

Snow and Ice Control Communications Summary for 2021-22 Season

Objectives for Snow and Ice Control Communications

This snow season introduced an updated Snow and Ice Policy whereby communications focused on addressing the following challenges:

1. Setting expectations with the public about service levels. Ensuring people knew where to look for information and to establish an awareness of our baseline level of service.
2. Reintroducing the concept of the two-phase parking bans within the city and implementing these bans for the first time.
3. Creating positive sentiment with everyone who uses our mobility network.

Edmonton was also faced with a winter that brought additional challenges such as fluctuating freeze/thaw conditions and extreme cold, as well as an increased snowfall that led to the introduction of a new residential bare pavement trial. These factors meant that communications needed to be agile in its approach and increase education and awareness of Edmonton's winter road maintenance work.

Communications Approach and Implementation

To address the challenges of the 2021-22 snow season, communications focused on increasing awareness and understanding of Snow and Ice Control services, as well as sharing the responsibilities of effective snow removal with residents, such as moving their vehicles during a parking ban.

The communications approach was comprehensive, adapting to a dynamic season of fluctuating weather - from extreme cold to freezing rain and large accumulations of snowfall. Frequent communication touch points with the public were maintained through a variety of tactics including web updates, social media posts, advertising, media availabilities, PSAs and news releases. Keeping Council informed of operational work was also a high priority, with daily operational updates starting mid-season to help provide Councillors with the necessary information to answer constituent questions and concerns.

The following is a more detailed list of communications activities that were implemented to increase awareness and understanding:

Pre-season Preparations

In preparation for the snow and ice season, a comprehensive communications plan and strategy was developed in the fall of 2021. This included the development of collateral and preparation of materials for City Council, the media, and the public. As part of this, the Council Resource Guide and 2021/2022 Snow and Ice Control Frequently Asked Questions document were prepared, as well as updates to 311 scripts, public-facing maps and edmonton.ca/safetravels. During this time, presentations were made to

various stakeholders to inform them of the planned communications for the 2021-22 snow and ice season.

Winter Season Kickoff

A proactive media event was held (media availability, news release, onsite event) to launch the snow and ice season prior to the first snowfall. This event focused on key messages such as; the City is prepared for winter and how Edmontonians can plan for a citywide parking ban.

Winter Season

City Council: To equip Council for the winter season, the Council Resource Guide and 2021/2022 Snow and Ice Control Frequently Asked Questions document were shared. Starting January 2022, daily operational updates to City Council and other key stakeholders were distributed. These updates kept Council apprised of operational activities and provided information to help respond to constituents or questions.

News Media: To maintain open and transparent communications with the media, a proactive and responsive media relations strategy was implemented, including bi-weekly media availabilities during snow events, as well as regular news releases and PSAs. In January 2022, availabilities increased to provide more frequent touchpoints with media partners. There were two to three media events each week to address changing weather patterns and inform how operations responded to these issues.

Storytelling & Education: Regular social media posts were used to highlight the work that crews were doing and encourage safe travels. Social media was also used to communicate parking bans and to provide information on high interest topics in an effort to answer frequent questions and demonstrate the activities that crews were focused on.

Traditional Advertising: During the week of December 14, a direct mail postcard was distributed to households throughout the city explaining how Phase 1 and Phase 2 parking bans work and how residents can be prepared.

Digital Advertising: Enhanced advertising strategies were used to provide timely and targeted messaging to raise awareness and connect with Edmontonians. This included driving residents to sign up for email alerts, weather triggered ads and customized sentiment-based ads based on various snow and ice related comments. This also included advertising on digital billboards, elevator ads, weather app ads, Third Party Digital partners and social media.

Citywide parking ban notifications: When each parking ban was called, notifications were initiated to Council and internal stakeholders, and messages were shared via social media, digital signage at LRT and REC centres, a media availability, news release/PSA, subscriber email alerts and web updates.

Web: Throughout the snow and ice season, edmonton.ca/safetravels was updated as a key source of snow and ice information, including service levels, parking bans, the interactive map, as well as frequently asked questions.

