

WINTER OPERATIONS POLICY

Purpose:

The purpose of the Town's winter operations policy is to define the scope of procedures for snow and ice control and removal. The primary objective with winter operations is to maintain the safety and mobility of the traveling public. Although financial limitations upon provision of resources ultimately affect the level of service, every effort will be made to provide safe roadway conditions as soon as possible with available resources (budget, personnel, equipment and materials). Vermont storms vary dramatically with regards to precipitation, prediction and timing. The Highway Department will coordinate operations to fit each event. This plan is intended as a guide for "average" conditions.

General:

During the winter period extending from November 1 – April 30, the Highway Department's main focus is controlling snow and ice on roughly 70 miles of road. A prioritization of roads has been established to address winter maintenance. Resource limitations do not allow for 24 hour continuous winter maintenance service during storm events. Best management practices limit employee plowing hours. There may be reduced or no winter maintenance between the hours of 10PM and 4AM.

The Highway Department strives to keep roads safe for the traveling public; however, the Town of Brandon does not have a "bare roads" policy. Roads may be snow- or ice- covered during and following storm events. Adverse driving conditions are to be expected and motor vehicle operators must be prepared for such. The following is a list of actions (provided by VTrans) that drivers should adhere to in order to accommodate safe winter driving:

- A) Slow down. Driving too fast on wintry roads is the leading cause of crashes.
- B) Travel at a safe distance. Allow at least 3 car lengths in order to leave plenty of room to stop.
- C) Watch for plow trucks. Do not crowd/tailgate slow moving maintenance and emergency vehicles.
- D) Do not use cruise control on snow covered roads.
- E) Four-wheel drive vehicle capabilities should not be overestimated.
- F) Clear all snow and ice from vehicle prior to travel.
- G) Have proper snow tires on your vehicle.
- H) Be aware of black ice on what appears to be bare pavement.

Prioritization:

During a storm event, priority will be given as follows:

- A) Class 1 Town Highways (approximately 2 miles): Grove Street, Conant Square, Center Street, Franklin Street, Park Street, Marble Street, Champlain Street.

- B) Class 2 Town Highways (approximately 16 miles): Pearl Street, Long Swamp Road, Union Street, Florence Road, North Street/Route 53, Arnold District Road, McConnell Road, High Pond Road.
- C) Class 3 Town Highways (approximately 40 miles): Roads will be addressed giving priority to paved roads and bus routes.
- D) Class 4 Town Highways (approximately 9 miles): Roads will not receive winter maintenance unless authorized by the Brandon Select Board per 19 V.S.A. Section 302 (a) (3) (b).
- E) The Brandon Highway Department will not maintain private roads or private driveways.
- F) Priority will be given to intersections, hills and curves.
- G) School bus routes will be prioritized as appropriate considering status of school operation, storm duration and nature of conditions.
- H) Sidewalks will be addressed as soon as practical following a storm event.

Procedure:

Using available resources and judgment based on experience, the Highway Division Chief or their designated representative will determine the appropriate level and timing of snow and ice control to be performed by the Highway Department. Each storm is a unique event, therefore deviations from the routine maintenance plan may occur. Decisions must be made using individual judgment based upon a current assessment of the situation. Town plow drivers are given the responsibility to make decisions regarding snow removal and material application to keep the roads open for travel and reasonably safe while concurrently minimizing costs.

Communication with the school bus coordinator will occur early in the morning if road conditions have not improved or are deteriorating. This will allow the school district Superintendent to make a decision, based on the Highway Division Chief's recommendation, on whether to close schools or have a delay. The Highway Department does not make the school district's decision.

In general, snow will be plowed and salt or sand, will be applied during a storm to keep roads open to traffic and to provide an operable roadway surface. Salt will be applied to roadway centers. For paved roads, one-third (1/3) bare pavement will be provided in the middle of the road, as soon as practical. Curves, hills, intersections and bus routes will be given additional attention. For continuous storms, repeated applications will be required.

Generally, when temperatures are below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, salt or sand/salt mixtures will be applied to paved roads while sand will be applied to gravel roads.

