



**Date of Meeting** June 8, 2022

**Subject** Snow and Ice Control - Service Level review

**Submitted By** Acting Mayor Crowson, Chair – Civic Works Standing Policy Committee

**Recommendation from Civic Works Standing Policy Committee:**

BE IT RESOLVED THAT City Council approve the following service level modifications:

1. Starting in winter of 2022/23, Phase 1:
  - declaration of snow routes and implementation of plowing to the right on approximately 25 km of selected roadways as identified in attachment 6; and
  
2. Starting in winter of 2023/24 and continuing into winter of 2024/25, Phase 2:
  - implement the provision of more residential plowing, less snow removal (snow removal only in the hospital area, downtown and around school zones) in combination with declaring snow routes more frequently Citywide and provide enforcement during snow events; (as in attachment 7); and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT Administration report back to Civic Works Standing Policy Committee in the spring of 2025 about operating budget and resource impacts.

**Vote:**

**In Favour:** 4-0 (Unanimous)

**Public Speakers at the Meeting:** None

**Public Submissions:** None

**Submitted By** Darwin Juell, GM Transportation and Julian Ruck, Transportation Op's Manager

**Presented By** Darwin Juell, Julian Ruck and Argyle Communications (Consultant)

**Purpose**

To obtain direction from the Civic Works SPC for approval of service modifications and potential budget implications and to forward to Council for approval.

### **Recommendation(s)**

That the Civic Works Standing Policy Committee recommends that City Council approve the following service level modifications:

1. Starting in winter of 2022/23, Phase 1  
declaration of snow routes and implementation of plowing to the right on approximately 25 km of selected roadways as identified in attachment 6; and
2. Starting in winter of 2023/24 and continuing into winter of 2024/25 begin Phase 2  
implement the provision of more residential plowing, less snow removal (snow removal only in the hospital area, downtown and around school zones) in combination with declaring snow routes more frequently Citywide and provide enforcement during snow events as identified in attachment 7; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED THAT Administration report back to Civic Works Standing Policy Committee in the spring of 2025 about operating budget and resource impacts.

### **Summary**

In 2020, the KPMG report recommended the City modify service levels for both Snow and Ice Control and Street Sweeping. To align more with practices seen in other municipalities, KPMG proposed to look at increasing snow plowing activities and decreasing snow removal activities. This RFD focuses on the snow and ice control recommendations from the KPMG report.

On March 4, 2021 Transportation presented to Civic Works committee several suggested actions for both Snow and Ice and Street Sweeping service level modifications with a recommended action to obtain public feedback on possible service level modifications as per City Council policy CC-60. Further, on June 23, 2021, Transportation prepared an RFD for City Council through the Economic SPC relative to funding options for snow and ice control deficits and surpluses (both reports are attached for reference). The resolution was to continue with the current funding model supported by MRSR.

In 2021, Argyle Consulting was hired to provide a public engagement strategy and report on the outcomes of community feedback on service level options. The City of Lethbridge used the feedback from this engagement to determine recommendations of service level modifications to Council.

### **Strategic Alignment**

Alignment with Council's Strategic Plan in the following areas:

from: City Council Strategic Plan 2017-2021

- Deliberate Community Engagement – Commit to conduct continuous public conversations on all services and program changes and Seek regular feedback from citizens on community issues (public meetings, surveys, social media, public events)
- Corporate Culture - Model a "how can we" mindset, embrace innovation in the provision of programs and services, seek opportunities, manage risks, learn from our mistakes and seek continuous improvement
- Financial Stewardship – Ensure strategic use of our resources by conducting operational reviews to seek out efficiencies
- Connecting Neighbourhoods through effective multi-modal systems – ensure our transportation systems connect people to where they live, work and play

from: Gateway to Opportunity 2022 Action Plan  
Community Engagement Strategy

### **Background and Prior Decisions**

2007 and 2009 the Snow Removal and Ice Control Policy of Council, CC34 was approved by City Council.

Every four years subsequently, the Snow and Ice control budget is approved by Council as part of the operating budget review. The Service levels have not been adjusted since and operating budgets follow the existing defined service levels within the existing Snow and Ice Control Policy.

Recent KPMG report recommendations suggested service levels may be modified for Snow and Ice Control. To align more with practices seen in other municipalities, KPMG proposed to look at increasing snow plowing activities and decreasing snow removal activities. There were no changes to the snow and ice control budgets as part of the budget reduction initiatives in November of 2020 for the 2021 and 2022 Operating budget.

