

Snow and Ice Control Investments to Improve Accessibility

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Standing Policy Committee on Transportation and Transit recommend that Council receive this report for the Corporate Record.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Council previously authorized one-time funding of \$18.5 million to enhance Snow and Ice Control (SNIC) services for priority sidewalks, pathways, bus pads and wheelchair crossings from 2018 October through 2020 December. Specific improvements:
 - Increased the priority of sidewalk clearing for all City-owned properties to 24 hours
 - Added 100 km of pathways to be cleared
 - Removed snow build up (windrows) at 500 high-priority wheelchair ramp locations
 - Communications campaign to increase public awareness of importance of clearing sidewalks, including helping helping neighbours (Snow Angels) and new fines
- New fines were added for those who fail to clear snow and ice from the public sidewalks adjacent to their property. \$250 for first-time offences, growing to \$750 for repeat offenses. While 90 per cent of properties that receive a warning about snowy sidewalks do comply, 74 tickets have been issued to date.
- **What does this mean to Calgarians?** Snow and ice control on sidewalks and pathways ensure that Calgarians have options for how they choose to travel during the winter, particularly those citizens who have limited or restricted mobility.
- **Why does it matter?** Slippery or un-shoveled surfaces can lead to injuries, and the fear of a serious fall can discourage people from leaving their homes during winter, which can take a toll on their well-being.
- Administration recommends that these pedestrian focused SNIC service levels continue for the upcoming winter season and advises that no additional funding is required to deliver the service until the end of 2022 December.
- Establishing the SNIC service levels going forward, including funding requirements and policy updates, will require Council direction during the 2022 budget deliberations.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A city that moves
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

The City of Calgary's Snow and Ice Control (SNIC) program is committed to helping make pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle passage along streets, sidewalks and pathways safer in winter. However, questions had been raised about the timeliness of snow removal from pedestrian spaces, and how this impacted seniors and people with disabilities in Calgary. In 2018, Council directed Administration to review walking-focused snow and ice control policies and funding. Council chose to adopt the following recommendations to improve the accessibility, safety, and equity of Calgary's walking network.

Fines for failing to clear snow and ice from sidewalks

Property owners are responsible to clear snow and ice from the public sidewalks in front of their property. Complaints about sidewalks left uncleared results in a warning notice, which is effective

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90 per cent of the time (Attachment 2). Approximately 4400 warnings are issued each year. Wanting to encourage better compliance in the future, Council approved a penalty of \$250 that could be issued to those who failed to clear the sidewalks, particularly for those properties that repeatedly fail to make the sidewalks safe for others to travel on. Calgarians were advised of the new penalties through the first winter season (2018-19), but enforcement action did not start until the following season. In total, 74 tickets were issued between 2019 October - 2021 April.

24-hour timeline for clearing sidewalks and pathways next to City property

The City's business units (BUs) with public sidewalks outside of their depots, office buildings or public facilities were previously meeting the same 24-hour timelines to remove snow/ice as required of private property owners. However, the two BUs that are responsible for the largest, least occupied parcels had a planned SNIC response that was slower – Parks had a 72-hour response rate for their 300 km of sidewalk, and Roads completed all sidewalks in their inventory within seven days of the end of snowfall.

With the increased funding, both Roads and Parks were able to achieve the new 24-hour timeline 95 per cent of the time.

Plow windrows away from high-priority wheelchair ramps

Windrows are the continuous trails of snow that are left behind by snowplows on the road that can create a barrier to seniors and people with mobility challenges when trying to cross the street. In consultation with The City's Advisory Committee on Accessibility, Administration identified 500 wheelchair ramp (curb ramp) locations that were in high-use areas around the city that would be cleared of any build up of snow.

Clear an additional 100 km of pathway within 24-hours

Parks identified an additional 100 km of pathways that if cleared would increase accessibility and improve access to the pathway network. The City now clears a total of 442 km of pathways in the winter, ensuring year-round options for pedestrians and cyclists. Criteria for more pathways to be selected included access to the primary network, usage patterns and connections to destination sites.

The location of all City pathways, sidewalks, wheelchair ramps and bus pads that receive SNIC service can be viewed on The City's website at maps.calgary.ca/PathwaysandBikeways.

