

Locale determines snow removal budgets

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER

It normally takes Rochester resident Mark Borus 40 minutes to get to work in Farmington. But when a snow storm hit last week, that 30 to 35-mile trip turned into an hour and 10 minute drive.

Snowfall obviously has an effect on driving conditions, and the manner in which the streets are cleared can either help or hamper drivers.

Borus, 23, said the roads he travels, I-75, Square Lake, Telegraph, I-896 and Orchard Lake, have been well maintained in the snow and ice weather. His slow-go last week was due to slushy, somewhat slick roadways and, while Borus was not pleased with the longer drive, the thing that really bothers him is the patch work.

"It really gets my goat," Borus said, when he has to use his car to muddle down lumps of asphalt. "It gets all over your car. I hate

that." Livonia resident John Wiaz, 37, works in Birmingham and said his drive time down 8 Mile to Southfield to 14 Mile really depends on the time of day as well as the weather. The 21-mile hike can take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes, Wiaz said.

"Mondays are usually bad," Wiaz said, especially when they follow a holiday.

On snowy days, Wiaz takes Southfield Road home from work. On non-snowy days, he uses I-696 as a faster route.

"It's (Southfield) a clearer route and people aren't going as fast," he said. "They're more cautious."

With a large amount of traffic and difficulty determining the divisions between lanes when covered with snow, Wiaz noted that the intersections of Southfield and 10 Mile and Southfield and 12 Mile are "bad" compared to others he traverses.

Snow removal budgets are lower in northern Oakland

County communities, Rochester Department of Public Works Superintendent Dave Kowaleski said, due to less traffic congestion.

In the 26-square-mile area of Southfield, a southern Oakland County community, the budget for snow removal includes \$420,981 for major roads and \$173,854 for local roads, according to Southfield Financial Services Manager David Horah. Some 19 vehicles are used for snow removal, according to Mike Habowski, Southfield highway department coordinator.

By contrast, in Rochester, a northern Oakland County community with a much smaller snow removal area of 3.3 square miles, the budget for snow removal is \$70,000 with 14 trucks being used, Kowaleski said.

"The northern (area) would be easier to do because of less traffic congestion," said Kowaleski, adding that heavy traffic often causes vehicles to dump the

snow back on the road. "You're liable to have to do the same thing two or three or four times. In the northern communities, you don't have that problem."

With a \$6.5 million budget for snow removal, the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) budgeted for 80,000 tons of salt this season, according to RCOC spokesperson Scott Kingan.

Kingan said salt is "still the best and most cost effective" way to clear county roadways. Sand is used on gravel roads.

When to salt and plow is determined by several methods, including Murray and Trettie forecast service, road commission workers, and law enforcement officials. Also, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) installed monitors, which determine freezing of bridges and decks.

The goal, Kingan said, is to have salt truck drivers on the roads two hours before snow storms hit in order to clear major

roads first. "What we do not do generally is the subdivision streets," Kingan said. "These are handled if we can get to them afterward."

Sue Sobock, executive secretary to the West Bloomfield Township supervisor, said many subdivision associations in West Bloomfield hire their own snow removal companies.

"It can easily be four days before they can do it," Sobock said of the RCOC.

Responding to the concerns of drivers like Borus, in Troy and Southfield the road commission has a night shift which works on patching potholes among other things. However, Kingan said there are a limited amount of trucks available for county-wide pothole filling in the winter since the majority of trucks are altered for snow plowing and salting.

Workers are supposed to back over the laid asphalt with the county truck to flatten it into the road, however, that does not

always happen. The reasons, Kingan said, are a lack of trucks compared to the number of potholes and safety of the workers, who must stop in mid-traffic to backup.

"It has been an ongoing problem," however, Kingan said. "We should have fewer cases of drivers being the lamp downers."

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) contracts with the Road Commission for Oakland County to handle snow removal on all of the state trunk lines, according to Richard Gould, MDOT maintenance engineer for Oakland, Wayne, Macomb and St. Clair counties.

For safety reasons, Kingan recommends drivers keep their distance from salt trucks traveling the roadways because the trucks may also have trouble maneuvering.

SNOW EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

When winter storms strike, Oakland County communities can declare snow emergencies, notifying residents via radio, cable and television. To avoid getting stuck, ticketed or towed, cars must be kept off snow route streets to allow for plowing. Here is what some Oakland County communities do when the snow starts piling up.

BIRMINGHAM: Usually, when there is over four inches, a snow emergency is declared for the entire city.

