



Report to Chesham LOCAL AREA FORUM

Title: Winter Maintenance 2009 – 2010

To: Chesham Local Area Forum
Special Meeting,

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Introduction

Winter maintenance is important in terms of both road safety and the economy. It is carried out in an effort to assist the safe movement of all users of the highway, whether in vehicles or on foot. It is economically significant because of the costs incurred by the delays and accidents that bad weather can cause.

Winter maintenance involves treating the highway to:

- (a) prevent ice from forming, known as "**precautionary salting**".
- (b) melt ice and snow already formed, known as "**post salting**".
- (c) remove snow.

Current arrangements

Transport for Buckinghamshire has a responsibility for approximately 3,300km of carriageway and 7,000km of footway. With such an extensive road network it is unrealistic to expect that all roads will be treated on a precautionary basis. Therefore roads are assessed and prioritised based on the following factors; traffic flow, route topography, bus route, adjacent key facilities, community link and collision record.

Our Priority 1 salting network is the only network salted on a precautionary basis and for 2009 – 10 it remains fundamentally unchanged from the start of last season. It is made up of A & B roads and other high priority risk assessed roads

using the above criteria. The extent of this network is approximately 1375km, which is 40% of the roads in Bucks and it is treated using 25 salt spreaders which are available 24 hours a day. Details of the roads included in the priority salting network 2009 – 2010 and advice on safer winter driving will shortly be made available on the Bucks County Council website.

The Priority 1 salting routes operate from 4 depot locations across the County and Chesham area is covered by routes out of the Amersham Depot. For normal precautionary salting these routes take between 2 & 2¹/₂ hours to complete. Severe weather can affect the treatment times of these routes. We normally aim to carry out precautionary salting outside of peak traffic hours i.e. early morning or evening. However, on occasions salting can be time critical and we will need to salt when forecast or prevailing conditions require.

Post salting is carried on our Priority 2 & 3 salting network and would only commence following a prolonged period of cold weather or snowfall, as happened in February 2009. These networks include the wider road and footway network that would not be treated as part of the Priority 1 salting network. This salting network is often referred to as our Secondary salting network. Treatment of these roads and footways will be subject to available resources and prevailing conditions on the Priority salting network.

In severe weather conditions we are able to supplement our own resources by using District and Town Council workforce, sub-contractors and local farmers.

In an average winter Buckinghamshire would use approximately 6500 tonnes of salt, which is stored in barns at the highways depots. We have storage capacity for approximately 8500 tonnes. Last winter's severe weather significantly increased Highway Authorities demand for salt and placed severe pressure on suppliers and national salt stocks. This resulted in a national salt shortage and required government intervention on to ensure supplies reached the worst affected areas. Whilst in Buckinghamshire we did not run out of salt it was necessary to temporarily reduce our priority 1 salting network and cease secondary salting to preserve salt stocks. From 7th February until the beginning of March precautionary salting was only carried out on the principal road network (A & B roads) and links to large villages.

This decision obviously severely affected many rural locations, none more so than the Chilterns, and made travel throughout the County very difficult. This was a difficult decision to make for the Cabinet Member for Transportation but was necessary to ensure the main road network remained serviceable until salt deliveries were reinstated.

In order to avoid similar circumstances in future years we have increased our salt storage by 1500 tonne using an open storage site in the South of the County.

Future arrangements

Currently Transport for Buckinghamshire are in the process of purchasing 8 new salt spreaders to replace some of the older fleet and it is hoped that they will be available from January 2010. The purchase of these new spreaders has allowed

us to consider the introduction of new salting techniques called “pre-wet”. This is a proven technique that improves the effectiveness of salting and also reduces salt usage thereby saving costs. Whilst the Priority salting network will remain unchanged for this season we will be introducing new routes that will be more aligned to the capacity and size of new fleet.

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