During the March 4, 2021 Council meeting, Administration presented feasible Snow and Ice Control and Street Sweeping service level modification options. Administration informed the Civic Works Standing Policy Committee of plans to consult the public about the service level modifications in accordance with City Council Public Participation Policy CC60. Key stakeholder meetings were held in December 2021 for the Snow and Ice Control service level options. City wide public consultation for both Snow and Ice Control and Sweeping programs was conducted from January 4, 2022 to February 13, 2022, posting the content on the "Get Involved Lethbridge" page. A survey was provided and residents' rated their preferred option.

### **Analysis and Options**

***Snow and Ice Control Options (in order of most preferred rated by residents):***

1. More residential plowing, snow removal only downtown and in the hospital area, plowing in school zones
2. More residential plowing, less snow removal (snow removal only in the hospital area, downtown and around school zones)
3. Maintain current practice – level of snow removal and snow plowing stays the same as it is now

***Snow Route Enforcement Options (in order of most preferred rated by residents):***

1. Increased enforcement – more active ticketing on snow routes when activated, to allow more efficient snow and ice control operations
2. Status Quo – very rarely snow routes have been declared nor enforced during major weather events
3. No snow route enforcement - this will reduce ticketing but may imply a cost increase for the city, increase road hazards and risk as plowing opportunities are reduced

***Recommendation Snow and Ice Control:***

Administration recommends to implement service level changes in a two phased approach:

**Phase 1** – Declaration of snow routes and implementation of plowing to the right on 28 km on selected existing snow routes when there are more than 10 cm of snow accumulation in the forecast or more than 5 cm of snow accumulated in place. Snow routes will be enforced if cars impede winter operations along snow routes.

**Phase 2** - Considering resident's feedback asking for significantly more plowing and feedback from key stakeholders regarding school bussing access, in combination with resident's wishes to increase enforcement along snow routes, Administration recommends to implement the provision of more residential plowing, less snow removal (snow removal only in the hospital area, downtown and around school zones) in combination with declaring snow routes more frequently Citywide and provide enforcement during snow events. This was the second highest options chosen by the general public that participated in the survey, however, this recommendation recognizes the school board and parents' concerns regarding school areas being of utmost importance for safety, ie. no windrows or snow piles along roadways in front of schools.

There are approximately 580 km of paved roadways in the City, 120 km are on a Priority 1 plow route (there will be no change here as they are currently plowed already) there is also no change on local residential streets (approximately 295 km of roadways). This leaves approximately 165 km of collector roadways where plowing may occur now,

versus snow removal. These are essentially bus routes and collector streets within residential neighborhoods. Residents that live on these roadways will be impacted the greatest.

**Implications:                      Snow and Ice Control**

**Community/Citizen**

- Social – Safety and mobility are key considerations for the snow and ice control program. More plowing will have more roads cleared early on in a storm event. Snow routes are clearly marked with signage and can be declared through general City communication practices and the Lethbridge Loop app that will remind residents to remove their parked cars along the road. Accessibility issues due to windrows along sidewalks and plowed in driveways and cars will impact especially residents with mobility issues. There are funding options to cover snow removal cost for low income seniors through the AB Special Needs Assistance Program or other non-for-profit agencies might help (e.g Snow Angel program). Access for emergency vehicles and user needs define the hospital as primary, downtown as secondary and schools as tertiary priority to continue snow removal practices. Snow route declaration and enforcement action will complement the implementation of plowing service level changes, especially in areas with limited snow storage space along the curb.
- Economic – Plowing is the most cost effective snow and ice control practice. The application of sand and salt as well as snow removal is more cost intensive. More plowing will create overall better drivability of roads for residents and businesses and in an average year the budget impacts will be cost neutral. During a significant snow event year MRSR funds can be used to support additional snow removal if need be. Further, when snow removal is necessary in large areas of the City, the financial impact is high and large deficits can result to the MRSR, ie. in 2009, 2011 and 2018 deficits in excess of \$2 million per year resulted.
- Environmental – Plowing has the least impact to the environment. Salt and sand applications have impacts on storm water and snow removal is a heavy equipment intensive operation creating a large amount of greenhouse gases and also result in significant public delays/inconvenience with blocked roads during the removal process.

## **Financial**

The snow and ice control budget would remain at approximately \$3.8 Million and be cost neutral in an average year. Resources and funds would be allocated to more plowing but less to snow removal. Surplus's and deficits from the snow and ice control program would continue to flow into/from the MRSR. For extreme weather events/ winters there would be **more** cost savings due to more plowing and less snow removal activities, which are extremely expensive and rarely done on residential collector and local roadways.

