



Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing



Association of Municipalities of Ontario

ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES

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BEST PRACTICES SUMMARY REPORT

RO – WC – 04 – 07

Roads Winter Control – Year-Round Mix of Contracted and Direct Staff Resources

Practice Identification: Roads Winter Control – Year-Round Mix of Contracted and Direct Staff Resources

Case Study Municipality: City of London

Key Word: Operational Procedures

Benefits that resulted from adoption of the Practice;

- **Improved winter event response times resulting from aggressive patrol coverage & early response decisions**
 - **Reduced year-round costs**
 - **Reduced winter operations costs**
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1. Description of the Practice in the Case-study Municipality

The City of London delivers winter control services across a mixed road system consisting of approximately 3,500 paved lane kilometres. London's 2003 winter event response capacity is substantial – featuring 62 plowing units, 24 sand/salt units and 33 sidewalk units. The City's response capacity features a mix of contracted service providers and direct service by City staff. An event response is initiated at 5 cm of accumulation or as specified under the Provincial Minimum Maintenance Standards. An initial system-wide plowing response is completed within 10–12 hours, on average. Post-event clean up requires 12-16 hours. Bare pavement service levels are the norm on arterial and primary collector

roads. The City of London had among the lowest MPMP winter control costs per kilometre among municipalities within its class of road system in 2003.

London's Winter Maintenance Operations is a 24/7 program delivered through a mix of contracted units and staff-operated units. The program is managed by the Roads & Transportation Division, which also has responsibility for non-winter maintenance activities like Parks and Recreations Operations. This Division manages its mix of fixed and variable labour costs and service hours through an entire fiscal year, not just through the winter season. Full time winter control staffing (representing fixed costs and a bundle of year-round service hours) is carried over into the non-winter road and park maintenance activities. If London delivered the sanding/salting program with a higher concentration of full time staff, an excess capacity of service hours (and fixed costs) would carry over into the non-winter season – resulting in excess hours of paid staff time searching for viable activities to perform. The key to the practice is the optimal mix of direct staff required year round, and then assembling a team of seasonal winter resources that deliver “peak demand” (variable costs). Over time, London has determined that a ratio of 55% contracted units to 45% staff-operated units provides the optimal year-round balance across winter roads, non-winter roads, and parks maintenance activities.

In analyzing the potential costs of doing business London compares winter event hours to non-events hours. Contracted operating hours are compared to the cost of City resources that can be utilized year round across all operations.

The City of London participates in the Ontario Municipal CAOs Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI). The Ontario Municipal CAO's Benchmarking Initiative is a CAO's partnership to continuously strive for service excellence in municipal government. Participating municipalities are working together to identify and share performance statistics and operational best practices and to network in a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship, for even greater successes.

2. Evaluation of Practice

Municipalities have struggled for years over the question of whether to contract or directly deliver winter control services. The London practice suggests that the “best practice” answer is not choose-one-or-the-other, but rather to seek the optimal mix. London found its optimal mix is achieved by sharing staff between roads and park maintenance activities. The creation of a multi Divisional management team resulted in a broad, year-round budgetary focus – a focus that was needed to ensure winter operations was not staffed in a manner that created an excessive bundle of service hours and fixed costs that would represent a cost management problem during the rest of the year. It is doubtful that the optimal mix of contracted versus direct service would have been created in London if the shared resources model was not implemented.

3. Replication of Practice

Replicating London's Winter Maintenance model requires the following:

- 1) Adoption of an organization design that allows roads and parks maintenance to share resources, thereby creating a pool of activities that merit a certain level of fixed cost staffing investment. In order to share staff resources, job descriptions are developed to include a wide variety of equipment, both winter and summer.
- 2) The existence of a "market" of available winter maintenance contractors that can meet peak demand for service during winter months

Developing a mix of direct and contracted service delivery capacity may not be possible in remote or very small municipalities. However, most Ontario urban municipalities can duplicate the type of direct/contracted service mix present in London's winter maintenance model.

4. Contact

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