

**City of Seattle  
December 2008 Winter Storm**

**After Action Report  
and  
Corrective Action Plan**

## **PURPOSE**

This After Action Report and Corrective Action Plan is intended to document the major impacts resulting from the December 2008 winter storm, the response actions taken by the City and lessons learned.

## **OVERVIEW**

During the month of December 2008 an extended period of severe winter weather struck the Puget Sound region. This resulted in road closures, difficult driving, limited Metro bus service, school closures, business closures, and other impacts.

This was one of the most significant winter storms to strike Seattle.

## **LIMITATIONS**

In order to quickly capture and implement lessons learned, collection of information for this report started soon after major response operations began to wind down and well before the recovery phase had begun. The final tally of property damage, detailed analysis of the exact weather patterns that occurred and complete assessment of the economic impact will not be known for several months. However, with several weeks of winter weather remaining it is prudent to identify, and where possible implement, improvements to City response plans.

## **Executive Summary**

In December 2008, Western Washington experienced one of its most severe winter storms – high wind warnings, snow, ice, and sustained freezing temperatures lasting more than two weeks. The non-stop accumulation of several inches of snow every few days coupled with temperatures that turned compacted snow into ice made for treacherous conditions throughout the region.

The Mayor called for a formal review of departmental operations and as is the City's practice, the Office of Emergency Management compiled the attached after action report and corrective action plan. While there were valiant efforts from many dedicated staff working round the clock to respond to the weather and its impacts on our customers, this event presents us with a test of the City's winter weather response and an opportunity to strengthen our capabilities and improve the outcomes in future events.

The Seattle Department of Transportation used its Winter Storm Response Plan and maintained 24-hour plowing operations with crews working 12 hour shifts including holidays and weekends. Over 1,530 lane miles were plowed and sanded multiple times, however the onslaught of snow on top of rapidly freezing compacted snow and ice inundated the capacity to keep streets passable.

The concurrent impacts throughout the region included severely limited Metro bus service, garbage and recycling collection, and other delivery services. Travelers were stranded at the airport and at bus and train stations; many more were simply forced to stay home.

Based on the experiences of this unusually severe winter weather, the City has committed to increasing the capacity for snow removal and improving a number of other operations.

Since keeping the roads passable mitigates a host of other potential problems, Seattle Department of Transportation has assembled a multi-pronged strategy to fortify their snow removal operations. The City's snow plow fleet will be augmented with two additional plows and contracts initiated for thirteen additional plows. The City's policy on the use of salt has already been revised to allow for its use in strategically prescribed conditions. Metro has committed to assigning a liaison with Seattle Department of Transportation to coordinate traffic operations on critical routes. The additional plowing capability on strategically planned routes coupled with the targeted use of de-icer, anti-icer and salt would be sufficient to keep pace with the conditions experienced in this storm.

The City was fortunate to escape any major traumatic incidents – Fire and Police Departments were capable of handling emergency responses with only minor delays for limited periods during the two weeks. Public Health worked side by side with hospitals and the Emergency Operations Center to keep medical operations on line. The forecasted high winds did not materialize into massive power outages for Seattle City Light customers and the relatively few customers who did experience outages had service restored the same day or soon thereafter. Human Services operated cold weather shelters for the homeless throughout the entire event and were prepared to expand shelter operations at a moment's notice.

The Office of Emergency Management had re-directed a \$50,000 State Farm funded public education campaign from a focus on residential seismic retrofit to winter storm preparedness earlier in the year. Local TV, radio and newspapers joined with us in this effort. Though there is no easy way to quantify how many people were better prepared for severe winter weather as a result, certainly the decision to focus on weather preparedness was beneficial.

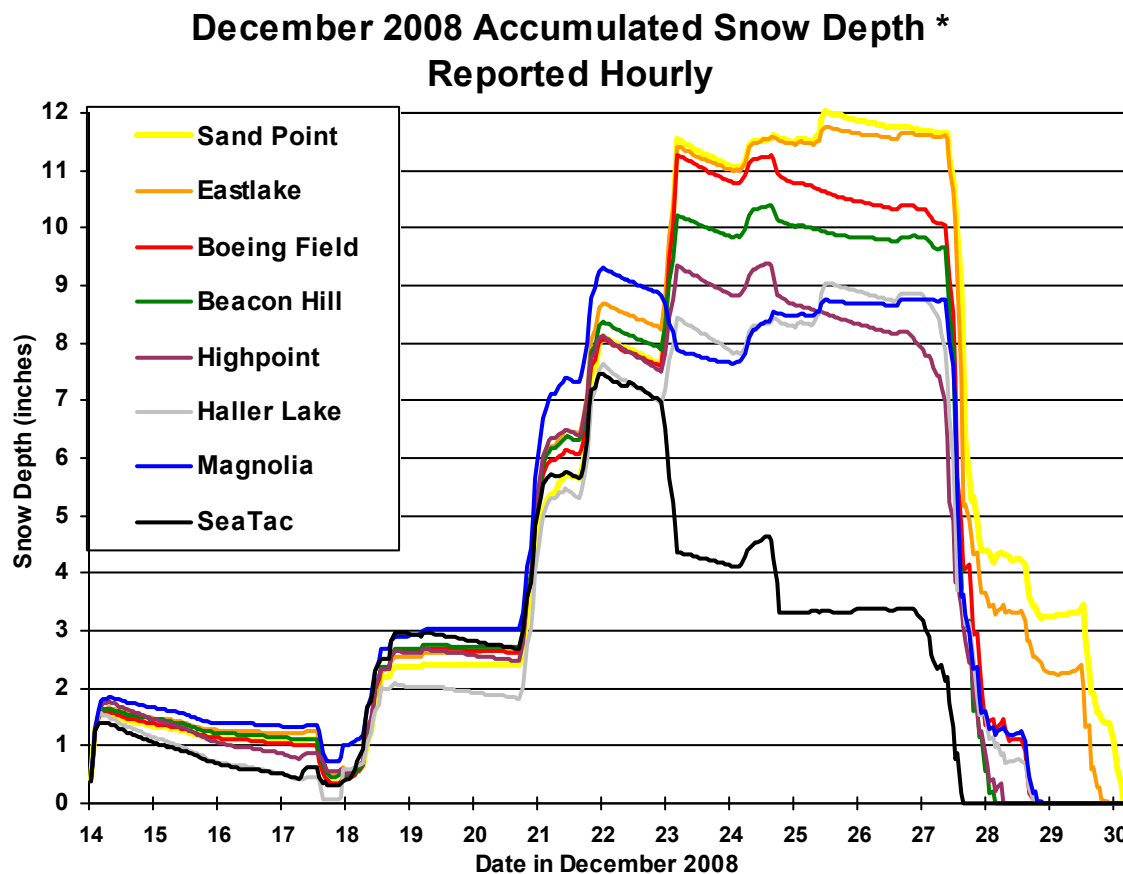
The need, however, persists for more community and neighborhood organizing to knit together human networks of care and compassion. This storm exposed the fragility in many people's lives caused by isolation or interruption to independence provided through case management services. City agencies must continue to partner with other government entities, the private sector, and community-based organizations to build networks of interdependence to increase our overall resiliency.

