



**City of Kingston
Information Report to Council
Report Number 25-235**

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Ian Semple, Commissioner, Transportation & Infrastructure Services
Resource Staff: Karen Santucci, Director, Public Works & Solid Waste
Date of Meeting: October 21, 2025
Subject: Sidewalk Plowing in School Areas

Council Strategic Plan Alignment:

Theme: 4. Foster a Caring and Inclusive Community

Goal: 4.1 Enhance community safety and well-being.

Executive Summary:

At its meeting on March 18, 2025, Council directed staff to provide an information report outlining the prioritization of sidewalk plowing in school areas, the criteria for pathway maintenance leading to schools, and potential improvements achievable within the existing level of service. This report presents the results of that review.

The City of Kingston's sidewalk and pathway winter maintenance program is guided by the Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways (Ontario Regulation 239/02) and the City's Winter Maintenance Policy (2018), which establishes service levels that exceed provincial requirements in many areas. The City maintains over 600 kilometres of sidewalks, pathways, and trails with a fleet of 17 sidewalk plows. Approximately 31% of this network is designated as priority for snow clearing, including areas around schools, hospitals, transit routes, and commercial corridors.

A comprehensive review was conducted with Public Works, Transportation Services, and representatives from the Limestone District School Board and the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board to assess winter maintenance in Community Safety Zones and school areas. The review found that 45 of 73 Community Safety Zones with sidewalks have

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partial or full priority sidewalk coverage, typically in front of schools. The analysis identified targeted, achievable improvements to enhance pedestrian safety and reliability around schools within current operational capacity.

Key operational improvements to be implemented and piloted for the 2026 winter season include:

- Minor adjustments to priority sidewalk routes within Community Safety Zones, informed by school travel survey data.
- Upgrading school crossing guard locations to the same 24-hour service level applied to express bus routes.
- Increasing the level of service for plowable pathways connecting to maintained school property from 72 hours to 48 hours following a snow event.

To support communication and education, the City will update Park & Stride maps and develop pilot school walking route maps highlighting Community Safety Zones and reliable winter routes. These tools will be produced in partnership with the school boards to ensure clear, accessible information for families.

The report concludes that the current level of service meets the City's policy and legislative obligations while continuing to emphasize accessibility, safety, and operational efficiency. The identified pilot changes for 2026 will inform future updates to the Winter Maintenance Policy following anticipated provincial amendments to the Minimum Maintenance Standards.

Recommendation:

This report is for information only.

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Authorizing Signatures:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY COMMISSIONER

**Ian Semple, Commissioner,
Transportation & Infrastructure
Services**

p.p. ORIGINAL SIGNED BY CHIEF
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**Lanie Hurdle, Chief
Administrative Officer**

Consultation with the following Members of the Corporate Management Team:

Paige Agnew, Commissioner, Growth & Development Services	Not required
Jennifer Campbell, Commissioner, Community Services	Not required
Neil Carbone, Commissioner, Corporate & Emergency Services	Not required
David Fell, President & CEO, Utilities Kingston	Not required
Desirée Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer & City Treasurer	Not required
Jenna Morley, City Solicitor	Not required

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Options/Discussion:

At its March 18, 2025 meeting, Council adopted the following motion:

Therefore Be It Resolved That staff provide Council with an Information Report by the end of Q3 2025 detailing the current prioritization of sidewalk plowing in school areas, criteria for plowing pathways leading to schools and identifying achievable improvements within the current level of service as well as means of communication to residents regarding the level of service in school areas.

This report provides the results of this review of all sidewalk, pathway and crosswalk winter maintenance activities for the information of Council.

Background

Under *Ontario Regulation 239/02 – Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways (MMS)*, made under the *Municipal Act, 2001*, Section 16.1(1) defines a sidewalk as the part of the highway set aside for pedestrian use. Section 16.1(4) requires that, following the end of a snow accumulation, municipalities must reduce snow on sidewalks to a depth of 8 cm or less within 48 hours and maintain a minimum cleared width of 1 metre. Section 16.3(1) further requires that icy sidewalks be treated within 48 hours after the municipality becomes aware of the condition.

The MMS do not currently regulate recreational pathways, park paths, or multi-use trails unless they form part of a municipal highway right-of-way. Proposed amendments to the MMS which are not yet in force, would, for the first time, include certain off-road active transportation facilities such as in-boulevard multi-use paths, applying clearance timelines similar to sidewalks. Park pathways and trails would remain outside the MMS.

The City of Kingston's Winter Maintenance Policy (2018) is based on the MMS but sets higher service levels in certain areas. Under Section 5.2, high-volume sidewalks are cleared within 24 hours during normal winter conditions, while residential sidewalks are cleared within 48 hours. Section 5.3 outlines that certain high-priority multi-use paths, walkways, and park paths are included in the winter maintenance program and cleared within 72 hours.

