

**RESORT MUNICIPALITY OF WHISTLER**

4325 Blackcomb Way  
Whistler, BC Canada V8E 0X5  
whistler.ca

**TEL** 604 932 5535  
**TF** 1 866 932 5535  
**FAX** 604 935 8109

## STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

**PRESENTED:** January 25, 2022  
**REPORT:** 22-006  
**FROM:** Infrastructure Services  
**FILE:** 500  
**SUBJECT:** ROADS MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE UPDATE

### RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

**That** the recommendation of the General Manager of Infrastructure Services be endorsed.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

**That** Council receive Information Report No. 22-006 Roads Management and Maintenance Update.

### PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report is to provide an update to Council on recent road management and maintenance activities.

☒ Information Report ☐ Administrative Report (Decision or Direction)

### DISCUSSION

#### Background

The recent holiday season and significant weather events in Whistler combined to make very challenging road conditions over the past several weeks. At the January 11, 2022 Council meeting Mayor Crompton asked staff to provide an update on road management and maintenance in Whistler.

#### Analysis

##### Recent Situation

The Christmas holiday period is normally one of the busiest times in Whistler and this season there was also above average snowfall combined with below average temperatures.

In response to these conditions, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (MOW) crews who maintain our municipal roads, valley trail, and sidewalks put in many extra hours. In the winter, the roads crew normally has two shifts (day shift and night shift) that cover 17 hours of the day, seven days per week. In response to the holiday season storms, road crew staff stepped up by working 12 hour shifts to provide 24 hour coverage in order to deal with the colossal amount of snowfall that took extra time clear

roads, crosswalks and transit stops. In addition, the parks crew who plow the valley trail switched to a split shift in order to provide a higher level of service through more frequent plowing during the day.

Once the snow stopped and it began to rain, the focus quickly shifted to clearing catch basins and drainage routes to prevent potential localized flooding. Much of this infrastructure was covered by deep snow. The crews initially focussed on the Village area, but then worked their way out to the other neighbourhoods in the community. They also worked to remove a buildup of roadway ice and widen roadways pushing back snowbanks to improve sight lines at intersections, improving safety for pedestrians and drivers.

While most Whistler residents know that the RMOW is not responsible for the operation and maintenance of Highway 99, the highway is still the most critical transportation path in Whistler and we do what we can to assist the provincial Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI) and their contractors who maintain the highway.

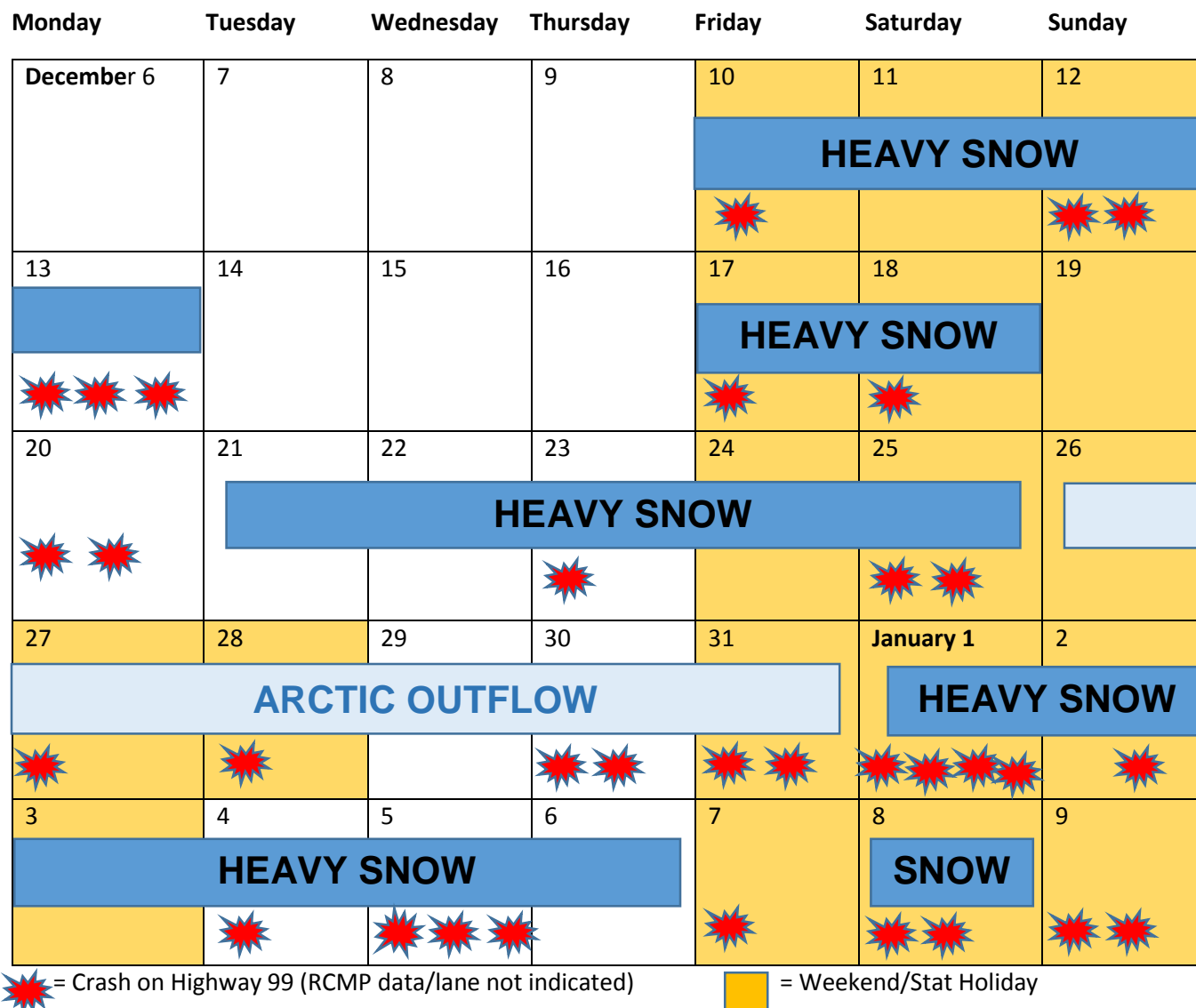
Operational staff know that keeping the roadways clear is incredibly difficult when the snow doesn't stop falling. On the highway when there's congestion due to high traffic volumes or cars are stopped due to an accident, plows can't get through to continue on with their maintenance and that makes the roads even more challenging to keep in good condition.