## WEATHER

The Puget Sound region experienced several storms for 14 days starting on December 13<sup>th</sup>. Freezing temperatures, snow, sleet, freezing rain, heavy rain and high winds presented a significant challenge to responders throughout the region as well as in the City of Seattle.

Seattle ultimately received 11.3 inches of snow between the period of December 13<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup>. Typical December snow accumulations average 2.2 inches.

Total number of consecutive hours with snow on the ground was 357 – more than 2 ½ times longer than the most severe storms in the last 20 years.



“The December 2008 snow storm resulted in more consecutive hours of snow on the ground than any other storm in the last 20 years. Only the storm in December 1996 produced a greater amount of accumulated snow. However, the snow from that storm stayed on the ground less than half as long as the snow from the December 2008 storm.”

(City of Seattle Office of Policy and Management).

## **IMPACTS**

Deep snow and ice on residential streets and packed snow and ice on primary and secondary snow routes significantly impeded vehicle travel which caused a number of problems:

- Many City streets covered in snow and ice
- Closure of portions of major City streets
- Closed schools
- Closed businesses
- Spot shortages of gasoline supplies and food
- Reduced or canceled public and private events
- Reduced or canceled health care services
- Canceled or significantly reduced public transportation
- Difficulty in obtaining prescription refills or food supplies
- Vehicle accidents
- Delayed garbage pick up
- Heightened risk of ruptured water mains and urban flooding

The Preliminary Damage Assessment for Seattle estimates storm costs at \$3,400,056. It includes snow removal, other response costs, power restoration, damaged equipment as well as some property damage. The Small Business Administration has already declared its intent to offer low-interest loans to businesses who incurred revenue or capital loss during the storm.

Fifteen counties, including King, have been declared eligible to receive federal disaster assistance. Additional counties will likely be added bring the total to thirty three.

In short, this was a major storm that significantly impacted the City for two weeks.

## **DETAILED IMPACTS**

### **Health Care**

Local hospitals and other healthcare organizations experienced difficulty in getting staff to and from work and had to implement emergency plans to provide transport with varying degrees of success. Also, some hospitals lack the ability to plow their extensive driveway and parking areas which hindered their operations.

Patients had difficulty getting to and from their scheduled medical appointments. Some dialysis patients, for example, could not get to their dialysis treatments and requested transportation assistance from the Health and Medical Area Command.

Puget Sound Blood Center experienced continual problems with maintaining access to their facility.

## **Human Services**

### **1. Food Banks**

Due to road conditions local food banks had to either shut down or reduce service due to staff inability to get to work and the difficulty delivery trucks had picking up and delivering food.

### **2. Vulnerable Populations**

Many individuals depend on public transportation for accessing food and to obtain prescription refills. Many of the transportation services these individuals depend upon, taxis, Access, bus were either not running or were at a significantly reduced level of operation. Additionally, throughout the City most sidewalks were not shoveled clear which further reduced options for these individuals.

## **Transportation**

### **1. Metro**

On the 18th of December Metro Transit attempted to provide full service during the morning commute. As the snow and ice accumulated the condition of the roadways deteriorated with at least 200 buses getting stuck or delayed on their routes. Half of Metro's fleet is comprised of articulated buses and trolleys that do not perform well in these conditions.

It should be noted that this impact was countywide covering 39 different jurisdictions which further complicated Metro's problems.

Bus routes and plowing routes were not well coordinated. Some portions of bus routes are in areas that are not plowed. This impacted the electric trolleys particularly hard because they are dependent on a route determined by overhead wires.

With so many buses out of service and roads in poor condition Metro was forced to modify its routes to provide service at less than 50% of normal for which it did not have an existing contingency plan. Such planning required effective communication with the buses in the system to determine current conditions and available resources. The Metro radio system has only four channels available which hindered Metro leadership in gaining situational awareness. Metro had already started the process to upgrade their communication system but it is not scheduled to be in place until 2010.

The result was more passengers than available buses; no tracking of where buses were at any given moment; no coordination of snow plowing with improvised routes; all at a time when more customers were attempting to ride the bus. Many passengers waited in cold and wet conditions for long periods of time for buses that never came. It should also be noted that Metro drivers and

mechanics and other support staff consistently went above and beyond in their efforts to deliver and maintain service during the storm.

## **2. Greyhound Bus**

Greyhound was unable to sustain service due to the conditions of the roads and freeways throughout the region. Approximately 40 passengers were stranded at the Greyhound bus station in downtown Seattle. This created a need for sheltering these passengers. With the assistance of the Seattle Police Department, shelter was provided. Later, when the floods closed Interstate 5, Greyhound again requested shelter for its stranded passengers. Seattle Emergency Operations Center and the King County Emergency Coordination Center arranged for the Greyhound passengers to use the regional shelter operated by the American Red Cross in Renton which had been established for flood victims.

