

VDOT's Response to the December 19, 2009 Record Snowfall

In the days following the record snowfall our area experienced December 19th, my office received hundreds of calls and emails regarding the lack of treatment neighborhood streets received during and after the storm. VDOT stated in its news releases that its priorities lie with the main, more heavily traveled roadways, and that residential streets would receive treatment in the form of a one-lane path in and out; though the latter was not widely known to residents. What was especially frustrating was the inconsistency of treatment between neighborhoods with no apparent reason behind it. A good example of this occurred in two communities in the Springfield District. One received several passes with a plow while a community comparable in size approximately five miles away, received no plowing.

In addition there were numerous incidences of lanes dropping which created extremely dangerous situations once traffic returned to speed. Many turn lanes were left unplowed and there were still mountains of snow blocking right of ways in some areas weeks after the storm.

It is not often we receive 20 plus inches of snow (although at press time it appears another major storm is imminent) and to maintain the staff and equipment to quickly address such a rare snowfall would be fiscally imprudent. In general I think VDOT did a reasonable job addressing the record snows, however, as with all things in life there is room for improvement and we should not let the lessons of this record snow go to waste.

At the January 12 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board approved my motion directing the Fairfax County DOT to communicate with VDOT areas where its response was effective as well as where improvement can be made during future snow events, including how it can better distribute information on the status of the roads and its progress clearing them. The Fairfax DOT will communicate the problems discussed above as well as those identified by other Supervisors and staff. My motion also encouraged VDOT to hold a 'lessons learned' session so that we all can be better prepared to handle significant snowfalls in the future.

Although plowing is a state responsibility, if you have any concerns regarding a specific roadway, please let my office know via e-mail at Springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov and we will communicate those concerns directly with them. You can also communicate your concerns directly to VDOT at 703-383-8368 or novainfo@VDOT.Virginia.gov.

It is important to note that VDOT crews first clear interstates, primary roads and routes that connect localities, fire stations, employment hubs, military posts, schools, hospitals and other important public facilities. They will then treat secondary roads and subdivision streets, but crews will focus efforts on roads carrying the most traffic. For residential streets, it is not VDOT's practice to plow curb-to-curb, nor to bare pavement. For updates on road conditions, as well as real-time weather conditions, traffic incidents and traffic camera video, you can visit www.511Virginia.org.

The Herrity Report, January 2010.

