

# 2024-2025 Winter Maintenance Summary

## ISSUE

This report is a summary of the winter maintenance operations for the 2024-2025 winter season.

## BACKGROUND

Snow and ice management of roads, bridges, pathways, cycle tracks, and bike lanes focus on public safety and mobility during the winter months. A typical winter season extends from November to April. [The Service Level for Snow and Ice Management](#) was approved by City Council in 2017. This service level includes the activities undertaken for snow and ice management including regular maintenance and targeted response strategies to snow and weather events.

Snow events are snowfalls with an accumulation of more than 5 centimetres, triggering the initiation of snow grading on all Priority streets. Contractor assistance is required to meet the service level commitments and grade all Priority streets within 72 hours of the end of the snowfall. Saskatoon sees an average of five to six snow events per winter season.

Weather events include snowfalls with accumulation of less than or equal to 5 centimetres, freezing rain, drifting snow or other adverse winter weather that triggers targeted response strategies to road conditions. These events do not require contractor assistance for snow grading on all priority streets.

In addition to the approved Service Level for Snow and Ice Management for typical snow and weather events, City Council approved the [Roadways Emergency Response Plan for Extreme or Unusual Snow Events](#) (Roadways ERP) at its September 27, 2021 regular meeting. The Roadways ERP consists of an immediate and planned response to extreme or unusual snow events, including a phased approach for winter maintenance activities required to restore mobility and safety on Saskatoon's streets and sidewalks.

Highlights of the Roadways ERP are included in Appendix 1. A video describing the plan is available at <https://youtu.be/-fDoEmIF0KQ>.

The criteria for activation of the Roadways ERP are:

- Major snowfall with snow accumulation 25 or more centimetres and/or combination of snow, freezing rain and wind; and
- Reduced mobility to the point that light vehicles cannot travel on city streets; mobility across the city is severely impacted and the regular winter maintenance level of service applicable to typical winter snow events can not be met.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

#### Snow Events and Priority Street Grading

In the winter of 2024-2025, there were seven snow events and seven weather events. Approximately 115 centimetres of snow fell in Saskatoon between November 19, 2024, and March 29, 2025, the highest recorded snowfall in Saskatoon in the past seven years. Environment and Climate Change Canada records show that the average snowfall in Saskatoon from 1991 to 2020 was 91 centimetres. City of Saskatoon (City) records show that the average snowfall for the last seven winter seasons was 98 centimetres.

The snow and ice management service level timelines were met for the completion of:

- Priority 3 street snow grading (within 72 hours after a snow event); and
- Snow removal along streets with paid parking (within 13 days after a snow event).

The service level for Priority 1 streets requires that all Priority 1 streets be plowed or graded within 12 hours after a snow event. This service level was not met in the first two snow events of the season.

The service level for Priority 2 streets requires that all Priority 2 streets be graded within 36 hours after a snow event. This service level was not consistently met.

The service level for City-maintained sidewalks and pathways requires that they all be cleared within 48 hours after a snow event. This service level was not met in the first three snow events of the season.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS**

#### Service Level Commitments – Priority Street Snow Grading

The Priority 1 service level was not met in the first two snow events of the season. This is primarily attributed to the recurrent significant snowfalls – 17 centimetres and 25 centimetres fell approximately five days apart in mid-November 2024. The Priority 1 service level was met in all other snow events throughout the season.

The Priority 2 service level was not consistently met. [In May 2025, City Council resolved](#) to extend the service level timeline for Priority 2 snow grading from 36 to 48 hours to align with available resources and road network inventory. All Priority 2 snow grading timelines in the winter of 2024-2025 met the new 48-hour target. The Administration plans to complete a review of the entire Priority Street network after the local transit network re-design review is completed in conjunction with the Link (BRT) project. This update is expected to take place in 2027 and may result in some streets seeing an increase or decrease in their priority level, existing streets removed and/or new streets added to the Priority Street network.

#### Service Level Commitments – Sidewalk and Pathway Clearing

The service level for City-maintained sidewalks and pathways was not met in the first three snow events of the season, primarily due to the significant amount of snowfall, as well as a nearly six percent increase in the pathway network from 2023 to 2024. During

the remaining four snow events, sidewalk and pathway clearing was completed within the 48-hour target timeframe.

### Local Street Grading

The approved service level for snow and ice management includes snow grading on local streets when there is severe rutting, or prior to snowmelt when there is an average snowpack of 15 centimetres. The Snow and Ice Management service line budget only allows for localized application of this service level on an as-needed basis, and not city-wide on all local streets. When a city-wide local street snow grading or removal is required to maintain sufficient mobility in residential neighbourhoods, most of this work is unfunded.

