the route.

Process for Exemption

Should any resident or business require an exemption to this requirement, contact is to be made with Council making such a request in writing with at least 24 hours' notice. This request for exemption is to include the following detail:

- Type of vehicle (dimensions and weights).
- Purpose for access.
- Dates and times that access is required.

Council will assess the merit of each request on a case-by-case basis giving due regard to risk. Should an approval be granted, additional conditions may be applied, such as the use of a convoy arrangement, or a temporary road closure to facilitate access.

For any vehicle that falls outside the 'allowable vehicles' defined by this document, a risk assessment **must** be completed before an exemption is granted. This risk assessment must consider, at a minimum, vehicle type, load details, prevailing weather, time of day, condition of the track, purpose for access and future frequency of access.

To request an exemption, please contact Council on 02 6354 9999, requesting either Paul Creelman, or Jonathon Edgecombe. Alternatively, requests can be made by email at wolgan@lithgow.nsw.gov.au.

Emergency Vehicles

All emergency service vehicles will be given unfettered access in the event of an emergency. Emergency services will be provided with separate keys and all the details required to ensure rapid and simple access.

Emergency Access

It is strongly encouraged that use of the Donkey Steps occur during the day, wherever possible. However, since traffic lights have been installed to govern alternating one-way traffic, community/business use after hours is permitted.

Should any restrictions on access be put in place, these will be clearly communicated and signposted. However, legitimate emergency use will always be given absolute priority.

It is requested that all residents and visitors abide by those restrictions in place, for their own safety, and for the benefit of all residents.

Operating Hours

The route is now open 24 hours per day. However, recommended operating hours are 7am to 7pm during daylight saving time, and 6am to 6pm during non-daylight saving time. Essentially, sunrise to sunset. It is recommended that access is limited to daylight hours only due to the geotechnical risks, and hazards associated with an unsealed pavement in wet weather.

In the event installed traffic signals are non-operational, a Pilot Vehicle will be in place to escort all vehicles. This will occur to minimise the potential for interaction of vehicles travelling in opposing directions.

While the traffic signals are operating, there will not be any need for a Council-provided pilot vehicle.

Pilot Vehicle Process (when required)

The Pilot Vehicle will be manned with a competent operator and equipped with an appropriate First Aid Kit and operational communications in case of emergency (both UHF Radio and Satellite Phone).

Each morning, the Pilot Vehicle Operator will assess the readiness of the route for daily traffic. Subsequently, a second inspection will be completed by the Pilot Vehicle Operator at 6:45am every morning.

The pilot vehicle operator will be required to travel the road each morning to conduct a documented road inspection prior to road use. Consideration will be given to all geological, environmental, and general hazards before signing off the road condition as fit for use for the day.

If a road closure is required, the Pilot Vehicle Operator will contact Council's Transport Manager, Paul Creelman, or Council's Director Infrastructure Services, Jonathon Edgecombe. Council's website will be immediately updated to reflect this change, and text messages will be distributed to the community if a closure is required.

Operating Hours During Construction

There remains the need for additional construction and upgrade of parts of the track and this will result in some disruption of access. It is acknowledged that each part of the construction and subsequent upgrade process related to the Donkey Steps will have unique requirements. However, as a baseline plan, during periods of road maintenance or construction, access will be limited to 7am to 9am, and 3pm to 7pm.

Prior to any changes to this schedule, Council will endeavour to provide at least 48 hours' notice to the community.

A complete closure of the Donkey Steps will only occur as a *last resort*. If any temporary closure of the Donkey Steps route is required, use of the Old Coach Road by convoy will be reinstated subject to the approval of National parks and Wildlife. Every attempt will be made to minimise the impact of such an event. For planned closures, at least 5 days' notice will be given.

As road conditions cannot be always assured during construction and/or maintenance periods, afterhours access is prohibited during these times. Any community locks will be removed to ensure site security.

In emergency, life threatening situations, access will be granted at any time during the closure period, so long as safe access can be assured. This includes access for emergency vehicles, to whom unfettered access will be granted at any time. Contact is to be made with Council or the contractor on-site in such circumstances.

Operating Hours for Heavy Vehicle Access

Heavy vehicle access will only be permitted during the hours of 10am and 2pm, to ensure minimised interaction with residential traffic during peak hours.

Due to increased risk, until such a time that phone reception is available, all heavy vehicle access must be accompanied by a Pilot Vehicle Operator.

All drivers must be experienced in all-terrain access requirements and seek written Council approval (by email) before access.