It is important to note that, on occasion, the City of Kingston designates a winter event as a Significant Weather Event. Under Ontario Regulation 239/02, Minimum Maintenance Standards for Municipal Highways, a Significant Weather Event may be declared when a weather hazard is occurring or expected to occur that poses a significant danger to users of the highway system. When such a designation is in effect, the standard timelines for completing roadway and sidewalk winter maintenance activities are suspended. The timelines for plowing, salting, and sanding will not commence until the declaration has been lifted. Over the past five years, the City has declared a significant weather event four times. In all cases, the time to clear roads, sidewalks and walkways were all extended beyond the normal time frames.

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Current Operations

The City maintains over 600 km of sidewalks, pathways and trails using a fleet of 17 sidewalk plows. Approximately 186 km of priority sidewalks are addressed during storms when possible, including areas in front of schools, busy commercial districts, Kingston Transit stops, hospital zones, and specified areas around Queen's University and St. Lawrence College.

At this time, the City's sidewalk fleet is sized and staffed to meet the current requirements however as the City invests in new sidewalks and multi-use pathways, particularly in the past five years through the Active Transportation Implementation Plan, this fleet is at capacity.

Criteria for Priority Designation

Priority sidewalks and pathways for winter control are designated based on:

- High pedestrian volumes (schools, hospitals, transit stops, commercial districts, post-secondary student areas)
- Proximity to high-volume roadways
- Location within school areas
- Transit accessibility
- Access to essential services (hospitals, fire, police)
- Connectivity within the pedestrian network

Approximately 31% of the sidewalk network currently meets the criteria of priority.

Priority sidewalks and pathways are plowed first during a snow event, however once the snow has stopped, staff plow entire routes in sequence, rather than skipping through the route to complete priority areas first. This sequential approach allows the entire sidewalk system to be maintained within the timeframes of the MMS and Winter Control Policy.

Over the past five years, the City has not met the MMS on four occasions, with each of these being the result of not meeting the timeframes associated with sidewalks. This is the result of multiple operating factors specific to sidewalk clearing operations including:

- Sidewalk plows operate at an average speed of 4–10 km/h,
- Frequent mechanical breakdowns during heavy use,
- Wet or deep snow requiring slower passes and multiple runs,
- Packed snow/ice on heavily used routes before plowing begins,
- Windrows from adjacent road plowing,
- Slow travel speeds to reach assigned routes, and
- Delays caused by moving between scattered priority areas.

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Community Safety Zones

With the addition of Community Safety Zones (CSZs) in recent years, this fall, Public Works in collaboration with the Transportation Services team and the School Boards reviewed sidewalk plowing priorities within these segments. These CSZs comprise a total of 38 km of sidewalks and serve 56 elementary and secondary schools.

A review of the CSZ segments with sidewalks was recently completed, with 45 of the 73 CSZs having some or all of their sidewalks identified as a priority. In most of these cases, the priority segments are located directly in front of the school.

The City recently launched a School Travel Survey, which provides families with the opportunity to identify preferred routes. As part of reviewing priority routes, the Transportation and Public Works teams will review the results of the school traffic survey to re-evaluate the priority snowplow zones for 2027 winter season. The results of this review will be presented to the EITP Committee in Q3 of 2026. For 2026, minor changes will be made using existing resources and piloted on sidewalks where feasible.

School Crossing Guards

School Crossing Guards are stationed at key crossings in school areas across the city to assist students in safely navigating busy roadways. The City currently staffs 33 locations across the city with a crossing guard. These locations require plowing of the crossing and removal of windrows to allow crossing guards to complete their crossings safely. Depending on the location, these could require multiple clearings to remove windrows created by City plowing operations.

As part of reviewing potential operational changes to prioritize school routes, all school crossing guard locations will be added to the same high-priority list used for our express bus routes, meaning they will be addressed within 24 hours. These changes will be piloted during the 2026 season to determine if they are effective and feasible going forward.

Pathways and Walkways

Many active routes to school include multi-use pathways, park pathways, paved walkways connecting sidewalks, and stone dust or informal grass paths (not maintained in winter). Multi-use pathways are cleared to meet sidewalk requirements, and where applicable, winter bicycle lane standards. Park pathways are cleared only if they have an asphalt or concrete surface and provide through-park connectivity from one street to another.