Budget analysis

Administration monitored the costs to provide the enhanced SNIC service levels that Council set in 2018. Due to a fewer number of snow events in the 2020/2021 season, and efficiencies in route planning and tracking, Administration was able to deliver the services for less than the original range estimates. The total expenditures were approximately \$11.45 million through 2021 April. Administration is confident that with the remaining funds, the enhanced SNIC service levels and communications can be maintained through to the end of 2022 (Attachment 2).

Establishing the SNIC service levels for pedestrian spaces going forward, including base funding requirements and policy updates, will require Council direction in 2022 November when the 2023-2026 budget cycle is being discussed and approved.

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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

- Public Engagement was undertaken
- Public Communication or Engagement was not required
- Public/Stakeholders were informed
- Stakeholder or customer dialogue/relations were undertaken

Administration engaged The City's Advisory Committee on Accessibility (ACA), including the Access Design sub-committee, to provide feedback on the changes made to SNIC services for the pedestrian environment. This committee's role is to advise and recommend solutions to Council on accessibility and disability matters. Key themes we heard:

- Communicating to the public as to 'why' snow & ice clearing is so important, as well as having a clear path of travel in all seasons of the year is vital.
- Improvements have been noticed, particularly in the Downtown. The clearing of windrows made the area easier and more reliable to navigate for those people using mobility devices, guide dogs and canes.
- Pathway clearing has also been improved
- Inconsistent clearing of sidewalks and ramps city-wide remains a concern. Gaps in clearing, or snow piles left behind by plows or power equipment can prevent some people from completing their travels.
- The issue of not clearing laneway crossings (aprons) and the engineered walkways between properties continues to be a challenge, and the ACA is recommending Council revisit and update policies to address these areas (Attachment 2 and 3).

IMPLICATIONS

Social

Improvements to snow and ice control in our pedestrian spaces will provide opportunities for Calgarians to be mobile during the winter season, regardless of age, gender, income or ability. Being mobile not only improves the health of individuals, it promotes independence and fosters social interaction and community awareness. It's also an affordable and inclusive way to travel.

Environmental

Having more citizens walk is a key long-term strategy for improving air quality while reducing Calgary's per capita consumption of energy from fossil fuels, which is the dominant source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution at the local level.

Economic

A well designed and maintained pedestrian realm also promotes access to services and adds value to public space and to the social fabric that keeps Calgary a competitive and international city built around strong neighborhoods.

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Service and Financial Implications

Existing operating funding - One-time

\$18.5 million for enhanced SNIC services from 2018 October through 2020 December

Current and Future Operating Budget:

While this report does not contain specific recommendations to adjust the current operational budget, any decisions made by Council to expand or accelerate the delivery of SNIC services would require additional investment in operational budgets.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

While this report does not contain specific recommendations to adjust the current capital budget, any decisions made by Council to expand or accelerate the delivery of SNIC services would likely require additional investment in capital budgets.

RISK

The Pedestrian Strategy contained an ambitious vision and a series of actions for Administration to take to deliver a safe, enjoyable and easy to use network for pedestrians by 2025. Additional investments were required to make improvements to the connectivity and accessibility of this network, particularly during winter conditions. The vision and key results will not be met by the 2025 target without maintaining these new SNIC service levels.

Roads, sidewalks, walkways and pathways are city property, and as such The City has a duty under the Municipal Government Act to consider and assign a standard for maintenance for these spaces, including snow and ice control. Engineered walkways and laneway crossings have not yet been assigned such a standard, nor has responsibility for SNIC been delegated to others. This lack of clarity causes inconsistent SNIC service to these community connectors, leaving citizens to decide in-the-moment on whether to take a risk themselves and travel along these spaces during winter. Assigning responsibility for SNIC on engineered walkways and laneway crossings will allow The City to appropriately manage risk related to conditions and claims. Cost estimates for adding SNIC responsibilities for these areas, and other levels of service, are provided in Attachment 3.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
2. Reviewing the Snow and Ice Control Investments to Improve Accessibility
3. Options for Additional SNIC Investment for Pedestrian Spaces

Department Circulation

General Manager	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Doug Morgan	Transportation	Approve
Katie Black	Community Services	Consult