To prepare this report staff gathered statistics from the recent holiday season about traffic volume, weather, and accident information:

- Traffic volume over the holiday period was still below pre-pandemic (winter 2018/19) levels. There was not an increase in traffic to Whistler this winter.
- What was significant about travel this holiday season is that RCMP responded to 60 per cent more collisions vs. the same period last year (although only 13% more than 2019/20).
- Every weekend during the past holiday season included periods of heavy snow. This made for a lot of joy on the local mountains, but also resulted in challenging driving conditions.

Figure 1 below shows the days of snow, accidents each day, and the period of extreme cold. The extreme cold weather does cause special road condition challenges as ice can form more quickly and salting the road becomes less effective to manage the roadway ice. Traffic accidents on the highway often result in long delays, and the frequency of the accidents over the holiday season definitely impacted the traffic flow.

Figure 1.



\*NOTE: Data does not capture vehicles stuck/slow travel/blocked lanes/unreported crashes

Staff acknowledge that highway congestion won't fix itself and there is a need to continue to work with the Province looking at appropriate mechanisms the municipality could implement to help address traffic volumes.

#### Previous traffic congestion efforts

In the past, the RMOW has worked with MOTI and other stakeholders to reduce the impact of highway traffic congestion. Operational communications initiatives associated with the Highway Protocol work was done years ago, specifically around "Know Before you Go" messaging to assist the load out from the mountain on busy ski days. Tools used to support that messaging included:

- Changeable message boards/ sandwich boards/ flag people were used to direct traffic and share key messaging around volume, conditions or accident.
- Information posted at the ski bases and entries/ exits to parking lots.
- Information shared through WB safety and other frontline staff at WB and other frontline businesses.
- Current information shared through Drive BC and pushing everyone to use Drive BC as primary call to action.

In 2017 a traffic control team was used at the Creekside highway intersection for several weekends. This was a joint project between Whistler Blackcomb and the RMOW, with permission cautiously granted from MOTI. Support was also required from the RCMP to have the traffic control crew on the highway. MOTI is generally not in favour of adding traffic control people unless absolutely necessary as it does put those people in a potentially dangerous situation.

When the traffic control team was tested in 2017, traffic flow was measured closely and was found that while the travelling public liked having the traffic control crew operate the intersection and felt that it was more efficient, the data showed that traffic actually moved slightly more slowly when the crew operated the intersection compared to when traffic signals were left to manage the traffic flow.

#### Work with Provincial agencies

The municipality will continue to work with the Province on a model to support a regional transit system to help reduce the volume of traffic entering and exiting Whistler, and the RMOW will also continue to look at all ideas and options within its jurisdiction - such as increased local transit, improving the NextRide system, and park and ride programs.

Infrastructure Services staff expect to have a call with the regional MOTI representatives in January to discuss highway maintenance standards and look for additional solutions to moving traffic on the highway.

We must acknowledge that MOTI has also had a lot of challenges this year, repairing highways across the province that were severely damaged by flooding which may impact resource levels the Provincial government can dedicate to Sea to Sky traffic issues.