Operational Requirements

Access Protocol

A secure lock will be installed for use by local residents and businesses only. A key to this lock will be assigned to all residents over the age of 16.

Each key will be security cut, uniquely numbered, and a register will be held by Lithgow City Council. Each key will be assigned to an individual, with details held such as name, address, phone number, email address and vehicle registration (if applicable).

Each resident will be assigned *one key only*. Security of this access is paramount, and it is the responsibility of each key owner to look after their own key. Any lost keys may significantly reduce the security of access.

Any issued key is **strictly non-transferrable**. If a key is no longer required, it must be immediately returned to Council prior to it being reissued.

Lithgow City Council will bear the cost of issuing one key to each resident. However, noting the importance of maintaining a secure access to the Donkey Steps, replacement keys will attract a fee of \$50. This is inclusive of the per-key replacement cost of \$29.50.

Prior to the issue of any key, each recipient must acknowledge and agree to the above conditions.

No keys will be provided to business suppliers or visitors, regardless of the regularity of their access. This is largely because they are outside existing communications networks. The requirement for facilitated access will best prevent visitors attempting the route if there have been changes to site conditions.

The old Wolgan Road remains closed to all traffic as a result of the assessed risk to life being higher than generally accepted tolerability criteria. To reinforce this closure, new concrete barriers and gates will be installed, keyed alike to the Donkey Steps gates. New, permanent road closure signage will also be installed to clearly advise all motorists of the closure. Lastly, cameras and counters will be installed to obtain detail of emergency usage.

General Requirements

CCTV will be installed on site, alongside clear signage, to ensure key rules and access requirements are adhered to. Any breaches of protocol (such as unauthorised access) should be reported to Council immediately.

There will be no requirement for the use of Convoys, except in any circumstance where temporary use of the Old Coach Road is required.

Any visitors must be accompanied by a local resident familiar with the road. Additionally, until such time where the Pilot Vehicle can be safely removed, visitor access must also be accompanied by the Pilot Escort Vehicle.

Timed Traffic Control lights have been positioned at the top and bottom, in a location adjacent to the gates. This will ensure that there is no opportunity for vehicles travelling in opposite directions to interact between the top and bottom of the Donkey Steps.

The travel direction time sequence will be 6 mins to allow a safe speed of travel in either direction, without interruption. Heavy vehicle access which might require in excess of 6 minutes to navigate the route must make contact with Council. In such an event, bespoke traffic control arrangements will be made to ensure motorist safety.

No more than 4 vehicles will be permitted to use the track at any one time. This limit is in place due to the limited room for queuing before the gate at the top of the Donkey Steps route.

At all times, vehicles are to maintain contact by UHF radio, tuned to Channel 20. Before proceeding to use the

route, drivers are to make a precautionary call to ensure the route is clear. All residents are strongly encouraged to purchase their own radios to maintain contact. In the event a radio is not available, Council has purchased an array of loan units for community use, and a radio is available at the top and bottom of the route, secured in a lock box, for emergency situations.

In the event of an emergency:

Vehicles are to cease all use of the track and congregate at the emergency muster point at the top of the Donkey Steps route, indicated on the map on Page 4. Contact is to be immediately made with relevant emergency services and Council as early as practicable.

If the traffic lights cease operating, please call Council in the first instance. If required, alternative temporary measures (such as manned traffic control) may be implemented. Prior to driving the route, however, please radio your intention to drive the route and wait a minimum of 3 minutes to ensure any vehicles currently using the track have sufficient time to finish their journey. Only once you have radioed your intention to drive the route and waited a minimum of 3 minutes should an attempt be made to travel the detour route.

Incident/Wet Weather

Lithgow City Council will monitor weather predictions and provide advice to the community of the potential for hazardous road conditions, and thereby, the possibility of road closures. If either 25mm in one event, or more than 12 hours of persistent rain, is predicted, a standard message will be sent by email to the community. While these events occur, inspections will occur twice daily, once at 6am and again at 3pm.

A rain gauge will be installed at the top of the Donkey Steps as a direct measure of how much rain has fallen in this location. Combined with any community held data, this will ensure a greater understanding of how much rain has fallen in the locality. If the gauge measures greater than 25mm, either during a formal inspection or through community feedback, an inspection must occur before the track is cleared for use.

In the event of a hazard reported to Council by the community, an inspection will be arranged as soon as is reasonably practicable. Operational staff may conduct the inspection and provide advice back to Council engineers. In such cases, these employees will not provide advice to the community, but rather refer residents to contact Council engineers.