## **3. Seattle Tacoma International Airport**

The airport experienced numerous cancellations of flights that stranded thousands of passengers over several days. While local passengers could return home others sought shelter in hotels and others elected to stay at the airport. The airport emergency operations center consulted with other centers around the region on how to best shelter their passengers. The airport was able to continue sheltering its passengers on site.

## **4. Bus Accident**

On Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, two chartered buses carrying a total of approximately 75 young adults lost control and slid downhill on Thomas Street before crashing through a guardrail at the bottom. The front sections of the two buses were suspended over Interstate 5. Had the buses plunged to the freeway below there could have been many injuries or fatalities. According to initial reports, the bus drivers were attempting to find their way around other streets that were closed due to the icy conditions when they turned on to Thomas Street and immediately lost control.

## **5. Roads**

All roads in the City were impacted. Seattle Department of Transportation was unable to clear primary and secondary snow routes of accumulated ice and snow (down to bare pavement) for several days. This severely impacted Metro's ability to maintain service as well as other public or private vehicle movement throughout the City.

In addition, as specified in the Winter Storm Response Plan, Seattle Department of Transportation does not plow side streets or residential streets. Many drivers had difficulty accessing the primary or secondary snow routes from their neighborhoods due to the depth of snow and ice.

Unique to this storm was the duration of the closures; many storms in this region are of short duration or are followed by warming temperatures or rain that contributes to rapid melting. That was not the case in this storm.

## **Utilities**

Seattle Public Utilities was hard pressed to maintain the schedule for collecting solid waste. The poor condition of the roads hindered access to neighborhoods by crews. All collection days were missed at least once and about 42% of the total City service area was missed two weeks in a row. Seattle Public Utilities was only partially successful in notifying customers when their solid waste would be picked up. In some areas only a portion of the customers had their waste picked up which made it difficult to determine who still needed service.

## **RESPONSE SUMMARY**

The Seattle Department of Transportation Winter Storm Response Plan is used to coordinate the City response in a winter storm. Seattle Department of Transportation is the lead department for implementing the plan with the support from other City departments and the City Emergency Operations Center.

National Weather Service (NWS) notified all response agencies of the impending storm on December 11<sup>th</sup>. NWS provides an online briefing for responders throughout the western Washington area. During the month of December the NWS provided numerous briefings on the storm. The initial briefing called for falling temperatures, high winds and snow.

The City Emergency Operations Center hosted a planning meeting for all departments expected to be involved in the response. The weather forecast was reviewed, each department outlined its preparations for the storm and communication procedures were updated.

Seattle Department of Transportation implemented its Winter Storm Response Plan and transitioned to 24 hour plowing operations with all crews working 12 hour shifts. The plan focuses plowing and sanding efforts on 1,531 lane miles of primary and secondary arterials. This is only a fraction of the total lane miles in the City. The number of lane miles that theoretically can be maintained during a storm is a function of the number of plows and sanders and crews and evolving weather patterns.

Residential and side streets are not plowed or sanded due to the limitation of existing plowing and sanding resources. Also, many streets are too hilly or narrow to be plowed.

Seattle Department of Transportation generally plows to the center of the street to avoid blocking driveways and vehicles parked on the street. This created an additional limitation to drivers attempting to make left turns. Plow drivers have the discretion to plow to the side of the street when advisable.



Seattle Department of Transportation and the Seattle Police Department close streets as needed. Generally, these are hilly portions of arterial streets. At the start of the winter season the “Street Closed” signs are placed in known problem areas. During storms transportation and police personnel close these streets for the safety of the public. In a severe, protracted, widespread storm there may not be enough “Street Closed” signs for the number of streets that might need it.

Seattle Public Utilities activated its Incident Management Team and closely monitored the weather and the water system. Seattle Public Utilities focused on preparing for three contingencies; rupture of water pipes (public water mains or in private homes), urban flooding and solid waste collection. Crews were put on alert to ensure that if those contingencies came to pass the response would be rapid.

Urban flooding did not occur, there were no significant water main breaks and Seattle Public Utilities staff was able to handle calls for service. The primary disruption to service for Seattle Public Utilities was the inability to maintain solid waste collection services due to the road conditions.

Emergency Support Function-6 (Human Services, Mass Care and Shelter) activated its cold weather plan which consisted of opening overnight cold weather shelters, keeping daytime warming areas open (community centers and libraries) and cold weather patrols by Seattle Police Department teams who conduct outreach for the homeless each night checking for hypothermia and offering transportation to the shelters.

Seattle City Light prepared for power outages due to high winds that were predicted in the initial forecast. While the winds did not materialize, City Light maintained increased readiness by monitoring the weather and keeping staff on call. Some outages did occur (largest outage affected 26,489 customers) but they were limited in number and were quickly resolved.

The Joint Information Center, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities and Public Health all issued numerous public messages before and during the storm.

Fleets and Facilities transitioned its Fleet Services Department to 24 hour operations, with staff working 12 hour shifts to provide rapid repair and maintenance of responder vehicles with priority provided to plow and sanding vehicles.

The Seattle Fire Department implemented its Cold Weather Procedures to maintain its response capability. Additional EMS vehicles were added. Response times did not degrade significantly; an additional minute was added to the average response time on only one day during the storm.

The Police Department organized its response through a department wide operational plan. This included chaining a percentage of their patrol vehicles ahead of the storm to

ensure service could be maintained when the storm hit. All calls for service were answered however some delays were encountered due to the condition of the roads.

The Emergency Executive Board was convened to review the response to the storm, review the proclamations by the governor and county executive, determine whether there was a need for any emergency executive orders, and to coordinate the response.