Paved walkways connecting students directly to schools are important for safety, reducing congestion at school entrances. They provide safe and reliable routes for students who walk, roll, or bike, while also supporting families who choose to park a short distance away and walk the final few minutes together. In this way, walkways serve as both active travel connections and “park and stride” options, helping to ease traffic pressure right in front of schools while encouraging healthier, safer travel habits. However, these walkways are not covered under the

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MMS and are typically cleared only after sidewalks, usually 48–72 hours after snowfall. Challenges include:

- Gravel surfaces unsuitable for City plow equipment
- Packed snow making bare-surface clearing difficult
- Terminations in grassed areas where plows cannot turn without damage or risk of becoming stuck
- Snow piles at walkway ends creating hazards
- School board budget constraints preventing plowing or surface hardening
- Security concerns leading to closure of some walkway ends

In discussions with representatives from Limestone District School Board (LDSB) and Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic School Board (ALCSB), a number of schools with pathway connections were identified and reviewed. Based on the information shared by the school boards, City staff have reviewed all pathways and walkways and updated the list of maintained routes to reflect which pathways can be plowed and which cannot:

- Pathways that can be plowed and connect to a maintained hard surface on school property will be upgraded to the same service time as the adjacent sidewalk (in most cases, this reflects an increased service level of 48 hours instead of 72 hours).
- Pathways that cannot be maintained in the winter include:
 - Pathways that terminate at a gate that is locked and kept closed by the school board administration.
 - Pathways that terminate in a school yard not maintained in the winter and without space for City plows to turn around.
 - Walkways that are too narrow, irregularly configured, or surfaced in a way that prevents plowing.

For pathways that will not be maintained, the City will update public walking information and share it with the school boards for distribution to families.

This joint review has resulted in updates to the list of maintained routes, providing families with clearer, more reliable winter walking options. These changes will be piloted during 2026 to determine if they are effective.

Analysis

A thorough review was completed with Public Works, Transportation, and the LDSB and ALCSB to determine what is currently prioritized for sidewalk plowing around school zones and what could be prioritized within existing resources.

Working within the current budget and resources, the following improvements have been identified and will be piloted for implementation in 2026:

- Minor changes to prioritized sidewalk plow areas within Community Safety Zones will occur during 2026. A more detailed review of these zones will be conducted to review

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priorities within the network to ensure they reflect key routes to school, informed by the 2025 school travel survey.

- The priority of school crossing guard locations upgraded to be the same as express bus routes, meaning these areas will be cleared within 24 hours of the end of the snow event.
- Pathways that can be plowed and connect to a maintained hard surface on school property will be upgraded to the same service time as the adjacent sidewalk. This will increase the clearing of these pathways from 72 hours to 48 hours following the end of the snow event.

Further review will occur at the end of the season to determine the effectiveness of the changes however to further prioritize sidewalk plowing within Community Safety Zones, or around schools, additional equipment and staffing would be required.

Education and Communications

The City, in partnership with the South East Health Unit, maintains Park & Stride maps for schools where nearby connections make this option feasible. These maps identify designated parking areas a short distance from the school, typically 200 to 600 metres away, where families can park and then walk the remainder of the way. Park & Stride locations help reduce congestion directly in front of schools, improve safety for students, and encourage families to incorporate active travel into their school commute.

To ensure these maps are aligned with the pathway maintenance criteria identified in this report, maps will be updated to identify any pathways that are not maintained in the winter. Where a suitable Park & Stride location does not exist, other tools and resources will continue to be used to support safe school access.

Separately, as part of promoting active routes to school, the City is also taking steps to develop pilot walking route maps. These maps will highlight Community Safety Zones and suggested walking routes for each school, providing families with clear and consistent information about reliable ways to walk, roll or cycle to school. The pilot maps will build on recent safety initiatives around schools and will be tested to evaluate their effectiveness before being expanded more broadly. Winter maintenance of these routes will be considered in the development of these resources.

Public Engagement

Staff met with both the LDSB and the ALCSB to discuss the challenges that they face within these zones. Additional information will be developed and shared with families in collaboration with the school boards.

Indigenization, Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IIDEA) Considerations

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) establishes a framework requiring municipalities to identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. While the Act does not prescribe specific standards for winter maintenance such as snow

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clearing timelines, it obligates municipalities to consider accessibility in the delivery of services and the design of public spaces.

In Kingston, this obligation is reflected in local policies such as the City's Accessibility Standards Policy and the Winter Maintenance Policy. The City works to meet the Minimum Maintenance Standards (MMS) and its Winter Control Policy by clearing roadways and sidewalks as quickly as possible for all residents. These policies ensure that accessibility considerations are incorporated into operational practices, including sidewalk and pathway clearing, with a focus on maintaining safe and reliable mobility for residents with disabilities during winter conditions.

Existing Policy/By-Law

Winter Maintenance Policy – October 2019 Revision

There is no need to update this policy at this time as there is an expectation that in 2026 the Minimum Maintenance Standards will be updated that will need to be incorporated into this policy. Piloted changes that are effective can be incorporated into updates to the Winter Maintenance Policy at that time.

Financial Considerations

These changes will not have any financial impacts as existing resources are being adjusted.

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Other City of Kingston Staff Consulted:

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Sara Lagace, Supervisor, School Area Safety, Transportation and Transit

Exhibits Attached:

None