Community Connections: Administration worked to connect with residents through community interactions and experiences, and this year focused on working with City Hall School to teach young citizens about how the City manages snow and ice, what tools and equipment crews use and how everyone has a role to play in maintaining the safety and accessibility of the mobility network. The objective was to connect their youthful curiosity and what they’re learning in school to the unique scale and complexity of the work the City does, while helping address misinformation by creating “well, actually” moments around the dinner table at home.

Results By the Numbers*

21	Media Events	450,000	Direct Mail Postcards
16	News Releases and PSAs	72	Social Media Posts (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram)
37	Operational Updates to Council	192,000	Facebook Post Engagements
3	Online Surveys (With 26,624 Respondents)	11M+	Digital Advertising Impressions
5	GBA+ Focus Groups	6,637	New Subscribers to Email Alerts (Out of 31,637 Total Subscribers, approx +20% increase)
33	City Hall School Virtual Classroom Presentations	137,000	Snow and Ice Webpage Views
650	City Hall School Attendees		

*As of March 11, 2022

2021/22 Results Summary

This season, the communications strategy set out to inform, educate and reach residents. An intentional strategy was built to achieve our goals, leveraging a variety of tactics as shared above. Implementation incorporated direct, two-way and interactive communication opportunities through tactics such as surveys, information handouts mailed to homes, media relations and engaging with resident concerns on social media. While the approach evolved given the unpredictable nature of the winter, the communications plan was successful in terms of reach. The strategy was able to meet people where they were, and in a variety of ways, to inform them about the City’s snow clearing efforts and emergent weather events. In fact, through digital advertising, social media and web visits, over 11.3 million digital impressions were received. This helps demonstrate that residents were engaged in this topic, that they were seeking out more information and were responding to advertising, messaging and promotion.

Information was also distributed to educate about the parking ban and how residents and the City work together as well as to engage with residents about their concerns. When a topic emerged as a concern, messaging was developed and shared to increase awareness, facilitate understanding and provide more enhanced information where possible. Positive community sentiment was also built with young Edmontonians over the course of the snow season through City Hall school activities, an objective set out at the beginning of the season.

Communications Research & Findings

Through the research and findings, communications was not identified as a significant concern from participants who shared their feedback. Rather, participants took these opportunities to share their concerns about operational aspects and how their day-to-day accessibility and commutes affect their livability in a Winter City. Top themes for concerns from an operational perspective included windrows, bare pavement, sidewalk conditions and overall accessibility.

However, there were still learnings and feedback shared where we could improve or build upon from a communications aspect. The most prominent item was that participants expressed a strong desire for more real time communications or tools that would provide notifications and allow residents to know more about crews in their areas and along their travels. People want to know where the equipment will be, in relation to them. Feedback from survey and focus group participants also included a desire for increased signage as well as insights on reducing the technical information around service levels and how much they found the direct mail piece beneficial. This feedback will be incorporated into next season's plan.

Research Objectives & Results

For the 2021/22 snow and ice season research was conducted to understand residents' perceptions of snow and ice control service levels, as well as communications needs. More specifically, to understand their information needs related to snow and ice control and then determine how communications could be enhanced and identify current and preferred information sources. Priority was also given to listening to citizens with mobility challenges and other marginalized communities.

The research shows that residents have a solid understanding of citywide parking bans, as well as the reasoning behind implementing these bans. Research has also shown that the communications approach positively impacted residents' awareness and actions related to snow and ice clearing. For example, early season communications ensured 74 per cent of residents were aware of what they needed to do during a phase 2 parking

ban; further communications after the first parking ban increased that to 86 per cent of residents.

Research also confirmed that residents rely on a variety of communication methods when collecting information from the City about snow and ice control. Residents primarily turn to traditional media (television, radio, newspaper), social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), online (Edmonton.ca), signage (digital, on streets, on transit), printed materials (flyers, pamphlets or brochures) or by calling 311. These findings confirmed our approach to communicating with residents, as a wide variety of mediums and channels were used throughout the season that obtained effective reach.