The City Emergency Operations Center activated to support and coordinate response operations and recovery in the City. Starting December 11<sup>th</sup> the EOC maintained a higher state of readiness throughout the storm period using a combination of its assigned Staff Duty Officers (SDO) and/or selected representatives from key departments. Some missions addressed by the City Emergency Operations Center:

- Coordinating assistance for stranded commuters and the homeless
- Arranging for transportation of dialysis patients and critical health care workers
- Coordinating solutions for potential shortages of tire chains and deicer for response vehicles
- Maintaining service at maintenance shops
- Coordinating public information
- Conducting conference calls to address specific issues or coordinate operations
- Arranging for priority plowing at critical facilities
- Providing regular situational updates and weather reports to all departments and other stakeholders
- Arranging transportation for Aging and Disability Services to maintain service
- Coordinating response and recovery operations with King County ECC and State EOC
- Developing and initiating the recovery plan

## **WHAT WORKED**

1. The concerns regarding the time needed to clear the streets of extraordinary volumes of snow and ice should not prevent acknowledging the dedication of the Seattle Department of Transportation crews who worked long hours every day, many over the holidays, for more than 14 consecutive days.
2. National Weather Service provided daily detailed forecasts essential to conducting response planning and operations. The National Weather Service was also available 24 hours a day to answer any weather related questions.
3. Essential public services such as fire, law enforcement and electrical power, were maintained without significant interruption or delay despite the difficult road conditions and low temperatures.
4. Fleet Services providing vehicle maintenance and repair 24 hours per day ensured essential services were maintained during the storm. It is important to note that no Department of Transportation vehicle was unavailable during the storm due to maintenance problems.
5. Auxiliary Communication Service personnel, a volunteer organization associated with the City Emergency Operations Center, volunteered to transport dialysis patients and medical staff. A total of 24 transports were made during the storm.

6. Fleets and Facilities rapidly addressed a growing shortage of tire chains and deicer ensuring response vehicles could continue their missions.
7. The Seattle Police Department's outreach to homeless during cold weather, in conjunction with ESF-6, provides a valuable service that prevents death or injury in cold weather due to hypothermia. Also, the police addressed the shelter issue that had arisen with Greyhound.
8. Metro Transit provided heavy duty tow trucks to assist fire trucks that had become stuck in the snow. This ensured the fire department could maintain services.
9. The City's Emergency Operations Center worked with Public Health Seattle King County through their Health and Medical Area Command to support the needs of the medical community.
10. The City had re-directed a public information campaign grant to focus this year on winter storm preparedness. Called, "Take Winter by Storm," winter preparedness material was made available through local media beginning in October. Though impossible to quantify, certainly more community members were better prepared for this storm as a result.
11. Post storm the City provided an opportunity for feedback from citizens regarding the snow response;
  - A City Council public comment hearing
  - Three community meetings hosted by the Mayor, which attracted a total of fifty five citizens, were held in three different locations attended by the department heads or their designee from each department that had a response role during the storm
  - Hosted a website for online comments

## **CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN**

Each department with a significant role in the response submitted a Corrective Action Plan. One goal of this report was to as rapidly as possible identify and act on improvements. Some overlap between individual department's efforts is inevitable due to the pace of this process. The Strategic Workgroup will ensure the implementation of the Corrective Action Plan is coordinated, efficient and meets deadlines.

Many of the proposed corrective actions such as research, training, and writing contracts require time to fully implement. Some projects may not be complete until September of this year. However, should another storm strike before all corrective actions are in place, the City is committed to a strategy of implementing as many corrective actions as possible, even on a partial basis. For example, emergency executive authority can be invoked to speed the hiring of plowing contractors on a short term basis.

Until the Corrective Action Plan is completed it will be referenced during the planning and response phases of any winter storm emergency to make use of as many lessons learned as possible.

## Seattle Office of Emergency Management

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Many departments use privately owned four wheel drive vehicles for transporting employees to and from work.	Develop policy to guide departments in how to use this resource which addresses liability and compensation.  Due: June 2009	Department of Executive Administration  Risk Management  Legal Department  Strategic Workgroup
The process for keeping City employees updated during a disaster should be reviewed to ensure it provides the information needed in an efficient manner.	Allow City Emergency Operations Center Director to authorize citywide email announcements and provide permission for all Emergency Management Duty Officers to transmit these messages over GroupWise.  Due: As soon as possible	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Customer Service Bureau
Health, Hospitals and Emergency Management have varying expectations as to how to organize the transport of healthcare employees and patients.	Develop plan for organizing the transport of employees and patients.  Due: June 2009	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Public Health Seattle King County
Department of Transportation received multiple requests for priority plowing to maintain access to critical facilities such as the jail, blood bank, precincts, public transit areas, and hospitals. The list of what should be given priority needs better definition to avoid unrealistic expectations and negative impacts to the implementation of the winter storm response plan.	For the remainder of the winter season maintain list of areas that needed priority plowing in the last storm within the Emergency Operations Center Planning Section and incorporate in the response strategy.  Due: Completed  Develop list of potential sites, procedures for requesting priority plow services, prioritization methods and a tracking system for ensuring those requests are fulfilled.  Due: September 2009	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Strategic Workgroup
Based on lessons learned update essential response information and information required by the Joint Information Center to support the response.	Seattle Office of Emergency Management will develop draft list of information essential for supporting the response and for public messaging. The Strategic Workgroup will review, edit and approve this list. Approved list will be incorporated into response plans.  Due: February 2009	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Strategic Workgroup

Identify and document all changes to the Winter Storm Response Plan based on After Action Report and Corrective Action	Update City Plan and Winter Storm Response Plan  Due: April 2009	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Seattle Department of Transportation  Strategic Workgroup
The EOC did not have sufficient information to maintain situational awareness in a severe snow storm.	Increase the number of information sources . Also, amend EOC standard operating procedure to include discussing human impacts with Customer Service Bureau and 2-1-1  Due: February 2009	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  Seattle Department of Transportation  Human Services