Closure Scenario

In the event of a closure, a prioritised list of five Council project managers and engineers has been developed for immediate notification. Whoever receives the notification will immediately send a pre-developed email advising of the need to close the road, to the following contacts:

- Standard community contact list, including a direct call to the Wolgan Valley Association president, for distribution via the local Whatsapp group.
- Local Emergency Management Committee contact list.
- Angela Lonerghan - NPWS
- Peter Gracey - contractor
- Council's IT team for website update
- Council's Customer Service team, including the after-hours service.
- Council's Visitor Information Centre

If a closure longer than 24 hours is expected, contact will be made with the local branch of National Parks and Wildlife Services to consider opening the Old Coach Road to facilitated traffic (convoys). Any access to the Old Coach Road will be at the discretion of National Parks and Wildlife Services as manager of the asset.

Please note that the old Wolgan Road remains closed, and the risk to life associated with access continues to be significantly above Council's risk tolerability criteria. Understanding that this risk is posed due to geotechnical instability, this risk significantly increases during periods of inclement/wet weather. Even if access to both the Donkey Steps and Old Coach Road is temporarily restricted, the old Wolgan Road will remain closed to all traffic.

Vehicle Recovery Arrangements

In the event something goes wrong, and a vehicle requires recovery, it is critical that all site and event variables are managed to ensure a safe recovery. Just about every recovery situation is going to be different and have a different degree of difficulty and risk associated to it.

Any recovery must be completed by an experienced, competent, and qualified individual. Please call Council immediately in the event these arrangements need to be made. However, if a recovery must be attempted by the vehicle owner, the following process is suggested.

In the first instance, please call 02 6354 9999 at any time to initiate an immediate Council response.

Understanding the risks of such a process, Lithgow City Council will not conduct a recovery effort under any circumstances. Instead, Council will arrange an immediate response through the engagement of a competent and qualified local contractor.

Personal safety must always be the first consideration.

The vehicle needing to be recovered often needs to be secured before the recovery takes place. This can be using wheel chocks in areas of steep grade, or the use of ropes and winches if wheel chocks are not considered appropriate. If the vehicle is on a lean, everybody must keep well clear of the low side of a leaning vehicle.

Do not attempt a recovery if you are not confident in completing this task.

Recovery hooks, mounting points on the four-wheel drive vehicle and use of rated recovery equipment.

Please ensure that all recovery equipment such as shackles have a SWL (Safe Working Load) or WLL (Working Load Limit) stamped on them.

All recovery points should be fitted directly to the chassis where practicable, with high tensile steel nuts and bolts of an appropriate size. Recovery points must be installed by professionals. Recovery points should NOT be welded.

Due to the forces which can be applied during most recoveries, equipment that is not rated and of suitable size or strength should not be used.

Preparing a vehicle for recovery and conducting a recovery effort.

1. In the first instance, contact Council for direct management of the recovery process. If this is not possible, perform the following:
2. Select a "Recovery Boss". He, or she, should be judged to be the most knowledgeable person to deal with the current situation and be in the best position to do so.
3. Secure vehicle, either by use of wheel chocks or winch.
4. Select the most suitable vehicle to perform the recovery. This includes variables such as being in the best position to perform the recovery, being fitted with an appropriate winch or snatch strap, and with suitable recovery points. Under no circumstances should a tow ball be used as a recovery point.
5. **If using a snatch strap, all people should be at least 1.5 times the length of the snatch strap away from the vehicles.**
6. Clear all obstacles that may impede the forward progress of the vehicle to be recovered.
7. Check your strap prior to use for any cuts or wear and check the wear indicator. Do not use worn out straps.
8. Attach snatch strap to both vehicles recovery points. Never attach a snatch strap to a tow ball. Ensure that the strap is not twisted and is free of knots

9. If connection must be made by a shackle use only quality bow shackles with a safe working load (SWL) suitable for the heavier of the two vehicles, normally 3.25 tonnes, giving a minimum breaking strength of 16.25 tonnes.
10. Place a wet hessian bag, blanket or towel over each end of the strap to act as dampeners should the strap break. This will also help prevent the strap flying up in the air should it break. These should be placed approximately 1 metre from each end.
11. Both drivers should communicate with each other by pre-arranged signals on the horn
12. The recovery vehicle should leave about 2-3 metres of strap slack before commencing recovery.
13. The vehicle being recovered must have the engine running and attempt to drive in the direction being recovered. This would normally be done with low range selected, and in 2nd gear.
14. The recovery vehicle moves off at a moderate pace to put the kinetic energy of the recovery vehicle into the strap. This would normally be done with low range selected, and in 1st gear.
15. If the recovery is not successful on the first attempt repeat the procedure but use either more pace by the recovery vehicle or more slack on the snatch strap.
16. If after 3 unsuccessful attempts put the strap away and use another one. Only use a strap 3 times in a half hour period.
17. As soon as the recovered vehicle has cleared the obstacle the driver sounds the horn as arranged to indicate to the driver of the recovery vehicle to stop.
18. Both vehicles slow down before coming to a halt. The recovered vehicle must not run over the snatch strap as this could cause damage to the strap and render it unsafe for use.
19. Both vehicles should apply their handbrakes and turn their engines off.
20. All recovery gear is now collected, inspected and securely stowed away.