Following storm events, continued maintenance will include improvement of road surfaces by clearing packed snow, pushing back snow on road shoulders (winging), removing excess snow piles within the business district and opening/thawing culverts, ditches and storm drains.

Equipment:

To support winter operations, the Highway Department has the following equipment available:

- A) Two Tandem 14 cubic yard dump trucks. Each equipped with a one-way front plow, wing plow and material spreaders
- B) One single-axle, 7 cubic yard dump truck, with one-way front plow, wing and material spreader
- C) Two Ford F-550 equipped with one-way front plow and tailgate mounted material spreader.
- D) One CAT 120 road grader with plow and wing.
- E) One CAT 924K bucket loader with front mounted plow.
- F) One CAT 440 Backhoe.
- G) One MT7 Trackless Sidewalk Tractor with plow, snow-blower and sanding attachments.
- H) One Gehl 4640 skid-steer with sidewalk plow and snow-blower attachments.

Materials:

The Town keeps a stockpile of sand, approximately 3,000 cubic yards, at the Highway garage for use during winter months. The town also stockpiles salt in a shed at the Highway garage; usage is approximately 470 tons. A small stockpile of sand for public use is provided and will be replenished as needed. It is located straight back from the entrance to the Highway garage located at 356 Champlain Street (VT Route 73 West).

Ordinances/Laws (All statutory references are to Vermont Statutes Annotated):

Title 19 § 111 prohibits the encroachment of the Town right-of-way (ROW) without prior approval of the Select Board. Objects in the ROW are placed there at the owner's risk, and the Town assumes no responsibility or liability for any damage to objects placed in violation of State statute. Common items in the ROW are fences, flower pots, basketball hoops, etc. Recovery of damages will be pursued by the Town if any Town equipment is damaged due to placement of objects in the ROW.

Title 19 § 1111 (b) prohibits the depositing of "material of any kind within, or to in any way ... obstruct a ditch, culvert or drainage course that drains a highway." Snow is not to be pushed or placed into these areas at any time.

Title 23 § 1126 (a) prohibits plowing or blowing snow into or across a State or Town highway, shoulder or sidewalk. Although this is hard to avoid, material should not be left such that it creates an obstruction or mound. Violation of this law may result in a fine as determined by the State of Vermont (presently \$70.00).

Title 23 § 1102 prohibits unattended vehicles from interfering with highway maintenance. Vehicles may be towed without further warning.

The Town of Brandon’s Traffic Ordinance, Article VI, Sections 1 and 2 stipulate that parking on a traveled portion of highway or sidewalk is prohibited. Section 3 prohibits parking on streets and parking areas between 12:01AM and 6:00AM from November 1 through April 1.

Public Communication/Information:

The Highway Department does not purposely plow snow into private driveways; it can, however, be the natural result of plowing operations. When clearing walkways/driveways, individuals should be aware of oncoming plow trucks. Do not attempt to “protect” cleared driveways/walkways by standing at the entrance. Individuals in close proximity to oncoming plow trucks may be injured by snow, or debris in the snow, from the plow, or by the plow truck itself.

The construction of snow forts, tunnels or similar in roadside snow banks is prohibited.

The Town will investigate any reported damage to mailboxes caused by winter operations. The Town will repair/replace any mailboxes that suffered direct, physical damage from plows or Town equipment. Damage incurred from heavy snow coming off plows will not warrant repair/replacement. All mailboxes shall be properly secured before winter.

Lawn damage within the ROW will occur even though highway personnel do their best to prevent it. Excessive damage, as determined by the Public Works Director, may be repaired in the spring or when soil conditions allow.

Conclusion:

Vermont winters provide a variety of challenges for Town highway staff, users of roadways, and private property owners. The Winter Operations Policy should be a source of information and education for the general public. Working together, all involved can help to make winter maintenance more efficient, and winter travel safer for everyone.

The above Winter Operations Policy was duly adopted at a properly warned meeting of the Brandon Select Board on March 25, 2024

Doug Bailey, chair

Heather Nelson, vice-chair

Ralph Ethier, clerk

Brian Coolidge

Tim Guiles