### Seattle Department of Transportation

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Improve snow related coordination with Metro Transit.	Memorandum of Agreement  Identify additional key plow routes. Metro to provide a snowplow and a liaison to Seattle Department of Transportation when necessary.  Due: March 2009	Traffic Management Division  Policy & Planning  Seattle Department of Transportation Emergency Preparedness
Revise road salt policy.	Road salt will be used when at least 4" of snow is predicted, when ice is predicted, when snow is predicted to last more than 3 days, or at the discretion of the director.  Due: Done	Director's Office Street Maintenance Division
Institutionalize the early mobilization of the Seattle Department of Transportation Incident Management Team	Revise Winter Storm Response Plan.  Due: Done	Seattle Department of Transportation Emergency Preparedness
Develop Winter Weather Response Plans for extreme weather conditions and sustained operations.	Revise Seattle Department of Transportation Winter Storm Plan.  Due: April 2009	Street Maintenance Division  Traffic Management Division  Seattle Department of Transportation Emergency Preparedness
Acquire emergency snow and ice	Identify 13 contractors	Street Maintenance

clearing assistance from private contractors	Due: Done	Division
Upgrade plow fleet to 29 vehicles	Upgrade two new vehicles (already on order prior to storm) to plows.  Due: Done	Street Maintenance
Increase Public Information Officer (PIO) capacity during prolonged events.	Augment communications staff with existing resources. Develop a plan to address staffing needs for extended periods of 24-hour operations  Due: July 2009	Communications Office Director's Office
Improve situational awareness; Utilize Traffic Management Center (TMC) resources.	Provide for monitoring of traffic cameras at the Charles Street Operations Center. Increase TMC staffing during weather events and deploy inspectors to the field to gauge road conditions.  Due: September 2009	Traffic Management Division  Street Use Division Street Maintenance Division
Reduce crew fatigue during prolonged events.	After four days of 12 hour shifts, assign crews to 8 hour shifts while maintaining 24-hour operations. Train additional personnel to operate snowplow equipment.  Due: Done	Street Maintenance Division
Increase public awareness about the need to clear snow from public, business and government owned sidewalks.	Coordinate messaging with the Office of Emergency Management. Incorporate into communications materials.  Due: September 2009	Communications Office  Seattle Department of Transportation Emergency Preparedness  Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Utilize technology to improve the efficiency of snowplow operations.	Study the cost and feasibility of a GPS tracking system for the winter storm fleet. Utilize this information to adjust resources in real time  Due: March 2009	Street Maintenance Division
Pursue an agreement with Washington State Department of Transportation for emergency access to snow and ice clearing supplies when necessary.	Memorandum of Agreement  Due: July 2009	Street Maintenance Division

## Fleets and Facilities Department

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Improve city departments' access to 4x4 vehicles to better support their mission during winter storm events.	<p>Identify 4x4 vehicles currently in the City fleet available for loan to other departments in an emergency.</p> <p>Due: March 2009</p> <p>Explore vehicle options with departments following existing Fleet policies that would meet departments' operational objectives during winter storms.</p> <p>Due: April 2009</p>	<p>Fleet Services</p> <p>Strategic Workgroup</p>
Clarify existing department policy/procedure for lodging critical staff.	<p>Research and develop a departmental policy for identifying essential staff, conditions required for providing lodging, etc.</p> <p>Due: June 2009</p>	<p>Human Resources</p> <p>Fleets Services and Facility Ops</p>
Improve communication with departmental staff and EOC regarding fuel supply status on fueling sites and emergency generators.	<p>Develop Fuel Status Report for fueling sites that can be uploaded onto internet site.</p> <p>Due: March 2009</p>	Fleet Services and Facility Ops
Address cold weather impacts on biodiesel and Seattle Public Utilities generator fueling needs.	<p>Evaluate timing of introduction of seasonal additives to biodiesel fueling stations.</p> <p>Due: March 2009</p> <p>Work with Seattle Public Utilities to revise, as necessary, protocols for maintenance of pony tanks and refueling generator tanks.</p> <p>Due: June 2009</p>	<p>Fleet Services</p> <p>Seattle Public Utilities</p>
Ensure adequate supply of parts for sanders and snow plows in periods of extended use of equipment.	<p>Reassess parts inventory and restock critical parts for the remainder of this winter.</p> <p>Due: March 2009</p> <p>Develop SOP/checklist for assessment of parts inventory prior to each winter season.</p> <p>Due: March 2009</p>	Fleet Services

Develop alternatives for chain up of police department vehicles, in the event vendor unable to perform effectively.	Develop internal fleet alternatives to be incorporated into SOP/Checklist. Due: March 2009	Fleets Division  Seattle Police Department
Improve knowledge and skills of vehicle operators for driving and operating vehicles in snow and ice.	Provide annual pre-winter reminder to departments regarding installation of chains and winter driving technique. Due: March 09  Provide additional training to other city department staff as needed for chain-up  Due: On-going	Fleet Services, other City depts.
Improve methods for facility assessments during emergency conditions.	Establish process to secure necessary professional and engineering expertise to supplement skilled trades, as needed, to assess condition of buildings.  Due: September 2009	Facility Operations
Evaluate appropriate amount of equipment and supplies to keep on hand for efficient removal of large quantity of snow around facilities.	Acquire better quality snow shovels for staff to use.  Due: September 2009  Identify alternative measures for snow removal at facilities if vendor is unable to perform contractual obligations.  Due: March 2009	Facility Operations
Improve methods for allocating and securing critical supplies, which may become difficult to obtain locally during a snowstorm.	Develop plan/checklist to inventory and secure relevant supplies each fall.  Due: September 09  Develop plan to review facilities and pre-position critical supplies each fall.  Due: September 2009	Fleet Services and Facility Operations, other departments
Clarify policy/procedures for activating emergency shelter caches.	Develop threshold for activating emergency shelter caches. Due: March 2009  Organize tabletop exercise to test the activation of caches.  Due: September 2009	Fleets and Facilities,  Department of Parks and Recreation  Humans Services Department



