

# MEMORANDUM



**TO:** JEFFREY HERCZEG, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS  
**FROM:** MATT WIKTOROWSKI, FIELD OPERATIONS MANAGER  
**SUBJECT:** FY 2025-2026 WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE REVIEW  
**DATE:** MAY 12, 2026

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This memorandum provides an overview of winter maintenance performance for the 2025/2026 winter season. The data has been analyzed and compared to previous winter seasons to assess operational effectiveness, service levels, and overall performance trends. The review also considers key factors that influenced service delivery throughout the season, including abnormal weather events that created operational challenges, as well as equipment/technological advancements that contributed to improved efficiency and service performance.

## Background and Winter Road Maintenance Results

Southeast Michigan experienced an average winter season in 2025/2026, with team members responding to 32 weather events (highest total since 2014-15) at an average temperature of 29°F with approximately 32 inches of total snowfall. By comparison, the historical five-season average references 23 events, an average temperature of 33°F, and 30 inches of snowfall. While the total snowfall last season was average, the frequency of continuous events (back-to-back) in January and February impacted service and staff.

The attached table summarizes winter maintenance data from the past 19 seasons. However, for consistency and relevance, this season's performance statistics are compared specifically to the previous five winter seasons. Detailed discussion and analysis of each performance measure is provided in the sections below.

## Citizen Feedback

DPW received a total of 252 concerns from citizens relating to winter maintenance compared to the previous five-year average of 127. A breakdown of some of this season's concerns are as follows:

- 8 Driveway Plowed In
- 100 Lawn Damage
- 20 Mailbox Hit
- 8 Not Close Enough to Curb
- 20 Not Close Enough to Mailbox

- 26 Road Missed
- 1 Sidewalk Plowed In
- 48 General Concern

The overall higher number of concerns (252) is partially contributed to reported lawn damage complaints (100). However, following inspection of each site, approximately 50 needed formal repairs of soil, seed, and straw. Nearly all others had filled in naturally this spring given their small size.

## **Traffic Crashes**

Data provided by the Novi Police Department indicates officers responded to 93 traffic crashes during the 2025/2026 winter season in which snow or ice was reported as being present on the roadway surface. While the available data does not establish whether roadway conditions were the sole contributing factor in these incidents, monitoring crashes associated with winter weather conditions serve as an important benchmark in evaluating roadway safety and winter maintenance performance.

Historically, Public Safety crews have responded to an average of 36 winter weather events over the previous five seasons. Despite the higher number of winter-related crashes reported this season (likely due to number of events), DPW operations continued to focus on maintaining safe and passable roadways throughout all weather events.

## **Salt Use and Liquids Use**

The Department of Public Works (DPW) continues to pursue operational strategies aimed at reducing the amount of salt applied to City-maintained roadways and parking lots during winter maintenance operations. Limiting salt usage not only reduces operational expenditures but also minimizes the introduction of chlorides into local watersheds and public infrastructure systems. During the 2025/2026 winter season, DPW crews applied approximately 4,859 tons of road salt at a material cost of approximately \$280,753. This equates to an average application rate of 152 tons, or approximately \$8,782 in material costs per winter event, compared to the five-year average of 197 tons per event.

During the 2025/2026 winter season, Metro Detroit experienced a significant regional road salt shortage resulting from persistent snowfall events early in the winter season. Demand for salt increased at a pace that exceeded historical production and delivery capacities, creating supply challenges throughout the region; affecting both public and private snow removal teams. As a result of this shortage, many municipalities depleted their salt inventories entirely or were required to significantly modify service levels using alternative materials such as sand. Between January 20 and February 20, Novi's salt deliveries were dramatically reduced, despite large orders being placed early in the season. Because of the uncertainty of when salt supplies would normalize DPW crew's began applying materials conservatively and selectively; focusing on the safety of high speed and high traffic volume roadways. This prioritized safety was sustainable only because a measurable stockpile was stored in the reconstructed high-capacity salt

storage dome. If this dome had not been in place, our team would not have been able to effectively manage shortages in granular deicing materials

The previous season's investment in a brine making system was used to not only pre-wet from the back of the truck, but also liquid deice the roadway in place of rock salt. This method of snow removal saved the city several tons of salt during the shortage. DPW applied approximately 84,000 thousand gallons of liquid deicer this winter, averaging 2,623 gallons per event.

Looking ahead, DPW plans to continue expanding the use of liquid treatment applications during future winter seasons; further improving roadway conditions. These liquids are anticipated to reduce reliance on traditional rock salt applications, and minimize environmental impacts associated with chloride use.

## **Labor Costs**

Labor costs associated with winter maintenance operations can vary significantly from season to season depending on the timing, duration, and frequency of winter weather events. Storms occurring overnight or during weekends generally result in higher labor costs due to increased overtime requirements. Conversely, weather events occurring closer to regularly scheduled work shifts typically reduce overtime demands and overall labor expenditures.

For the 2025/2026 winter season, total labor costs were approximately \$314,678, averaging \$9,834 per winter event. These costs exceeded the historical seasonal averages of approximately \$184,188 in total labor expenditures and \$8,120 per event. The increase in labor costs during the season was primarily attributable to the higher number of winter weather events, and the operational staffing demands required to maintain roadway safety with expected service levels throughout the season.

## **Conclusion**

Each winter season, DPW evaluates the materials, labor resources, and equipment utilized in winter road maintenance operations to identify opportunities for improved efficiency and enhanced service delivery. In recent years, the Department has implemented several technological and operational advancements, including in-cab application controls to better calibrate material dispersion rates, wing plow attachments that increase roadway clearing efficiency, and Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) technology that improves tracking of winter maintenance activities and assists crews in estimating route completion times.

Prior to the 2025/2026 winter season the reconstruction of the salt stockpiling dome was completed. The new building improved operational efficiency and employee safety by incorporating an external conveyor system for salt loading operations. In addition, the dome increased on-site storage capacity by approximately 33 percent. This increased capacity was instrumental to ensure the community's stockpile was not entirely depleted during the shortage.

Many of the Department's operational improvements, enhanced maintenance practices, and leadership development initiatives are achieved through continued investment in employee training and professional development. This past season staff attended Snowplow Operator Training (SPOT), the Michigan Road Scholar Program (MRSP), the Michigan Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) Winter Operations Conference, the Michigan Public Service Institute (MPSI) and the American Public Works Association (APWA) International Snow and Ice Conference, which featuring 70 educational sessions. Staff will continue using those opportunities to research and enhance Novi's winter maintenance services.