

Supplementary Report: Winter Maintenance Program Review Update

Date: November 10, 2025

To: City Council

From: City Manager

Wards: All

SUMMARY

On November 4, 2025, the Executive Committee considered item [EX27.2 – 2025 Winter Maintenance Program Review Update](#) and requested that the City Manager report directly to the November 12, 2025 meeting of City Council on:

- a. the utilization of friendly tow system in permit parking areas as is used in Montreal;
- b. the detailed process on proactive monitoring on how to deal with illegally parked vehicles on Toronto Transit Commission streetcar routes;
- c. the plan to plow snow around schools;
- d. how City Councillors will be advised of the local snow plans and the role of SNOWTO and their lobbying firm in advising Councillors of their Ward plan and what are appropriate Councillor communications by SNOWTO;
- e. the Councillor's direct pathway to appropriate City Officials during a snow event; and
- f. the parking plan to ensure that permit holders receive the necessary communication and consideration in the relocation of vehicles to allow for snow clearing and removal, including communication prior to towing, as well as the approach to managing vehicle volumes in densely concentrated permit parking areas.

In addition, we received feedback that further clarification on improvements for the 2025–2026 winter season would be beneficial.

This report responds to these requests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the Financial Impact Section as presented in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on November 4, 2025, the Executive Committee considered EX27.2 – 2025 Winter Maintenance Program Review Update. The Executive Committee adopted the City Manager’s report with amendments directing the City Manager to report directly to City Council on November 12, 2025.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX27.2>

At its meeting on July 23 and 24, 2025, City Council considered together EX25.5 - 2025 Winter Maintenance Program Review and AU9.6 - 2025 Winter Maintenance Program Follow-Up: Status of Auditor General’s Previous Recommendations. Council adopted the City Manager’s Report with further amendments and directed the City Manager to report back to the Executive Committee on November 4, 2025.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX25.5>

At its meeting on March 26 and 27, 2025, City Council considered EX21.1 - Review of Toronto's Winter Maintenance Program that was adopted with amendments by the Executive Committee on March 19, 2025. Council adopted the report with further amendments and directed the City Manager to report back to the Executive Committee on the work outlined in parts 1 to 5 of Council's decision.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EX21.1>

At its meeting on July 24 and 25, 2024, City Council considered IE15.3 - Annual Winter Maintenance Report which established the vision and guiding principles for a major snow event response. Council adopted the report and confirmed updated service levels.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE15.3>

COMMENTS

Overview of 2025 – 2026 Winter Season Improvements

As identified in the report [2025 Winter Maintenance Program Review Update](#), a number of operational improvements are being introduced for the 2025–2026 winter season to enhance winter maintenance, including:

- Removing the temporary hold period for 311 winter service requests, allowing earlier identification of problem areas.
- Strengthening contractor oversight and reporting to ensure improved monitoring of performance and service delivery.
- Expanding proactive snow removal operations at high-priority locations with limited snow storage capacity.
- Establishing a year-round Winter Services Unit focused on operational preparedness, contract management, and continuous improvement.
- Enhancing in-house fleet readiness by acquiring additional equipment, piloting alternative sidewalk-clearing machines, and expanding mobile technician support.
- Refining the City’s winter communications strategy to provide timely, coordinated updates during typical and major snow events.

These changes will result in a noticeable improvement in service delivery compared to last year’s experience. City staff are fully committed to delivering improvements and resolving issues experienced last year by the public and escalated to Councillors. For example:

- **Windrows:** Operational practices are being reviewed, and the potential to add additional windrow-clearing equipment is being considered to allow earlier clearing after road plowing, reducing obstructions for residents’ vehicular access to their homes.
- **Streetcar route obstructions:** Enhanced snow removal on streetcar routes will reduce the likelihood of parked cars impeding service, supported by increased patrols and closer coordination with the TTC and Toronto Parking Enforcement to more quickly address any necessary removals.
- **Transit stop access:** Enhanced and earlier snow clearance, and removal where necessary, will help ensure access to transit stops remains accessible. The TTC also clears platforms and station entrances to maintain accessibility for transit users.
- **Improving verification of on-street conditions:** Improvements to monitoring tools – including GPS equipment, heat maps of incoming service requests, use of on-street cameras, and additional staff patrols – will provide a better

understanding of winter operations progress and earlier identification of issues. The four new Divisional Communications Centres (DCC), one for each Community Council district, will receive and review 311 service requests and initiate appropriate action to more promptly address service issues.

- **Communications:** The Communications Division will now lead all winter communications, with a new winter communications strategy designed to provide timely, accurate, and accessible information to the public and Members of Council. The Communications Division will also serve as the primary spokespersons, ensuring consistent and coordinated messaging while allowing Transportation Services staff to focus on operational response during winter events.

Utilization of a Friendly Tow System in Permit Parking Areas

The “friendly tow” system involves relocating vehicles within close proximity to facilitate snow clearing, rather than impounding or issuing tickets. Owners of vehicles that are “friendly towed” are not charged any fees. This is the approach currently used in Toronto to manage parked vehicles in permit parking areas during snow removal operations.

Approximately 24 hours before scheduled snow removal activity, City staff hand-deliver notices to residents of the affected street(s) and place temporary “no parking” signs in snowbanks. Transportation Services is currently working with the Toronto Parking Authority to identify surface parking lots that can be used for resident parking while snow removal operations are underway.