## Human Services Department

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
The Human Services Department provides in-home case management services for thousands of vulnerable clients; however, by the third day of the snow and ice some case management workers were unable to access clients. A solution was offered by Fleets and Facilities finding two 4x4 vehicles to loan to case workers until the roadways were again passable with ordinary vehicles.	Secure chained or all wheel drive vehicles for use by key case management workers to reach critical clients through an agreement with Fleets and Facilities Department or outside resource.  Due: August 2009	Human Services Department ADS Case Management Manager  Fleets and Facilities Department  Strategic Workgroup
People who became homebound by the weather conditions and were not receiving case management services were not able to procure food and medicines as the snow event continued to limit the mobility of independent but more vulnerable populations.	Work with Public Health, ADS, 2-1-1 and other partners to develop a plan of response so that people who become homebound in a disaster are able to have critical basic needs met. Continue to develop and provide public education to raise awareness of the issue and increase personal and community preparedness.  Due Date: On-going  Develop a proposal for a volunteer coordinator to launch and manage a volunteer Citizen Corps Council.  Due Date: August 2009	Human Services Emergency Management Planner and ESF-6 Coordinator
Had the EOC been activated for a longer period of time, HSD would have needed more trained backup staff in their emergency response team.	Train all Human Services Department staff in what their role is in an emergency and build the depth of the Human Services Department Emergency Response Team.  Due Date: December 2009	Human Services Emergency Management Planner and ESF-6 Coordinator
The City Hall and Seattle Center severe weather shelter sites had to close at 5:00 a.m. each morning, due to provider operating requirements. The early closure results in people being moved out into the cold before alternative facilities are open.	Investigate whether arrangements can be made to open other facilities in the early morning.  Due Date: August 2009	Human Services HIBGA Division Director
The snow storm and later floods left	Work with Greyhound and Amtrak to	Human Services DVSAP

many stranded travelers in Seattle. Greyhound did not have a plan to care for travelers that were stranded for an extended period.	review their plans to assist stranded travelers.  Due Date: August 2009	Division Director  Human Services Emergency Management Planner and ESF-6 Coordinator
The Frye shelter for women exceeded normal capacity, particularly when Tanya's Room, a regular women's shelter, could not open due to staff being unable to get to the shelter. This resulted in 25 women's beds not being available. While everyone seeking shelter received it, the increased need put additional pressure on the Frye severe weather shelter.	Investigate whether the capacity for severe weather shelters needs to be expanded, particularly for women, and continue to work with shelter agencies on their ability to remain open.  Due Date: August 2009	Human Services HIBGA Division Director

### Joint Information Center

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
The Joint Information Center shall explore emerging online communications technologies to ensure City communications are consistent with customer media consumption patterns.	Establish a policy and procedure for communicating with customers through new online technologies.  Due: June 2009	Mayor's Communications Director
The Joint Information Center shall establish appropriate vendor relationships to ensure American Sign Language interpretation is available for press conferences held during activations.	Establish vendor relationships to provide American Sign Language interpretation.  Due: February 2009	Mayor's Communications Director
Many citizens found it difficult to determine what City offices/services were open or available and their hours of operation; courts, neighborhood service centers, libraries etc.	Include in effort to deliver information through one location on the City web.  Due: July 2009	Mayor's Communications Director  ESF-15 Coordinator  SDOT Communications Officer
The Joint Information Center was activated only during times of most need with departments covering public messaging when it was not activated. This made coordination difficult.	City strategy will now favor Joint Information Center activation to ensure coordinated and effective response messaging. Not activating the Joint Information Center will be considered an exception to that strategy. The Emergency Operations Center Director will issue coordinating instructions for public messaging to all departments in those instances where the Joint	Seattle Office of Emergency Management  ESF-15 Coordinator

	Information Center is not activated  Due: Completed	
With plowing the main tactic for resolving the challenge posed by the snow, the City should better describe which streets have been plowed and when. Many citizens complained their street had not been plowed when in fact it had been several times.	Participate in the Strategic Workgroup process to define essential information required by the Joint Information Center.  Due: February 2009	Mayor's Communications Director  ESF-15 Coordinator  SDOT Communications Officer
The Joint Information Center shall establish a "one stop" information page/portal at <a href="http://www.seattle.gov">www.seattle.gov</a> that aggregates relevant incident specific information across departments.	Work with the citywide web team to identify appropriate content and create page/portal.  Due: July 2009	Mayor's Communications Director  ESF-15 Coordinator

### Seattle Parks and Recreation

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Had the EOC been activated for a longer period of time, Parks would have needed more trained EOC responders.	Identify and train additional Parks employees as EOC responders and increase the capacity of the Parks EOC Responder Team.  Due: December 2009	Parks Emergency Management Director
Training: prior to winter season, conduct annual winter weather response exercises with staff to communicate clear expectations and clarify severe weather staffing assignments and responsibilities. Provide information to staff on METRO bus snow routing response and contact info.	Assign Division Managers and Parks EMC to conduct annual winter storm response and staffing plan preparedness training.  Due: October 2009	Parks Emergency Management Director

### Seattle City Light

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Slightly increase the number of four wheel drive vehicles available within the Department for passenger travel.	Seattle City Light will replace three of these vehicles with four-wheel-drive vehicles during our normal vehicle replacement cycle for 2009.  Due: March 2009	Security and Emergency Management Director  Fleets and Facilities Department  Strategic Workgroup
Seattle City Light and Seattle	Seattle City Light, Department of	Customer Care Director

Public Utilities continue to receive comments about their jointly operated Call Center indicating that some calls have been dropped or routed incorrectly.	Information Technology and Seattle Public Utilities are investigating the complaints about the Outage Hotline to determine the problem and select a corrective action.  Due: February 2009	Seattle Public Utilities Call Center Manager
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### Seattle Public Utilities

