

January 3, 2008

Toronto Pedestrian Committee

Report and recommendations regarding the clearing of snow from pedestrian routes in the City of Toronto

The heavy snowfall of December 15-16, 2007, revealed numerous inadequacies in the City of Toronto's provision for the clearing of pedestrian routes.

The following obstacles were encountered by pedestrians:

- Sections of sidewalk that were not cleared of snow by property owners or the city, leaving deep snow or narrow, slippery pathways of trampled snow.
- Mounds snow ploughed from the roadway blocking access to the road at intersections and at TTC stops
- Deep, wide pools of slush and brine at intersections where ploughed snow had blocked sewer grates.

These obstacles remained in place for a considerable amount of time: in some cases, for several days until the city cleared the obstacle, in other cases for many days, until the snow eventually melted.

These obstacles created serious hazards for pedestrians, including:

- Danger of slips and falls causing injury. Studies have shown that falls are a major cause of pedestrian injury.
- Danger of slips and falls onto the roadway at TTC stops and intersections, from mounds of ploughed snow or trying to avoid pools, increasing the danger of being hit by vehicles
- Forcing pedestrians to walk on the road, creating danger of being hit by vehicles.
- For persons with mobility impairments, who are in greater danger of falls or who need to travel with a cane or other support, or a wheelchair/scooter, these obstacles made it effectively impossible to travel in the city. In addition to the obstacles listed above, which are in many cases impossible to overcome for the mobility impaired, the cleared passaged of sidewalk are often too narrow for full accessibility.
- Parents with children in strollers faced restrictions similar to those with mobility impairments.

The severe limitations to accessibility created by the City of Toronto's current pedestrian snow clearance activities are contrary to the spirit and intentions of the City of Toronto's Accessibility Plan (<http://www.toronto.ca/diversity/accessibilityplan/index.htm>).

Recommendations

The Toronto Pedestrian Committee recommends that the City of Toronto revise its policies for clearing pedestrian routes in the following ways:

1) As a matter of policy, the sidewalks of all arterial and collector roads **in all parts of Toronto** should be ploughed by the City of Toronto.

Furthermore, the ploughing of sidewalks should take place **on the same schedule** as the ploughing of roadways. Not only should sidewalks be ploughed immediately after the road has been ploughed, but particular attention should be made to clearing TTC stops, intersections, and sewer grates immediately after street ploughing.

The City should better enforce the removal of parked cars from designated snow routes during major snowfalls. Snow routes should be cleared of parked cars, and then cleared of snow completely (both sidewalks and roads ploughed, and snow removed) in a coordinated and timely fashion.

Even on those parts of arterial and collector roads where there are stretches of sidewalk that cannot be ploughed because of a lack of clear space, small ploughs should immediately follow the ploughing of the roadway in order to clear intersections (always including sewer grates) and TTC stops.

2) The city should specifically identify the minimum clear width required to plough a sidewalk, and create a catalogue of the relatively small number of arterial and collector sidewalks that can be proved to have too narrow a clear space to plough. In those cases, the city should actively enforce the bylaw that states that property owners must clear the sidewalk, or have the City do it for them and add the cost to their taxes.

Note that the lack of boulevard space should not be considered an issue for clearing sidewalks on arterial and collector roads (see below).

Note that the presence of illegal obstacles created by property owners (e.g. patios, stalls) that interfere with the minimum clear width of a sidewalk should not constitute an argument for not ploughing these sidewalks. On the contrary, as with parked cars, property owners must be required to clear away any obstacles that they have put in place on the sidewalk that interfere with sidewalk ploughing.

3) The City of Toronto should investigate and prepare a report on the cost and feasibility of extending sidewalk ploughing to all residential areas throughout the city.

4) In the absence of municipal ploughing of all residential streets, the City of Toronto should actively enforce the bylaw requiring property owners to clear the sidewalk adjacent to their property, or have the City do it for them and add the cost to their taxes.

Furthermore, the City should develop a comprehensive strategy to increase awareness of this obligation, through media outreach and advertising.

5) The City of Toronto should improve the provision for property owners who are elderly or disabled to have the municipality clear their sidewalks for them. Furthermore, the City should work to increase awareness of this service.

6) The City of Toronto should investigate providing a referral service of private snow-clearing services (including, for example, youth entrepreneurs) for property owners who are unable, as a result of extended absence or other reasons not related to disability, to clear snow themselves.

7) All new sidewalks built in the city must be built so that the City of Toronto can clear them of snow without difficulty.

Note regarding current sidewalk ploughing policies of the City of Toronto

The City of Toronto claims that ploughing in large parts of Toronto is impractical because sidewalks are too narrow and/or because there is no boulevard on which to dump ploughed snow.

In fact, the city has equipment that can plough quite narrow sidewalks. These should be sufficient for almost all sidewalks in the city, with only a few exceptions.

The lack of boulevard should never be an obstacle for sidewalk ploughing. Almost all arterial and collector roads have some boulevard. When property owners clear their sidewalk, they have to put the snow somewhere, and it will go the same place as it would if it was ploughed – on the shared edge between the road and the sidewalk.

In fact, often where there is a lack of boulevard space, the sidewalk becomes the primary dumping ground for snow, making the sidewalk even less accessible. This practice is not acceptable. Pedestrians must be treated with equal consideration as cars, and a minimum accessible pathway must be provided for them as it is for vehicles on the road.