FARMINGTON: Snow emergency routes affect all city roadways, and are usually declared when there eight inches or more accumulates on roads.

FARMINGTON HILLS: Snow emergencies are normally declared when more than four inches of snow accumulates. School bus routes and main roads are plowed at the same time.

ROCHESTER HILLS: The city's winter weather emergency provision allows the mayor to declare an emergency. Automobiles must be removed from main and residential roads.

SOUTHFIELD: When more than four inches accumulates, a snow emergency is declared for the entire city.

WALLED LAKE: All roads inside the city, including Decker, Maple and East Lake Drive, are snow emergency routes. Cars should not park on these streets when there is six-plus inches of accumulation. When possible, people will be asked to move their cars, but if they are blocking a snow route they can be towed.

SOURCES: Bobby West, Birmingham foreman of streets, walks and sewer and water; Kevin Gushman, Farmington Director of Public Service; Tom Bassel, Farmington Hills director of public service; Rochester Hills city ordinance; Mike Habowski, Southfield highway department coordinator; Ralph Smith, Wallied Lake dept. of public works superintendent.

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Plowing approaches differ

BY JENNIFER PLACINTO
STAFF WRITER

It's difficult to determine how fast you can drive safely when roads are snowy and icy in some locations and merely wet in others.

If you've ever wondered why some Oakland County roads are salted and plowed faster than others, read on.

The basic practice in Oakland County is to clear snow and ice from roads with higher speeds, higher volumes of traffic, and treacherous hills and curves.

The following is a list of methods used by several Oakland County communities to determine when salting and plowing is necessary, where it takes place first, and when and how long it takes to clear roadways:

In Northern Oakland County:

Clarkston: The police officer on duty notifies the Clarkston Department of Public Works (DPW) about slick conditions.

"When they feel it's not safe, they can tell pretty quick when it at least needs salt," said Clarkston City Manager Art Pappas.

Clear first: Intersections. Residential roads are cleared next with the county salting and plowing the major roads that traverse Clarkston, including M15 S. Holcomb, Clarkston Orion Road, Walden Road and W. Washington. However, Pappas said, "If they (Clarkston DPW) go down the street, they're not going to lift their plow up," Pappas said.

Time cleared (on average):

Whenever needed. "It doesn't take that long with a half-mile area," Pappas said.

Lake Orion: The police determine when the roads need attention, according to Lake Orion Village Manager John Berchold. Cleared first: Flint and Belle-

Time cleared (on average): The entire village can be cleared in one day, Berchold said.

Rochester: Plows scoop residential and main roads after two inches of snow has accumulated, but salting begins as soon as the snow starts to fall, said Dave Kowaleski, Rochester department of public works superintendent.

Clear first: Main, University, Ludlow, Parkdale, Elizabeth, South Street and streets in the Central Business District. If a large amount of snow is expected, the intersections will be salted first.

Time cleared (on average): Major roads are cleared within 8 hours of snowfall.

Rochester Hills: "We have a clear pavement policy," said Rochester Hills Director of Public Service Tom Dohr, adding

that the main roads are cleared first and kept clear and then the residential roads are cleared next.

Clear first: Livernois - South Blvd. to Tienken, Hamlin, John R, Old Perch and Brewster.

Time cleared (on average): Three to four hours for main roadways.

Road workers pre-salt roads when possible in preparation for the rush hour, Dohr added.

Troy: Snow removal can begin as soon as it starts to fall, according to Tim Richnak, Troy superintendent of streets and drains. However, Richnak added, if the weather is expected to warm up enough for the snow to melt, sometimes plows are not used.

Clear first: Rochester, Livernois, John R. Crooks, Square Lake, Long Lake, Wattles and Big Beaver.

Next to be cleared are industrial and school routes, roads with sharp curves and hilly areas and then intersections with yield and stop signs are salted. If there is four or more inches of snow, residential

See PLOWING, A8

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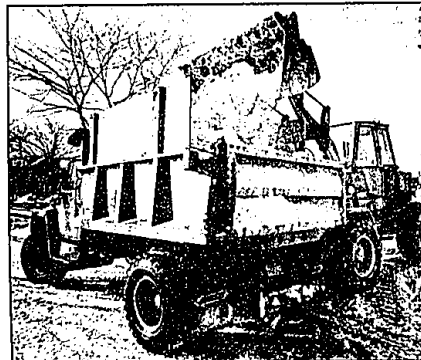
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