

Memorandum

City of Minneapolis Department of Public Works

To: The Honorable Sandra Colvin/Roy
 Chair, Transportation and Public Works Committee

From: David J. Sonnenberg, P.E.
 City Engineer/Director of Public Works

Date: August 1, 2002

Subject: Snow Emergency Analysis Project Report

Why did we do this study?

In the fall of 2001, Public Works anticipated a renewed interest in what is commonly referred to as "24-hour snowplowing." The Management Analysis Division (MAD) of the Finance Department was asked to assist with analysis and report preparation to look at the City's current snow emergency plan and investigate the potential for changing how snow emergency plowing is accomplished. Subsequently, Mayor Rybak reiterated that analysis of the City's snow emergency plowing system was a priority.

Snow plowing and the parking problem.

Before the discussion can begin, a major point has to be clarified. The phrase 24-hour snowplowing refers to snow emergency plowing, that is, the time frame in which all streets in the city are plowed full width after a major snow event. Obviously, in order to accomplish full width plowing of all travel and parking lanes, all lanes must be free of parked vehicles. Because of the high demand for on-street parking in Minneapolis, a snow emergency isn't as much about plowing, as it is a plan that allows for the systematic movement of parked vehicles that allow plows to clear the parking lanes. Full width plowing *HAS to be a cooperative effort* between the public and plowing crews in order to be effective. The real issue isn't about how to physically plow streets, but how to manage a parking problem to allow for complete plowing when conditions warrant. The time frame for snow emergency plowing is not dictated by the number of snowplows or how fast they plow, but by the method chosen to manage the parking problem.

Issues and information sources for input on Snow Emergencies.

The attached report addresses a wide range of issues related to snow emergency plowing. It must be noted that Public Works considers all winter precipitation events to be emergency in nature and always responds with a variety of plowing and ice control measures as appropriate. This report only addresses those times when snow accumulations are great enough that a plan is required to complete plowing of the parking lanes. This happens, on average, about 4 times per snow season. Factors such as staffing, equipment and financial issues are addressed as well as an analysis of parking issues and other important considerations. Input from a wide range of staff, customers and stakeholders were solicited for input and their feedback was incorporated into the

report. Other snow-belt cities were surveyed to see if there were other practices that could be workable in Minneapolis. At the direction of the Mayor, a series of neighborhood meetings was held to solicit direct input from citizens.

The consensus for change?

Normally, one would expect that after performing an analysis of this scope and depth, some conclusion or recommendation could be put forward. Unfortunately, in this case, the only conclusion seems to be that there is no single solution or preference that rises above the rest. There is no overwhelming or majority sense from the community of what sort of plan would be preferable, or that change is desired. For every voice asking for 24-hour plowing, there is equal sentiment that the current system is satisfactory or preferable. Calls for less towing are balanced by demands for more aggressive towing. Some say that speed is more important than quality. An equal number feel that quality is more important than speed.

Snow Emergency Alternative discussed in the report.

The alternative discussed in this report is basically the same concept that was proposed by Public Works in 1995. It was used because a base line was needed to estimate costs, and staffing and equipment needs to form some comparison with the current system. Some details may be changed if it is decided to go in the direction of 24-hour snowplowing, but this serves to illustrate many of the overall issues and factors that must be taken into account to work in a compressed time frame. In general, there is not likely to be significant financial impact in the long run, but there would be significant up front costs required to implement a new system.

Where do we go from here?

The analysis did not indicate that, in aggregate, there is an overwhelming consensus on either side of the issue. Therefore, rather than making a recommendation, what we hope to accomplish with this report is to provide the elected officials with enough information to engage in a lively policy debate and ultimately make an informed policy decision. Public Works is ready and willing to assist further in looking at potential alternative plans, discuss the implications, pros and cons of each, and implement whatever policy decisions are ultimately made.

Team effort.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Management Analysis Division, Public Works, and all of the other City staff who contributed to this report. A tremendous amount of good work went into compiling this analysis and their efforts are much appreciated.

Cc: Mayor Rybak, Councilmembers Ostrow, Zerby, Biernat, Johnson, Johnson Lee, Zimmerman, Lilligren, Schiff, Niziolek, Benson, Lane