

News

Less road funding means less plowing, salting

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By Angie Favot

A steady decrease in road funding and an increase in costs have caused state and other agencies to alter winter maintenance plans this year.

When light snow finally sticking to the ground Downriver and slick roads leading to numerous crash reports, winter driving and safety have been on the minds of area residents and law enforcement officers.

There also has been a higher volume of traffic to manage recently because of the holidays.

State, county and municipal officials also closely monitor the weather as they are responsible for keeping motorists moving safely even in the worst conditions.

Rob Morosi, a Michigan Department of Transportation spokesman, said Monday that roads will be maintained within reason, but agencies are trying to limit overtime expenditures for road plowing and salting.

"When we have a major storm we're going to have as much on the road as we can," he said. "But what we're trying to do is, because the comprehensive transportation fund decreased to close to \$100 million over a few years, operate within reason."

With a struggling state economy for the past several years, MDOT officials have said that \$1.44 billion designated for highway construction and maintenance in the current budget is expected to drop to \$593 million in 2010-11.

Morosi said the transportation money is collected from gas tax revenues and registration fees.

MDOT ranks plowing by priority level, according to its Web site.

Major routes such as I-75, I-94, I-275 and the Southfield Freeway are the first to be plowed under prevailing weather conditions. The goal is to provide a pavement surface over their entire width generally bare of ice and snow.

That work can be accomplished using overtime as necessary, according to the site.

On Downriver routes, the next priorities for clearing are Fort Street and Southfield Road. The goal is to provide a pavement surface generally bare of ice and snow in the center portion wide enough for a one-wheel track in each direction.

"Clearing the pavement bare of ice and snow over its entire width will be accomplished as soon as reasonably possible

after the winter storm event, without working overtime," the site says.

Road conditions are available by calling the Michigan State Police Travel Hotline at 1-800-381-8477, or by checking www.michigan.gov/roadconditions.

Information posts on the site for the major freeways and state trunk lines are made twice a day or as information concerning travel conditions is received. It operates from late November through March 30.

MDOT and the County Road Association of Michigan have released reminders on how to drive safely around snowplows:

ISnowplows have limited visibility and drivers cannot see directly behind their trucks.

ISnowplows often throw up snow clouds, reducing visibility on all sides of the truck.

IMotorists should never attempt to pass a moving snowplow on the right. With new, wing-plow technology, the blade can clear the shoulder and the lane of travel simultaneously. Motorists attempting an illegal pass through a snow cloud on the right and/or shoulder of the road most likely will not see the plow blade and run the risk of a serious crash.

Other MDOT reminders to drivers are:

ITo always wear safety belts.

ITo slow down when visibility is low and conditions are snowy.

ITo be extra cautious on bridges because they can be icy when roadways are dry.

ITo accelerate and brake slowly and avoid abrupt steering maneuvers.

Once temperatures get down into the teens, salt can be ineffective because it takes longer to work, so refreezing is faster.

Also, if slush is thrown to the side of the wheels and splashing, the salt is still working. If the slush begins to stiffen and is thrown directly behind the wheels, the salt is losing effectiveness and icy conditions could begin to develop.

Finally, MDOT recommends that if a vehicle is equipped with anti-lock brakes, apply steady brake pressure to avoid skidding; pump brakes only for vehicles without the anti-lock feature.

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