Post recovery checks and repairs


Once the recovery has been completed several checks need to be made:

1. Check both vehicles are safe with hand brakes on and engine off
2. Check under the recovered vehicle as previously detailed in this training manual for damage to brakes, steering, suspension tyres, etc.
3. Inspect all recovery points for damage.
4. Inspect all recovery equipment for damage.
5. Clean and stow recovery gear away safely.
6. Contact Council immediately if there has been any damage caused to the track.

Specific Site Requirements and Risk Controls

Risk Description	Details and Controls
Security - Site entry and exit points control for road users	<p>Hard barriers (lockable gates) to be used on northern and southern entry points and will be closed for each journey.</p> <p>Both gates shall be always locked when the road is not in use, and or, the Council Pilot Escort Vehicle Operator / Inspection Officer is not present on site.</p>

Risk Description	Details and Controls
	While the escort system is in place, keyed locks will be used. Once requisite improvement measures are complete and the requirement for escorts removed, secure, double-sided keys will be issued to the community.
Rain events – extreme weather events	<p>A recorded event of greater than 25mm will necessitate road inspection and possible closure, as any rain causes slippery conditions.</p> <p>The road serviceability will need to be assessed daily, prior to use, by the Pilot Escort Vehicle Operator / Road Inspection Officer.</p> <p>Note: this is to be revised as the road is developed further.</p>
Donkey Steps land zoning	A detailed environmental planning pathway study has been completed by Lithgow City Council with the assistance of a professional environmental consultant.
Complaints from local community	A register of complaints to be documented by Council on a 'complaints register' for tracking purposes. Responsible Council representatives to manage each complaint as required.
Impacts to water quality, including erosion and sediment control	Erosion and sediment control plan to be regularly inspected by the road Contractor and Council Pilot/Inspection Officer and maintain regularly.
Impacts to Terrestrial and Aquatic Fauna and Flora / Habitat	Covered under the REF and CEMP. Vehicles are not to leave the defined track.
Impacts to Aboriginal and European heritage & archaeological areas of significance	Covered under the REF and CEMP. Vehicles are not to leave the defined track.
Noise and vibration	Covered under the REF and CEMP. Vehicles are not to leave the defined track.
Environmental risk to wildlife around the area.	Covered under the REF and CEMP. Vehicles are not to leave the defined track.
Remote Access	<p>An approved access strategy/emergency response plan is to be provided by Council prior to commencement of piloted access.</p> <p>Risks and mitigative measures such as "Ensure 4WD selected", "No pedestrian access", "Struck by falling objects", "No stopping permitted" and UHF channel site comms will need to be clearly outlined on good signage.</p> <p>Council to install signage and road guideposts in consultation with Council's WHS staff and insurers</p>
Pedestrian access	No pedestrian access other than mitigation work crew when required.

Risk Description	Details and Controls
Being stuck by falling objects	Daily inspection by pilot vehicle for any movement or change. Persons in vehicles being piloted to always remain in their vehicle.
Single vehicle accidents	Pilot to assess situation. Secure vehicle and occupants prior to calling for assistance.
Working over Telstra cables	Underground cables located and potholed during construction to be clearly marked and regularly inspected by Council's representative. This is to be included in Council's emergency response plan. Telstra Fibre cable has been Potholed, Service located and demarcated.
Site communications	UHF Radios/Satellite Phone to be always operational and on site whilst the road is in use. Use of horns when approaching corners and crests to signal presence.
Moving plant and machinery during Piloted Movements	No mobile plant to be operated. Plant to be parked in safe location to allow clear access for pilot and vehicles when not in use.
Broken Down Vehicle	 <p>Pilot Vehicle to have Procedure for Broken Down or stranded vehicle. Pilot vehicles to carry wheel chock, minimum of 4 at all times.</p>