



Levels of service for winter operations

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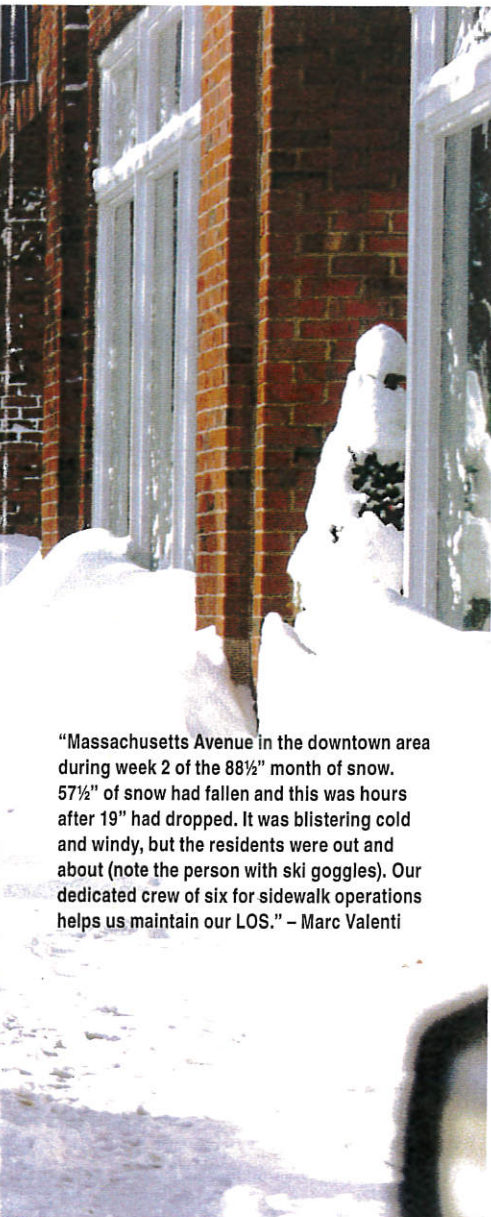
The public works industry is in the service business. When we as organizations reflect on how our organizations are performing, it comes down to the level of service (LOS) that we are providing to our customers. This applies to a community in Western Massachusetts that has a population of less than 600, major metropolis like New York City, or a state DOT. And, every level of service is different.

It's my opinion, but I think most people like a nice, warm summer instead of a cool, snowy winter unless you ski or plow snow, or both! Snow is more of a nuisance to the public which drives organizations to be on their "A" game when it comes to winter operations. When you introduce the "nuisance" factor to your typical LOS,

your customers are more sensitive to the winter ops.

Over the years, I have had numerous conversations with my colleagues across the country and I have heard everything from plowing residential streets at $\frac{3}{4}$ " of snow accumulation to no plowing unless there is 12" on the side streets and everything in between. These are the two extremes of the LOS spectrum, but they are out there.

It's always a great exercise to perform a self-assessment of an operation. In this case, a few questions that need to be answered are, who developed your LOS for snow operations? Elected officials? Public Safety? Is it documented somewhere? Is it published for the public to see? Do you have a Snow & Ice Policy? If so, it's probably in there, but is it cur-



"Massachusetts Avenue in the downtown area during week 2 of the 88½" month of snow. 57½" of snow had fallen and this was hours after 19" had dropped. It was blistering cold and windy, but the residents were out and about (note the person with ski goggles). Our dedicated crew of six for sidewalk operations helps us maintain our LOS." – Marc Valenti

Is your LOS published in a flyer, on the internet, etc.? Public education prior to the winter season helps the support staff who answer the daily calls about winter-related issues. The staff benefit the most from the public education component.

Are the expectations of your organization achievable when it comes to the

snow operations LOS? Before this question is answered, it's best to perform an internal audit of your resources which includes staff, equipment, contracted services and materials. Make sure that your LOS is attainable with your current staff. Does your staff understand the expected LOS? Make no assumptions about whether or not they know



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rent? Snow & Ice Policies are live working documents and should change as the technology and operations evolve. The APWA Winter Maintenance Subcommittee can provide you with an example if your organization doesn't have one. They *do* work and it helps provide a baseline for performance of the operation.

Do your elected officials understand your LOS? Have they been educated in what your capabilities are? Have you made a point to meet with them and discuss what's to be expected for the upcoming season? A simple meeting to explain the LOS will provide the critical information that's needed when the phone calls start coming in. Have you met with Police, Fire & EMS to make sure that everyone understands what acceptable road conditions are?



"Residential side street, Flintlock Road, goes down to one lane. Our loader-mounted snow blower made almost a full pass leaving six-foot-plus high curb lines. This was week 3 of the 88½" month of snow. 57½" of snow had fallen. Capital equipment planning helps LOS expectations." – Marc Valenti

it; make it a point to articulate the expectations of the operation.

A good starting point with staff is to bring them in and debrief them relatively soon after a season has ended. And, follow up with the same staff prior to the start of the upcoming winter season to recap, again. This is a great time to discuss the LOS and spark discussion about what is expected of them to maintain the current LOS. This is also a great time to discuss whether the LOS needs to be adjusted. With current personnel issues like employee retirements, promotions, and departures due to other opportunities available in other public works organizations, it's always good to make sure that everyone understands their responsibilities.

Do you have the equipment to achieve the current LOS? If so, great! If not, think about what it would take to adjust the LOS and tailor it to what can be accomplished. Start planning to replace the equipment to get your operation to the point where

you need to be. Correct, where you *need* to be, not where you want to be. It's all about progression; plan for success! There's a lot of new technology out there that will enhance your LOS—everything from composite plow edges, expandable snowplows, tow plows, slurry ("oatmeal") salt spreaders, ground speed and central hydraulics systems, winter liquids, etc. Communicate with staff and see what kind of equipment challenges are inside the organization and make the changes as best as you can.

If you use them, make sure that the contracted services are briefed before the season starts, especially if they are new to the contract. It's always good to have a point of contact that understands the contract requirements and performance measures. They should also have a good understanding of the agency's organizational structure when they need to communicate with the agency staff. Keep the dialogue in the forefront to make your operation successful.

Materials...why should they be included in LOS considerations? Can the current storage facility for the materials that you use sustain the LOS? Is your agency using more materials more than your facility can store? Can your supplier replenish your supply as quickly as it's applied? Now is the time to reconsider that your expectation may not be attainable. A "bare" pavement policy may deplete your salt supply too quickly. Bare pavement policies are a slippery slope; they are very expensive for the taxpayer, the environment and your storage facility.

In closing, a winter operations Level of Service must be sustainable for the customers, budget, personnel and environment. Each of these holds serious weight in the equation of LOS development and they should always be balanced as best as possible.

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