

Are You Ready for Winter?



Important Information for Councillors
and Senior Local Authority Officers

The Highway Network

Highways are one of the country's largest public assets and essential to the social and economic wellbeing of local communities. Safe and reliable highways are fundamental and are the starting and finishing point of almost all journeys, whether on foot or by other means. The public highway provides access to public transport, our hospitals and emergency services, and directly carries the bulk of passenger and commercial traffic.

Winter Conditions

Winter snow is an event to which some people, especially young children, look forward, but others are concerned about disruption or fear for their personal safety. Over recent



years the impact of climate change has become noticeable, with a decreasing number of snow events. Climate change, however, is not only likely to mean milder and wetter winters in general, but also more frequent occurrences of severe weather events.

In 2009 we experienced severe winter weather with the heaviest snow fall in recent memory, resulting in widespread disruption to travel across much of the UK. Public transport was interrupted or unable to operate in several parts of the country and many roads became impassable, affecting access to essential services. These events provided a reminder that it is critical for the economy and for society that local authorities prepare for winter conditions. Good preparation will help ensure disruption is minimised and conditions are as safe as possible.

What is Winter Service?

A local authority's winter service facilitates safe and free movement around key parts of the highway network in winter conditions. It deals with regular, frequent and reasonably predictable occurrences like low temperatures, ice and snow, as well as with exceptional events. It is a key aspect of highway maintenance and is specifically designed to:

- enable economic and community activity to function as normally as possible through the winter;
- keep important parts of the highway network free from the dangers of ice and snow, so far as reasonably practicable.

Winter service involves:

- weather forecasting and prediction of local conditions;
- preventative treatment of selected roads, footways and cycle ways to inhibit ice forming;
- treatment of ice and snow.

Whilst the effects of climate change are likely to result in an increased frequency and intensity of severe winter events, these can be taken into account in winter service planning.

Why is it Important to be Ready for Winter?

There are high public expectations that it should be possible to undertake many journeys in road conditions close to normal; and there is a high impact on the economy if they cannot.



Winter service is not an emergency service. Winter comes every year and should be planned for. There are many expectations of, and requirements for, winter service:

- the ability of people to access places of work, learning, health care, shopping and community activities;
- continuity of regular haulage and the distribution of goods for industry and commerce;
- the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and vulnerable highway users;
- the legal obligations of the highway authority.

There are a significant number of risks and uncertainties which highway authorities need to take into account when planning for winter:

- a high public and economic impact if winter service cannot cope or fails;
- short-term unpredictability of winter conditions;
- lack of network resilience in severe conditions, with consequent disruption and impact, similar to early 2009;
- the ability of essential services to respond;
- the risk of litigation for failure to perform a basic highway service;
- the reputation of the local authority.



What Should Local Authorities do?

Local highway authorities should:

- approve a winter service policy, setting out what is to be treated and when, which includes a local resilience standard in terms of the number of days capability in severe conditions;

- coordinate and collaborate with other highway authorities and public services (such as the emergency services, hospitals and public transport) to ensure critical services can be delivered;
- prepare a Winter Service Operational Plan with details of how the service is to be delivered;
- prepare a contingency plan for exceptional conditions;
- provide information for the public in preparation for the winter, explaining routes to be treated and information on driving in winter conditions;
- establish liaison arrangements with the media.

What Resources are Needed?

Preparing for winter requires investment in people, technology, vehicles, salt, and depots. As part of their preparation for delivering winter service, local authorities will need to provide resources either directly or through their service contracts for:

- an adequate budget, with flexibility to respond to conditions;
- service management and decision-making arrangements;
- training and exercises to test plans;
- technology, including communications capability, ice detection and vehicle tracking;
- depot infrastructure and storage;
- people;
- vehicles;
- salt, and other de-icing materials.



Further Advice

General and technical advice is contained in the UK Roads Liaison Group's Code of Practice Well-maintained Highways, see www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org. The Code of Practice has been updated following the Secretary of State's full acceptance of the recommendations of the UKRLG report *Lessons from the Severe Weather February 2009*.