#### Balance Model

To assist with developing a plan specifically to reduce roadway congestion, the municipality is in the process of a broader strategic planning process to support long term sustainability in the community. This work considers the implications of resident and visitor populations, and will model various scenarios to enable the identification of strategies and actions to support a balance of community and economic needs, as we work towards achieving the community's vision and goals over the coming 20 year time period. This work is led by the Economic Development team, and is being done in collaboration with many municipal departments and the Strategic Planning Committee.

Part of the project scope is to look at traffic and leverage historical relationships between various populations and traffic volumes on a seasonal basis, to predict possible future volumes given various scenarios. The modelling tool will provide insight to potential impacts of changing population and therefore provides the opportunity to consider both short and long term strategic actions that will enable progress towards achieving some tangible goals. Examples of questions that would be supported through the balance model and strategic planning work include:

- How do varying levels of visitation, including changes to mix of destination and regional visitors or overnight and day visitation, impact road congestion?
- How is road congestion impacted by residents compared to visitation levels?
- How does increasing employee-restricted housing impact the size of Whistler's resident population, and subsequently road congestion?

It is expected that work on the balance model will advance to the strategies and action planning phase in 2022.

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## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

### Relevant Council Authority/Previous Decisions

Whistler's 'Climate Action BIG MOVES Strategy' was adopted by council in 2020. Whistler's BIG MOVES identify the six most impactful action areas we need to focus on as a community to address climate change. Big Move 1 is to "Move beyond the Car". Approximately half the vehicle trips on the highway in Whistler are from local motorists, so Big Move 1 can have a significant impact on reducing highway traffic congestion.

### Corporate Plan

The RMOW Corporate Plan is updated annually and articulates strategic direction for the organization. This section identifies how this report links to the plan.

### **Council Focus Areas**

☒ Community Balance

*Effectively **balance resort and community needs** through deliberate planning, partnerships and investment*

☒ Climate Action

*Provide leadership to **accelerate climate action and environmental performance** across the community*

☐ Housing

*Advance strategic and innovative initiatives to enable and **deliver additional employee housing***

☐ Pandemic Recovery

*Leadership and support for **community and tourism recovery and sustainability** – priority focuses are where recovery needs intersect with other Council focus areas*

☐ Not Applicable

### **Community Vision and Official Community Plan**

The Official Community Plan (OCP) is the RMOW's most important guiding document that sets the community vision and long-term community direction. This section identifies how this report applies to the OCP.

The information presented in this report is relevant to the Transportation chapter of Whistler's OCP and specifically Goal 11.1 and Policy 11.1.1.1.

#### **11.1. Goal**

Provide a quality travel experience for all visitors, *employees* and residents, and promote a culture of safety and accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

##### **11.1.1.1. Policy**

Collaborate with the provincial government to maintain and enhance the safety and reliability of Highway 99 in all areas, including effective snow clearing and removal, access management, *active transportation*, land use, pollution (noise and environmental) and environmental impacts.

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### **BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS**

Transportation initiatives are funded through General Fund contributions. Additional transportation projects will need to be balanced with other Council priorities and within the existing roads work plan.

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### **LIL'WAT NATION & SQUAMISH NATION CONSIDERATIONS**

The RMOW is committed to working with the Lil'wat People, known in their language as *L'il'wat7úl* and the Squamish People, known in their language as the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* to: create an enduring relationship; establish collaborative processes for Crown land planning; achieve mutual objectives; and enable participation in Whistler's resort economy.

There are no specific considerations to include in this report.

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### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Level of community engagement commitment for this project:

☒ Inform    ☐ Consult    ☐ Involve    ☐ Collaborate    ☐ Empower    Comment(s):

This information report provides an update to Council and the community regarding recent traffic congestion issues in Whistler.

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## REFERENCES

N/A

## SUMMARY

The recent holiday season and significant weather events in Whistler combined to make very challenging road conditions over the past several weeks. The Christmas holiday period is normally one of the busiest times in Whistler and this season there was also above average snowfall combined with below average temperatures.

In response to these conditions the RMOW crews who maintain our municipal roads, valley trail, and sidewalks put in many extra hours. Traffic volume over the holiday period was still below pre-pandemic levels, despite this, the RCMP responded to 60 percent more collisions vs. the same period last year. Every weekend during this holiday season included periods of heavy snow which made for good skiing, but also resulted in challenging driving conditions.

RMOW staff will continue to work with the Province to find solutions on the highway and identify appropriate mechanisms the municipality or MOTI could implement to help address traffic volumes.

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## SIGN-OFFS

### Written by:

Andrew Tucker,  
Manager of Roads and Waste Management

### Reviewed by:

James Hallisey,  
General Manager of Infrastructure Services

Virginia Cullen,  
Chief Administrative Officer