## **Risk**

Operational and Reputational Risks:

- Residents/ business requests for special treatment/ advanced service level
- Windrows in front of residential driveways and partial on sidewalks causing accessibility issues. Person's with accessibility issues might feel especially impacted by the service level change.
- Plowed in parked cars, potential loss of parking space
- Potential property damage and resources needed for claim investigation
- Bus stops plowed in and resource needs to remove snow
- Priority plowing completed faster than crosswalk and bus stop clearing
- Ice on road when berms melt during day and freeze at night on road and causing catch basins to plug with ice
- Enforcement along snow routes might create controversy

Financial:

- As stated in the KPMG report, Lethbridge has a high service level for snow and ice removal services. Maintaining high service levels while limiting tax increases is a challenging combination for most municipalities. More plowing practices is an easier to maintain service level.

Legal/compliance:

- Significant service level changes will increase the likelihood of claims being filed against the City. However, the *AB Municipal Government Act* stipulates that a municipality will only be liable for

an injury to a person caused by snow, ice or slush on roads or sidewalks, if the municipality is grossly negligent.

### **Corporate**

The current Council policy CC-34 would likely **not** require amendment as the potential changes while do reflect a service level modification does not change the basis of the snow removal and ice control policy. The practice of plowing versus snow removal is an operational practice of how to comply with this current policy. Transportation would be required to update our snow removal and ice control practices and to modify our priority maps.

### **Engagement**

According to City Council Public Participation Policy CC60, residents of Lethbridge were engaged in the Snow and Ice Control and Street Sweeping programs service level review. The City retained Argyle Communication in June 2021 to provide a public engagement program during Covid with a number of virtual open houses, stakeholders meetings and public opinion polls. The primary public engagement method was provided through the City's website (Get Involved website).

The City of Lethbridge used the feedback from this engagement to determine recommendations to Council. Public engagement is about considering the input, ideas and perspectives of people who are interested or impacted by decisions, before decisions are made. Public input is an important part of this Service Level Review but is one of many areas of consideration in the decision-making process.

### **Implementation and Communication Plan**

Administration recognizes that more plowing is a high impact service change that can impact residents positively but also negatively. Thus, Administration proposes to focus on Phase 1 of the implementation on snow route declaration, snow route enforcement and active snow route operation with plowing to the right when activated only on selected roadways.

For Phase 2 Administration plans to update the existing snow route network which will include an in depth review of plowing feasibility along residential collectors with mono-curb gutter. These areas have limited snow storage capacity along the curb/ parking lane and will likely have to be added to the snow route network. Along snow routes, the snow route declaration process will help to notify residents about operational practices and impacts in their area. Tools that will be used are PSAs, social media and the Lethbridge Loop App. This will cause an expansion of the existing snow route network in addition to more enforcement action.

Changes to the service levels have to be communicated to the public once a Council decision is made and information to assist residents in understanding the change has to be provided.

Administration believes that the overall budget of \$3.8 Million for Snow and Ice control is appropriate to implement the recommendations, given its last ten-year overall average surplus. However, the accumulated debt is still greater than \$6.5 million. Administration plans to monitor successes and challenges with implementation of the new service levels and will report back to Council in the spring of 2025. This will allow two full seasons for implementation and an additional season, 2022/23, to implement snow route enforcement with a report back to Civic Works SPC on results with any recommended changes including operating budget adjustments.

If approved, implementation timelines are:

- Summer 2022 – allocate implementation team and resources and develop communications plan for snow route declaration, enforcement and operation in 2022/23 and reviewing existing collector roadways in the network with the intent of more plowing to the right to be initiated in 2023/24.
- Fall 2022 and ongoing – Inform community about impacted snow route service level changes and provide information to assist them in understanding the changes and how to overcome potential challenges.
- Winter 2022/23 – Implement service level changes for Phase 1 with plowing to the right on selected roadways on existing snow routes with snow route enforcement during declarations, and monitor performance.
- Winter 2023/24 – Implement service level changes for Phase 2 Snow and Ice Control (more plowing to the right) and monitor performance for 2023/24 and 2024/2025 season.
- Spring 2025 – Report to Civic Works SPC/ City Council.

#### **Attachment(s)**

1. City of Lethbridge Presentation of Service Level Change Recommendation
2. Lethbridge Transportation Service Level Review – Snow and Ice Control and Street Sweeping programs by Argyle Communications
3. March 4, 2021 Civic Works SPC material previously presented
4. March 4, 2021 Civic Works SPC Presentation
5. June 23, 2021 Snow Reserve Financial framework RFD prepared for Economic SPC.
6. Phase 1 Map
7. Phase 2 Map
8. Policy CC34 – Snow and Ice Control
9. June 8, 2022 Civic Works SPC Presentation

<b>Approvals</b>
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**City Treasurer:** Darrell Mathews

**City Solicitor:** Brian Loewen

**Department Director:** Joel Sanchez

**City Manager:** Lloyd Brierley