Insights

- **A mixed-mode communications strategy should be continued.** The research showed that the City performs well in terms of providing a wide range of communications methods to meet residents' information needs. Consistently in the research, residents acknowledged that a range of communication methods are necessary, and that a mixed mode was required given the varying communication tools used across the population. Residents endorse placing priority on street signage, traditional media, and the City's website, with social media also being key for some audiences.

"Usually, I learn from the local news, and if I need more information, I look it up on the City website. The search engine on the site is really good. I often need to refine my search parameters." - Focus Group Participant

"I don't have extra time to initiate the seeking of information, so I am more often prompted by things on social media, or on digital signs. Sometimes I'm prompted by those and then go to the website or 311 for more information." - Focus Group Participant

- **There is a need to develop real-time, localized information tools for snow and ice clearing.** With the ongoing introduction, acceptance and usage of real-time information tools in daily life, residents have clear expectations for information tools that are current, localized and responsive to their individual needs. Provision of a static, non-specific tool will simply not meet expectations going forward, particularly when information is action-oriented and rapidly-evolving. The City will explore how its current tools can become more dynamic and interactive, while adapting to meet the needs of both residents who actively seek information and those who expect information to come to them.

"It's as simple as this – I need to know where they are clearing, when they are clearing it and where there are traffic issues –in real time!" - Focus Group Participant

A detailed research summary was completed that provided information and insights on where respondents live and how they move, as well as their understanding of and

sentiments about the snow and ice control program, and willingness to respond to calls to action.

2022-23 Winter Season Plans & Improvements

Throughout the 2021-22 snow and ice season, agile communications strategies were implemented to keep City Council, the public and other stakeholders informed regarding snow and ice control. This year's research suggests this approach successfully increased awareness and understanding of key concepts and actions like the citywide parking ban. While a high level of awareness was achieved, there is always room for improvement. All research and learnings from the past year will be taken into account for the next winter season, when planning the communications strategy.

A mix of advertising, social media, digital tools and ongoing media engagement during snow events and throughout the snow season will continue to be implemented to build upon the awareness and understanding from the previous year. Focus group research suggests the direct mail postcard is among the most useful and accessible tactics for residents, so particular attention will be made to update and enhance this channel to ensure residents understand citywide parking bans, and their role in making it a success, and how effective snow removal requires a community effort. Research will also continue to be a regular part of the strategy so that we can adjust as required and continuously improve.

Improvements for 2022-23

Simplify language: Language will be reviewed and adapted to ensure that it is relatable to residents. This review will help ensure publicly used terms are more meaningful, understandable and accessible to all.

Expand key audiences: Research suggests that we need to bring more focus to unique groups with specialized needs. For the 2022-23 season, residents who speak English as a second language and people with disabilities will become part of the key audiences we communicate to. Early season research will be used to better understand these audiences and their needs.

Leverage non-traditional channels: Understanding that traditional channels may not reach everyone, a GBA+ perspective will be used to help improve information access and reach to residents. Looking beyond the traditional information campaign, additional communications methods and channels will be researched and identified.

Community activation: Community activities will be expanded to include new opportunities, such as promotional contests and attendance at community events. This will encourage positive and non-traditional interactions, making the work more relatable.

Develop digital tools: As highlighted in the research, residents want more real-time information related to snow and ice control on roadways. One of the most impactful tactics that we can improve upon for the upcoming season is to enhance the experience of notifications during snow events. The snow and ice control notification process will be improved for the 2022-23 season through the development and implementation of digital tool(s).

Every snow and ice season presents new challenges and the 2022-23 communications strategy will take learnings from past years while continuing to evolve to respond to the needs of City Council, stakeholders and the public. To achieve a successful snow and ice program and one that ensures safe mobility on our roads, sidewalks and pathways, a strong partnership based on education, trust and communication needs to be established between the City and everyone who lives, works and plays here. Through education and communication, trust in the work that the City does will build that effective partnership that will allow our Winter City to help ensure safe, cleared streets for all roadway users.