

3. Boston Region Pedestrian Transportation Plan, Snow and Ice Removal

The Boston Region Pedestrian Transportation Plan identifies actions local governments, advocacy organizations, citizen groups, the private sector, and individuals should take to encourage walking. Adopted and released in June 2010, the Pedestrian Plan addresses the importance of walking, describes existing pedestrian infrastructure in the Boston Region, and recommends policies and programs that will facilitate walking as a convenient, practical and safe mode of transportation. To view the Pedestrian Plan in its entirety visit <http://www.mapc.org/resources/ped-plan>

Snow and Ice Clearance

Prompt and effective snow clearance on sidewalks is critical to maintaining safe walking conditions. If walkways, crosswalks, islands, and curb ramps are icy or unshoveled, travel is both difficult and dangerous for pedestrians. Children, the elderly and people with disabilities are most affected. Although there are challenges with enforcement, it is critical that municipalities improve sidewalk and road snow and ice clearance and enforce their regulations to encourage walking and increase pedestrian safety. Depending upon jurisdiction, snow and ice removal may be the responsibility of state and municipal agencies or private abutters (e.g., homes, businesses, property owners or tenants).

Both MassDOT and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) are responsible for maintaining their respective roadways reasonably safe for public travel by keeping them sufficiently clear of ice and snow. Both state agencies carry out these responsibilities under a snow and ice removal partnership. MassDOT is responsible for providing curb-to-curb snow removal for specifically designated DCR Parkways in the Greater Boston Area. However, DCR is responsible for clearing sidewalks related to these parkways. DCR's Winter Storm Plan and Priority Map and MassDOT's snow removal responsibilities further delineate snow removal roles for both agencies.

In dense urban areas property and business owners are required to clear sidewalks (often including curb cuts and ramps) that abut their property. Usually, property and business owners have between three and twenty-four hours to clear sidewalks. Subsequently, communities may issue a warning or a ticket. Communities primarily clear sidewalks adjacent to municipally owned buildings or property. In some cases, communities clear the most heavily traveled sidewalks. To ensure pedestrian access and safety, it is critical that a community's snow removal program address both roadways and sidewalks.

The following is an inventory of snow clearing policies of select communities in the Boston Region. Densely developed mature cities as well as suburban and rural communities have been selected for comparative purposes.

Snow Removal Policy Toolkit



Newton's ordinance (Section 26-8) states that snow and ice must be removed from sidewalks in defined business districts within 24 hours. There is no fine indicated in the ordinance if snow removal does not take place.

Woburn's ordinance (Title 12, Section 6) requires snow removal from specifically designated sidewalks. The property owner has two hours to remove the snow (six hours if there is ice) after snowfall and is subject to a onetime \$50 fine. If an individual removes ice or snow from public and private property, and places the ice or snow without permission on public or private property they can be subject to a \$300 fine. In Westwood, if a person lays, throws, or places snow or ice on any paved town street or sidewalk that creates a hazardous condition or public safety concern, a minimum \$300 fine can be issued (Ordinance - Article 10, Section 3).

Bolton has a \$100 fine in its ordinance for persons who pile, push, or blow snow or ice onto a public way that is already plowed and sanded by the Town. The Towns of Concord and Essex will issue a \$50 fine for the same activity. The Towns of Lincoln and Carlisle can issue a \$10 fine if a vehicle is parked to prevent the plowing or removal of snow and ice.

Residential and commercial property owners in Boston are required to remove snow within three hours after a snowfall. Cleared paths must be a minimum of 42 inches wide. Removal should be conducted in a manner "that ensures the orderly flow and safety of pedestrian traffic upon such sidewalks." Depending on the severity of the violation, fines range between \$50 and \$250 per day.

Since the 1960s, Stoughton has been using sidewalk snowplows as part of their snow removal program. Priority snow removal locations, for both sidewalks and roadways in Stoughton include schools, the town center, the train station, hospitals, and areas where elderly residents are highly concentrated. Residents are not required to clear snow on sidewalks that abut their property. Canton and Sharon also use sidewalk snowplows as part of their snow removal programs.*

* Conversation with Larry Barret, Director of Public Works, Town of Stoughton, March 12, 2009.

Best Practices – Snow Removal Regulations

Boston

In 2007, the City of Boston adopted an ordinance (16-12.16 Snow, Slush, and Ice on Sidewalks) that outlines fine policies for the removal of snow and ice from sidewalks and abutting curb ramps. Depending on building size and length of time it takes to remove snow (greater than three or six hours) and if paths are not shoveled to a minimum of 42 inches wide, daily fines ranging from \$50 to \$150 can be incurred. If someone removes slush, snow, or ice from privately-owned real property and places it upon any sidewalk or street, a daily fine of \$250 will be imposed.

The City of Boston also has an extensive Snow Information and Advisory Program. Interested parties can register for e-mail or text alerts to be notified when snow emergencies are declared.

Cambridge

In Cambridge, property owners are responsible for keeping all sidewalks that border their property clear of snow and ice. The Cambridge Municipal Code requires property owners to remove snow from the sidewalk within 12 hours after snow stops falling in the daytime and before 1:00 P.M. when snow has fallen during the night. Ice must be cleared from sidewalks or treated with an ice-melting substance. In addition, paths must be at least three feet wide and ramps, corners and crosswalks must be cleared (Section 12.16.110, Sidewalk – Snow and Ice Removal).

After a snow storm, Cambridge deploys parking control officers on prioritized routes to ticket property owners who do not clear sidewalks. Failure to comply with the City’s sidewalk clearance ordinance is 50 dollars for each day of noncompliance. Cambridge also has an on-line form for residents to report icy or uncleared sidewalks as shown in the figure on the next page.

WalkBoston Recommendations

The advocacy group Walk Boston has developed seven basic recommendations to improve sidewalk snow and ice clearance for state agencies, communities, individual property owners/managers, and advocacy organizations. The seven recommendations are outlined in its 2007 report, “Keep it Clear- Recommendations for Sidewalk Snow and Ice Removal in Massachusetts.”

1. *Create a norm of snow and ice clearance through social awareness campaigns.*
2. *Identify a municipal point person for snow removal.*
3. *Set priorities for sidewalk snow clearance.*
4. *Improve monitoring and enforcement.*
5. *Design sidewalks for easier snow removal.*
6. *Train municipal and private snow plowing personnel.*
7. *Create sensible state policies through appropriate legislation.*

Monitoring and Enforcement

There are three primary ways in which the clearance of sidewalks can be monitored and enforced:

- Identify who monitors and enforces.
- Define penalties and how they will be collected.
- Implement social awareness campaigns.

(e.g., distributing notices to households that indicate rules and penalties).

It is important for regulations to clearly differentiate between residential and municipal responsibilities regarding snow removal from sidewalks. Regulations should include times by when sidewalks must be cleared before being subject to fines.



Screenshot of City of Cambridge's Online Snow Removal Reporting System

Problematic Areas

The most problematic areas are curb ramps and pedestrian-crossing islands. These locations are often subject to poor drainage, which can create dangerous ponds of ice or slush. There are no laws that require abutting property owners to clear these locations and communities often do not take responsibility.