



Winter maintenance

Summary of policy 2011/12

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Summary of policy 2011/12

Introduction

This document is a summary of the Winter Maintenance Service Policy¹. It provides a straightforward guide for reference by the general public.

Legal responsibilities

Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003 states that a Highway Authority must ensure, so far as is reasonable, that passage along a highway is not endangered by snow and ice. The purpose of the winter maintenance service is to ensure the safe movement of all highway users on designated roads throughout the county, while also keeping delays and accidents, caused by adverse weather conditions, to a minimum.

Weather monitoring

East Sussex has four weather monitoring stations located at Ashcombe, Golden Cross, Mark Cross and Guestling. These weather stations are equipped with sensors to monitor air and road surface temperatures, precipitation, humidity, road surface conditions, residual salt on the road surface and wind speed. Information from each of the stations is retrieved and managed through a specialist bureau.

Weather forecast

A weather forecast provider supplies daily forecasts of the weather in East Sussex. The road forecast uses information from our four weather stations to provide a detailed weather forecast. This tells us if the road surfaces are likely to fall below freezing during the next 24 hours and where we need to salt.

Roads that are routinely salted

Routine precautionary salting is carried out on pre-determined routes to help prevent the formation of ice. These routes are consistent with the principles of the Local Transport Plan and the Transport Asset Management Plan. We treat two types of roads:

Primary routes

These are roads that are normally salted during the course of a winter period as a priority. They consist of A and B roads and about 75% of the C roads, which are the most heavily used roads in the county. The normal salting routes cover 860 miles of road, or 42% of the total road network. They would normally be treated when the following weather conditions are forecast:

- Snow.
- Road surface temperatures falling close to, or below, freezing where moisture may be present.

We only salt where it is considered necessary. Even on a cold day, the roads can retain enough heat to prevent the need for salting.

The roads are treated at different times of the day depending on the weather forecast. Wherever possible salting is planned to occur:

- after the evening rush hour, if the forecast indicates low overnight road surface temperatures; and
- before the morning rush hour, where low morning temperatures have been forecast.

Secondary roads

These roads are not normally salted unless snow or severe icy conditions are forecast. They tend to include those major bus routes not included in the primary routes, link roads into a village/hamlet/urban estate, and main feeder roads to local hospitals. The secondary salting routes currently cover 130 miles of road, representing an additional 7% of the total road network.

We do not routinely salt footpaths or pavements.

Gritter fleet and response times

There are 25 gritters available, which are used to salt both primary and secondary routes.

When primary routes need salting it takes an hour for the gritters to start work. This allows for the drivers to get to a depot, load the salt and refuel the vehicle. It will then take up to three hours to treat all of the roads within the primary routes.

When secondary routes need salting it takes 30 minutes for the gritters to be re-loaded and vehicle checks undertaken, before salting can re-commence. It will then take an additional 1½ hours to treat all of the secondary roads.

It takes approximately six hours to treat both primary and secondary routes².

Treatment during snowy conditions

Once primary and secondary routes are clear, operations can move to other roads with priority given to:

- hospitals, fire, ambulance and police stations;
- bus and railway stations and other public transport stations;
- main shopping areas, schools etc; and
- difficult sites (very steep hills etc).

Minor rural and urban roads will be left to thaw naturally.

Hand salting of pavements will only be carried out if staff and equipment become available. The pavements in main shopping areas and busy urban areas will be treated as a priority.

Using farmers during snow

The Council retains a list of farmers that are prepared to clear minor roads local to their farms during snowy conditions. They are provided with a Council owned snowplough which can be mounted onto tractors. They have been instructed to clear specific minor rural roads.

Roadside grit (salt) bins

These have been provided throughout the county, so that pedestrians and motorists can help themselves by salting small areas of road or pavement. It is current policy to only maintain the existing grit bins and new grit bins will not be provided³. However, new bins can be provided by recognised bodies such as parish councils or resident's associations. The location of these bins would require written approval from the local Highways Office. (See Winter maintenance: provision of grit bins: ESH11.)⁴

The Council inspects and fills all its grit bins during the autumn. If there is snow, the bins will only be re-filled if staff and equipment are available to undertake this work. The salt in the bin should be used very sparingly. Salt does not aid grip and is supplied to assist in preventing the formation of ice and with the melting of snow, which will only occur after it has been churned by traffic. The salt is provided for use only on public roads and pavements, and should not be used or transported anywhere else. Grit bins will not be refilled on demand.

Self help

Householders and businesses in East Sussex are encouraged to clear snow and ice from public areas near their properties during periods of severe winter weather. They are also encouraged to assist neighbours who may not be able to clear snow themselves. The following extract from a Ministry of Justice⁵ letter may be of interest to anyone who is concerned about their legal position.

'The prospect of a person who volunteers to clear snow from a pavement being successfully sued for damages by a person who subsequently slips on the cleared area and is injured is very small.'

'A snow-clearer does have a duty to anyone who passes along the pavement to do the clearing with reasonable care so as not to create a new and worse risk, but the only person who is at risk of being sued is a person who clears the snow so badly that things are worse than before and that common sense would indicate this was so. A job done very badly indeed which makes the pavement clearly more dangerous than before might give rise to a risk if a person who would not have slipped otherwise slips and is injured as a direct result of that more dangerous state of affairs.'

Facts and figures

Total road length	3200km (2000 miles)
Primary route length	1380km (860miles) or 42% of the road length
Secondary route length	208km (130miles) or an additional 7%
Salt in storage at start of season	10,000 tonnes
Salt used to treat primary route	210 tonnes (light to medium application)
Salt used to treat secondary route	50 tonnes (light to medium application)
County Council revenue budget	£358.1 million
Band D Council Tax	£1,158.30
Winter maintenance revenue budget	£1.59 million or 0.45% of county revenue expenditure.
Band D council tax contribution	£5.14 per year, equivalent to 3p a day during the winter period.

Reference documents

1. Winter Service Policy and Plan 2011/12.
2. Meeting of the Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment dated 4 February 2002 resolved to amend response and treatment times.
3. Meeting of the Transport and Environment Committee dated 30 September 1997 resolution on roads to be gritted and provision of grit bins.
4. East Sussex Highways – Fact Sheet ESH 11 – Provision of grit bins, available from our website.
5. Letter from Ministry of Justice to Nicholas Soames MP dated 28 February 2010.

Other useful documents

- i) Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Transport & Environment Scrutiny Committee of the 15 September 2009 and the Scrutiny Review of Winter Services in East Sussex.
- ii) East Sussex Highways – Fact Sheet ESH 04 - Winter road maintenance, available from our website.

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November 2011 • 11-12 484



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