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Solid Waste. Communication between SPU and the solid waste collection contractors was, on occasion, not timely and accurate enough to ensure that field conditions were clearly conveyed to Seattle Public Utilities management staff for assessment and decision support.	Develop and implement a procedure for collecting, verifying, and reporting operational condition information to managers; include a process for explicitly sharing information between Seattle Public Utilities and the solid waste contractors regarding: 1) Seattle Public Utilities objectives and expectations; and 2) contractor capabilities, safety concerns, and performance.  Due: March 2009	Solid Waste Director  Collection, Processing & Disposal Manager
Solid Waste. There were some inconsistencies in information between the Seattle Public Utilities Solid Waste web page, the Call Center, and ORC regarding pickups.	Route all information through a single Seattle Public Utilities process for vetting by the critical stakeholders, Incident Commander and the Public Information function prior to making it available to the various Seattle Public Utilities customer-contact outlets.  Due: March 2009	Solid Waste Director  Communications  Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator
Solid Waste. Messaging to the general public regarding adjusted solid waste pickup schedules was, at times, unclear, inconsistent, or overly-optimistic.	Route all public information through a single Seattle Public Utilities process for vetting by the Incident Commander and the Public Information function prior to releasing to the public.  Due: March 2009	Solid Waste Director  Communications  Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator
Solid Waste. Current methods for communicating to the general public did not allow for timely and focused dissemination of information regarding changes in pickups routes/schedules in the face of changing weather, street conditions, and contractor capabilities.	Investigate Seattle Public Utilities capability for accessing alternative, real-time methods for disseminating information to the public, including: out-dialer, community blogs, web sites, media feeds, etc. Develop and implement a procedure to make maximum use of real-time public communication channels.	Solid Waste Director  Communications  Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator

	Due: June 2009	
Drainage and Wastewater. Lack of flexibility in activating the Urban Flooding Plan.	Update Urban Flooding Plan to reflect current technological improvements in work scheduling and tracking.  Review and revise criteria (as necessary) for plan activation.  Due: March 2009	Drainage & Wastewater  Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator
Drinking Water. Lack of flexibility in activating the Winter Freeze Plan.	Update Winter Freeze Plan to reflect current technological improvements in work scheduling and tracking.  Review and revise criteria (as necessary) for plan activation  Due: March 2009	Water Operations.  Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator
Seattle Public Utilities. Identification of priority facilities for plowing/snow clearing.	Develop list of Seattle Public Utilities facilities that should be priority for plowing or snow clearing for access.  Due: June 2009	Public Utilities Emergency Management Coordinator  Strategic Workgroup

### Seattle Fire Department

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Many Administrative Staff personnel could not make it in to work or had difficulty because of a lack of 4-wheel drive vehicles.	Secure 4-wheel drive vehicles for use by critical Administrative positions through an agreement with Fleets and Facilities.  Due: February 2009	Fleets and Facilities Fleet Manager  Strategic Workgroup
Immediately accessible winter supplies.	Establish a greater minimum inventory of winter supplies (chains, deicer, ice melt.  Due: July 2009	Support Services Lieutenant
Reduce time and labor required for putting together tire chain caches.	Palletize and shrink wrap tire chains for quick access and transportation to Battalion Headquarters. Support Services to explore with Fleets and Facilities Fire Garage.  Due: April 2009	Support Services Captain and Fleet Manager
Ability to safely distribute	Provide the type of support vehicles	Chief of Staff/Resource

equipment and supplies on a 24-hour basis to fire stations and emergency scenes.	necessary to respond to all types of natural and manmade transportation challenges.  Due: April 2009	Management
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### Seattle Police Department

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
Plowing: Precincts encountered minor problems with snow removal specifically ensuring that when parking lots are plowed by contractors that snow is moved away from as opposed to towards the parked patrol vehicles.	Work with Fleets and Facilities to better define expectations for contractor performance  Due: September 2009	Homeland Security Bureau  Fleets and Facilities Department
Officers encountered problems getting prisoners into King County Jail due to the road conditions around the jail entrance. Officers had to walk prisoners into the jail. The entrance is located on a steep hill and during a significant snow event plows may not be able to maintain access.	Seattle Police Department will meet with the King County Jail staff to develop a plan for access during snow events.  Due: March 2009	Homeland Security Bureau  Seattle Department of Transportation
Signage: Precincts and Traffic Section both ended up delivering signage to neighborhoods because Seattle Department of Transportation was overwhelmed with other demands.	Review policy for who is responsible for providing signs to neighborhoods and store adequate signage at the precinct and Traffic Unit.  Due: September 2009	Homeland Security Bureau  Seattle Department of Transportation
Vehicle Needs: Officers encountered problems accessing certain parts of the City in patrol vehicles that did not have All Wheel or 4-Wheel Drive.	Identify vehicles with all-wheel or 4-wheel drive from City Fleet that can be loaned to Precinct for use during snowstorms. Develop policy for deployment of vehicles in the event of major snowstorms.  Due: September 2009	Homeland Security Bureau  Fleets and Facilities Fleets Manager  Strategic Workgroup
Tracking street closures	SPOC has developed an Excel spreadsheet that will enable 911 radio dispatchers to track street closures and	Homeland Security Bureau

	<p>then report those to SPOC. This process has been completed and is now ready to be implemented under circumstances requiring it. The list of routine street closures will be reviewed following every event.</p> <p>Due: Completed</p>	Strategic Workgroup
Preparation before the storm	<p>Ensure that the Precincts have a sufficient supply of rock salt and other snow/ice removal aids prior to snow.</p> <p>Ensure that the Precincts' Winter Storm Response Plan are current and that all Precincts have a copy of the City's Winter Storm Response Plan.</p> <p>Due: February 2009</p>	Homeland Security Bureau

