

## Snow in NYC – The Perennial Problem

BY EDITH PRENTISS



**T**his winter has been exceptionally cruel with back-to-back snowstorms. New York City has been long known for its lackadaisical attitude towards snow removal except from streets and highways.

For years selected neighborhoods in the outer boroughs remain snowbound while Manhattan's central business district is swept clean with snow carried away to be melted and the remaining water deposited into sewers.

Many people with mobility disabilities remain snowed in during inclement weather. Snow-laden plows turn corners dropping their load on shoveled crosswalks and pedestrian ramps.

Many shoveled paths to pedestrians ramps fail to meet the ramp. Instead they meet adjacent curbs leaving seniors and mobility equipment users unable to reach the sidewalk.

Accessible transportation is moot as snow plows leave ridges blocking bus stops and poor snow removal leave bus shelters unusable. Accessible taxis that load in the street require a clear area for ramps to open for wheelchair to enter and leave the vehicle.

Multiple articles about flooded crosswalks and news features barely touch upon the blight of seniors and people with disabilities trying to cross the perennial slush lagoons, although news anchors more frequently end with a question wondering how we're surviving.

In addition to spending hours reading the Department of Sanitation's (DSNY) 2020 Snow Action Plan (SAP) I've been watching YouTube's many snow removal videos. Montreal has some truly awesome equipment in a wide range of sizes. Their snow removal is said to cost millions of dollars. DSNY also has a video showcasing its equipment.

I suspect if you polled pedestrians, as well as people with disabilities they would prefer sidewalks be cleared by appropriate sized snow removal equipment on the same time table as it is plowed from streets.

The Parks Department has narrower equipment to clear their paths and sidewalks. Many private buildings have snow removal equipment. Why can't the Sanitation Department purchase appropriate equipment to clear sidewalks and pedestrian ramps?

Depending on adjacent buildings to clean and maintain sidewalks and pedestrian ramps is not equitable especially when the fine for failing to clean and maintain a four feet (48 inch) path begins at \$10 and is capped at \$350.

The major focus of DSNY's SAP is streets and highways. Bus stops, pedestrian ramps, sidewalks and bike lanes barely rate a mention. In fact, property owners and managers are instructed "to TRY" to clear a sidewalk path. MOPD's joint snow document is the only clear posting of the four foot (48 inch) clear path requirement.

Every winter the disability community rails as sidewalk, pedestrian ramps, bus stops and crosswalks remain mired in snow and slush. Isn't it time that New York City considers the transportation needs of people with disabilities and seniors as important as motor vehicles?

Isn't it time for a serious Snow Taskforce with key City Agencies, the City Council, private industry and the disability community. Rather than enforcement by the Department of Sanitation, we need a responsible independent body to evaluate snow removal and compliance with the four foot (48 inch) path requirement.

Why doesn't the Department of Transportation have plans to re-design streets, sidewalks and crosswalk so that corner lagoons do not form every storm? We hear about raised crosswalks – would they help? In preparation for inclement weather, are catch basins inspected and cleaned to minimize water creating lagoons?

At the same time, isn't it time for the fines to be reconsidered? As well, the amount of time before enforcement after a storm needs to be examined and shortened. Enforcement should not be dependent on a decision of the Sanitation Commissioner.

Yes, there are regulations and laws. Isn't it time to update and enforce them? Let's get serious about winter in New York City.