A city-wide local street grading consists of grading all residential streets within an approximate five-day timeframe. This work is undertaken to make roads passable for residents throughout all neighbourhoods. Snow and ice are graded from the street, leaving a level, drivable surface. Depending on conditions, the snow and ice pack may be removed down to the road surface. Snow is left in piles in on-street storage areas typically intended for parking along curbs in front of homes and along flankages.

Local street grading was undertaken twice on a city-wide basis in the winter of 2024-2025. First on December 8, 2024, in response to an overnight rainstorm and subsequent thaw with 50 centimetres of snow on the ground, and again on February 21, 2025, to prevent rutting during the spring melt following accumulation of another 45 centimetres of snow between these two events.

In June 2025, the Administration brought forward an [Information Report](#) to the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation, with options to enhance the service level for snow and ice management on local streets. The report includes estimated costs of each option and is intended to inform budget decisions during the 2026-2027 City Council's budget deliberations.

### Priority Street Snow Removal

Priority street snow removal consists of removing snow from Priority streets to make space for future snowfalls once on-street storage capacity has been reached. This work is typically done at night to improve safety for workers and equipment, as well as for vehicles and cyclists who may be using Priority streets and pedestrians that may be adjacent to Priority streets while the work is underway. Due to the above average snowfall early in the 2024-2025 winter season and a higher than typical number of snow events during the season, snow was removed from all Priority streets. Priority street snow removal was initiated in December of 2024, and considered complete on all Priority streets by the end of February 2025. Work on Priority Street snow removal was paused when crews and equipment were needed to respond to snow and weather events.

In a typical winter season, snow removal is completed at least once on all Priority 1 streets, and approximately 60% of Priority 2 streets. Snow removal on Priority 1 streets

may take place several times per winter to ensure the highest traffic streets have snow storage available for future snowstorms. Funding for snow removal in the Snow and Ice Management service line budget is allocated based on a typical winter season.

### Snow Management Facilities

Snow management facilities are snow storage sites operated by the City to allow for City crews and private snow haulers to haul and store snow removed from streets and parking lots. The City operates three snow management facilities – Civic Operations Centre which is a facility with a concrete pad and engineered drainage system, as well as Wanuskewin Road and Central Avenue facilities which are open-field snow storage sites. Significant funding was spent managing snow at the three snow management facilities in the 2024-2025 winter season. This can be attributed to the above-average number of snow events, above-average snowfall, as well as completion of snow removal on all Priority streets. These factors contributed to an increase in the effort required to manage snow hauled to the facilities by City crews and private snow haulers and resulted in higher equipment and labour costs than in a typical winter season. Cost reduction options for the operation of the City's current and future snow management facilities are being researched for potential future implementation.

### Improved Lighting Standards to Increase Visibility of Snowplow Trucks

In Saskatoon, snowplow trucks are used to clear snow from high-speed roadways such as Circle Drive. Snowplow trucks can be difficult to see during plowing operations, due to swirling snow creating reduced visibility around the vehicles, as well as covering the lighting on the vehicles in some cases. In November of 2024, a pilot project was undertaken to install a new lighting configuration and improve visibility of snowplow trucks for the benefit of the snowplow operators as well as motorists driving behind the trucks during snow removal operations. Appendix 2 includes photographs of the improved lighting standards.

This pilot project was successful both in improving visibility of the snowplows, as well as reducing the need for snowplow operators to leave the cab of the truck to clean off the lighting during plow operations. The new lighting configuration is intended to be installed on all City snowplow trucks over the next two winter seasons.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The total 2024 Snow and Ice Management costs were \$22.4 million (January 1 – December 31). These costs include a partial activation of the Roadways Emergency Response Plan in March 2024, local street snow grading in December 2024, and progress made to December 31 on the removal of snow from all priority streets due to the significant snowfall. Additionally, in 2024 there were nine snow events compared to the five budgeted snow events, further contributing to increased costs.

The total 2024 Snow and Ice Management costs were over budget by \$6.5 million. This deficit was covered by a portion of the overall corporate surplus in 2024.

The significant snowfall in the 2024-2025 winter season resulted in a considerable amount of unbudgeted winter maintenance work completed in 2025, in the Snow and Ice Management service line.

There is approximately \$7.7 million in the Snow and Ice Management Contingency Reserve. This reserve funding is intended to offset deficits in the Snow and Ice Management service line due to annual weather variations such as changes in weather patterns, number and severity of snow events, total snowfall, and is not used for service level enhancements.

### **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

There is no privacy, legal, social, or environmental implications identified.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Snowplow truck visibility upgrades will continue to be implemented until all snowplow trucks are upgraded with the new lighting configuration.

Administration will report to Committee in approximately 12 months time with a 2025-2026 Winter Maintenance Summary.

### **APPENDICES**

1. Highlights of the Roadways ERP
2. Prototype of Visibility Lighting Changes

#### Report Approval

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