#### Public Health Seattle and King County

Area for Improvement	Due Date and Solution	Responsibility
The Department lacked sufficient plans to enable essential staff to get to and from work and to field operation sites.	<p>Develop emergency transportation plans to enable essential staff and volunteers to get to and from work and field operation sites.</p> <p>Due: September 2009</p>	Public Health Preparedness/CPRE
Some essential staff were unable to get home from the downtown Seattle area after their shifts and had to remain overnight at the Chinook Building to enable sufficient staffing for Area Command and critical department functions.	<p>Develop housing plans to temporarily lodge critical department staff in Seattle downtown core.</p> <p>Due: September 2009</p>	Public Health Preparedness/CPRE
Healthcare Workers and patients had difficulty getting to and from work/points of care.	<p>Work with local emergency management, healthcare organizations and the private sector to develop critical personnel/patient transport strategy and identify necessary resources.</p> <p>Due: June 2009</p>	<p>Public Health Preparedness, King County Healthcare Coalition,</p> <p>Seattle Office of Emergency Management</p>

Situation status updates from healthcare organizations varied in frequency and content.	Develop standardized healthcare organization status reporting template and institute routine reporting timeframes.  Due: September 2009	Public Health Preparedness and King County Healthcare Coalition
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#### **Customer Service Bureau**

<b>Area for Improvement</b>	<b>Due date and solution</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
CSB's emergency response plan calls for CSB to provide a regular call summary to the EOC. CSB staff did not provide a summary during the snow storm.	Review emergency response plan with staff at monthly staff meeting.  Due: Completed	Customer Service Bureau



## **SUMMARY**

The December 2008 Winter storm presented significant challenges to the City of Seattle and the region. The central strategy in any Winter Storm Response plan involves clearing the roads of snow and ice. How long that takes depends on the following factors:

- The number of plows and sanding trucks
- The use of chemicals, including salt
- Sufficient staff to operate snow removal equipment 24 hours per day
- A plan that identifies which streets will be plowed and those that won't
- The weather

In the December storm the region experienced a rare snow event that delivered a significant amount of snow accompanied with an extended period of below freezing temperatures which ensured the snow and ice were not going to melt quickly.

In the battle to clear the streets the Seattle Department of Transportation attacked the snow with all of the resources it had under its control. At no point in this analysis has information been revealed that Seattle Department of Transportation failed to put all of its vehicles on the road. It was also able to gather sufficient staff to operate those vehicles continuously for 14 days. Seattle Department of Transportation followed its plan which calls for plowing and sanding efforts at identified primary and secondary arterials only.

The Winter Storm Response plan and equipment are capable of handling most Seattle winter storms; typically not a lot of snow, followed by increasing temperatures and rain which results in short duration events. The severity of this series of storms simply exceeded the ability of the Seattle Department of Transportation plan and resources to address it.

Complaints regarding the performance of the Seattle Department of Transportation during the storm consist of three issues:

- Use of Salt
- Types of plow blades
- The result of all snow and ice removal techniques should have created roads conditions passable to vehicles equipped for winter driving (4x4's, snow tires, chains, and responsible driving)

Salt was abandoned as a de-icer in the 1990's. Seattle Department of Transportation follows best practices regarding salt as outlined in the Regional Road Maintenance Program. It has already amended its policy of use salt in certain conditions, i.e. when 4 inches of snow are forecast, when ice is forecast, or when the duration of the snow or ice is predicted to last more than 3 days. The Seattle Department of Transportation Director also can authorize the use of salt at their own discretion on arterials, hills or hospital access.

The use of steel or carbide plow blades carry the significant risk of causing substantial damage especially to asphalt covered streets, which is on most streets. It should also be noted that many other cities in the region do not use steel or carbide plow blades for the very same reason. The rubber cutting edges deployed in the plow fleet are both effective in clearing snow and protecting asphalt road surfaces. But Seattle Department of Transportation does use steel blades where it makes sense to do so, i.e. on concrete structures. The future use of salt in combination with increased plowing capability should be more effective under extreme weather conditions.

The bottom line lesson is that regardless of the round-the-clock dedication of the full fleet of resources and regardless of the number of times roads were plowed over two weeks, many streets in the City and region remained impassable to vehicles other than 4x4's. This had cascading impacts. Seattle and neighboring cities could not cumulatively maintain passable routes for Metro buses and this too cascaded into problems for passengers who were trying to buy groceries, fill prescriptions, get to work and shop for the holidays, etc.

The primary strategy to address streets covered with ice and snow consisting of a combination of plowing, sanding, and the application of chemicals to counter ice has been revised to include the use of salt and the hiring of contractors. Also essential to the response is adequate preparation on the part of the public to mitigate the impacts.

This plan provides for a number of enhancements to the existing capability to clear the streets. Expanding the number of plows to 29, having agreements in place to hire contractors, a clear policy on salt application and close coordination with Metro Transit increases confidence in the ability of the City to, at minimum, keep primary routes open during a storm similar to the one experienced in December of 2008. It will permit the movement of vehicles, and especially buses, with greater efficiency provided those vehicles are prepared for winter driving.

Every winter storm is different. The solution is to adjust to the conditions sooner in anticipation of these conditions and apply strategies adaptable to the conditions. Seattle Department of Transportation has committed to doing exactly that in their operations. The salt use policy has already been amended, the use of private contractors has set a good example, and the purchase of equipment in the future that can be pressed into storm response service is being incorporated into department plans. The EOC will learn from this event to focus on the bigger picture and try to help solve the problems that cause cascading problems through its advanced planning function. The Mayor's Emergency Executive Board will be assembled earlier during events to assure city-wide executive support and coordination focused on these solutions.

The city-wide ESF-15 (External Affairs and Public Information) team will investigate methods to more effectively get real-time useful information into our customers hands

whether that's estimated date of solid waste collection, transportation detours or any other critical service.

The storm response crews and emergency workers throughout the City demonstrated remarkable dedication in their efforts to combat record-breaking conditions. Their dedication will be further demonstrated by making the improvements to our collective response identified in this report.