On the day of snow removal operations, City staff will patrol the area to identify vehicles that remain parked on the streets where snow removal is to take place. If vehicles are still present, staff contact the Permit Parking Office to obtain the permit holders’ address and then attempt door-knocks to have the vehicles moved. When that is unsuccessful, the vehicles are “friendly towed” to a nearby location, and a notice is left at the door indicating that the vehicle was relocated to facilitate snow removal operations. This friendly tow would be to already cleared arterials, collector roads, or other nearby streets or locations in the neighbourhood, such as TPA lots, where there is space to move vehicles to.

In areas where friendly towing is not feasible – such as streets with permit parking on both sides or limited space to relocate vehicles – full snow removal may not be possible despite best efforts. In these locations, crews plow the roadway to maintain emergency access and return at a later date to remove snow where feasible.

As part of the Surge Plan being introduced this season, additional staff resources will be available to assist with area patrols and door-knocking activities during major snow events to expedite vehicle relocations and minimize delays.

In Montréal, residents are not permitted to leave vehicles parked on streets scheduled for snow removal. Temporary orange parking restriction signs are installed ahead of operations, overriding regular parking regulations. Tow trucks use audible alerts to remind residents to move vehicles before towing begins. Any vehicles remaining on affected streets are ticketed and towed once removal begins; storage fees apply if a vehicle is impounded. To support residents, the municipality provides free overnight parking in designated municipal lots during snow removal operations. Information on Montréal's snow removal practices was sourced from the City of Montréal's official website, as attempts to reach staff were unsuccessful within the short timeframe for report preparation.

Illegally Parked Vehicles on Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) Streetcar Routes

During the February 2025 snowstorm, some streetcar routes were temporarily blocked by illegally parked vehicles. In addition to being parked illegally, the wide windrows caused these vehicles to extend into the track allowance, preventing streetcars from operating.

The proactive snow removal approach introduced for the 2025–2026 season will help reduce the likelihood and impact of these situations. Under this approach, snow removal will be initiated following an 8 cm accumulation – earlier than in the past – at high-priority locations, including streetcar routes. Transportation Services will prioritize locations where issues have been identified in the past. This targeted removal will help to prevent windrows from narrowing the roadway, significantly reducing the likelihood of parked vehicles impeding streetcar movement.

Although blockages are expected to be reduced, they may still occur. During snow events, Transportation Service will increase patrols of streetcar routes. Where a vehicle is identified as encroaching into the track allowance, Transportation Services will notify the Toronto Parking Enforcement (TPE) and the TTC Control Centre. The TTC also works closely with TPE to arrange for vehicles to be tagged and towed, through the Toronto Police Services (TPS) towing contracts, that are obstructing streetcar routes.

Clearing Snow Around Schools

The City is responsible for clearing snow from roads and sidewalks adjacent to schools, including school bus loading zones and curbside pick-up and drop-off areas. School Boards are responsible for clearing snow on school property, including internal walkways and parking lots, as well as any paths connecting on-street school bus loading zones or pick-up and drop-off areas to the sidewalk or to school property.

During typical snow events, roads and sidewalks around schools are plowed as part of regular winter maintenance operations. In accordance with the City's levels of service, snow plowing – which moves snow to the roadside to keep roads and sidewalks passable – is initiated based on snow accumulation and infrastructure type:

- Sidewalks, bus stops, pedestrian crossovers, and cycling infrastructure – 2 cm
- Arterials – 5 cm
- Local and collector roads – 8 cm.

Snow removal – the process of physically removing snow – is generally triggered when snow storage capacity is limited, or high snowbanks can create safety issues.

As part of the enhanced proactive snow removal program introduced for the 2025–2026 winter season, school bus loading zones will have snow removed starting at 8 cm of accumulation to prevent the buildup of high snowbanks and ensure safe access to schools.

During major snow events, school bus loading zones are prioritized within the City’s winter maintenance program to maintain access and minimize disruption to school operations. For the 2025–2026 winter season, additional “surge” staff and, if required, equipment will be utilized to ensure timely and effective service delivery.

In addition to clearing roads, cycling infrastructure, and sidewalks, the City also maintains designated pathway cut-throughs in neighbourhoods. Due to their narrow widths, these locations often require hand clearance by in-house crews.

Communications with Councillors

During each winter event Transportation Services provides regular updates to Members of Council on winter maintenance activities, including completed and ongoing work, and any emerging issues.

To support timely issue escalation, Councillors will be able to escalate issues through the Divisional Communications Centre (DCC), established by Transportation Services as part of improvements for the 2025–2026 winter season. The DCC will provide a dedicated email address and phone number for each Community Council District, exclusively for Councillor use.

Lobbying Activities by Snow T.O.

The current contracts do not restrict private or lobbying communications that winter maintenance suppliers may have directly with Councillors.

Anyone lobbying public office holders in the City of Toronto must comply with the provisions of the City’s Lobbying By-law (Chapter 140 of the Toronto Municipal Code). The Toronto Lobbyist Registrar’s Office is responsible for overseeing compliance with the By-law, providing guidance on lobbying rules, and, where appropriate, conducting investigations.

Questions regarding compliance with the Lobbying By-law fall within the jurisdiction of the Toronto Lobbyist Registrar's Office. City Council, Members of Council, and members of the public, including City staff, may bring relevant information to the attention of that Office as appropriate. The Office of the Lobbyist Registrar does not comment on whether any matter is under review or investigation.

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SIGNATURE

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