



To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee
From: Walk Toronto
Re: 2021.IE22.13, Mechanical Sidewalk Winter Maintenance Trial
Date: May 21, 2021

Walk Toronto is a grassroots pedestrian advocacy group that works with various levels of government, community groups and citizens to improve walking conditions and safety in Toronto.

Walk Toronto strongly supports the staff proposal to expand municipal sidewalk snow clearing to all the sidewalks in Toronto that do not currently enjoy this service.

Walk Toronto has been working on this issue since our foundation in 2013. Over the intervening years, we have met with Transportation Services staff multiple times to press the importance of expanding sidewalk snow clearing to every sidewalk in the city. We also prepared extensive [reports](#) and [deputations](#) detailing the importance of sidewalk snow plowing and the manner in which other major cities are able to clear even narrow sidewalks.

In the past, we were able to gain some small incremental improvements, but were constantly told that the goal of equal service to all sidewalks in the city was not possible because sidewalks in the older parts of Toronto were narrow and obstructed.

Consequently, we were pleased when the City finally agreed to a trial that would test the feasibility of plowing the narrower sidewalks in the older parts of the city.

Now, we are delighted to hear that this pilot project was a success, and that staff are proposing to expand sidewalk snow clearing to every part of the city.

We are especially pleased by staff's commitment to clear snow even in those 111 km where the plows cannot operate. We hope that attention to these areas will encourage the city to also make permanent improvements at these locations to deal with obstructions and make these sidewalks wide enough to plow in the future. Implementing long-lasting changes at problematic locations will bring them in line with the City's own accessibility standards and enable people with accessibility needs to use them in other seasons as well.

We are also pleased about the commitment to use City staff to operate these plows. We feel that in-house staff will benefit from more training and accumulated experience, compared to contractors, and will take more responsibility for ensuring good service and not causing damage.

The benefits of sidewalk snow plowing are significant. A [2016 report from Toronto Public Health](#) showed the negative health and financial impacts of slips and falls caused by snow and ice in Toronto. But the impact on health extends beyond injuries, to seniors and people with



disabilities who may not even venture out to walk during the winter because they are concerned about slips and falls, depriving them of the physical and mental health benefits of walking.

The proposed service expansion will put every Torontonian at an equal level of service. But most importantly, it means that people who get around with a walker or other mobility support, who move in a wheelchair, who use a white cane or a guide dog to navigate, or who are seniors afraid of a debilitating fall will all be able to walk safely just like other Torontonians during the winter.

As well, in a city dedicated to goals such as Vision Zero road safety and reducing pollution and greenhouse gases, it is vital that walking on sidewalks be safe at all times, and walking access to transit stops be available at all times. The pandemic has shown that the ability to walk in our neighbourhoods safely is valuable to all Toronto residents.

Furthermore, as a city that competes with other, warmer cities around the world for talent, it is vital that winter conditions not be a deterrent to attracting people to work and invest in Toronto.

Universal sidewalk winter maintenance will be cost-efficient. It affects residents in the densest parts of the city where the largest number of people walk, thus benefitting many pedestrians for a small investment. It will save money by removing the need for the seniors snow clearing program, which has a \$1.5 million annual budget. The enforcement program (which employed 10 officers in 2016) will likewise become redundant. The City will also likely save money on liability claims for slips and falls, whose settlements cost the City an average of \$6.7 million per year. Further reductions in spending may occur with reduced use of Wheel Trans and through other hidden savings. Finally, well-maintained sidewalks will save individual Torontonians time and money, and eliminate pain and lost opportunities caused by slips and falls.

As well, purchasing the required equipment will be operationally efficient, since the machines can be used for sweeping sidewalks and bike lanes in the summer.

This snow clearing program will make a huge difference to pedestrians of all ages – children walking to school, commuters getting to their transit stop on foot, dog-owners walking their dogs, runners getting in shape, seniors walking for daily exercise, and everyone walking to the park, to a store, to a local restaurant, or just for pleasure.

The inequity of not providing this service for the many people who live or work in the older parts of the city has been one of the most prominent obstacles to walking in Toronto for many years. I urge the Committee, and City Council, to seize this opportunity to make Toronto a better city for walking.

Thank you,

Dylan Reid

On behalf of Walk Toronto