

Mounds of snow a challenge to walkers, drivers in Brockton

Huge snowbanks continue to block sidewalks, forcing pedestrians into the streets and making it tough for motorists to navigate intersections.

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BROCKTON — Richard Marsh wonders if he will get hit by a car as he navigates around giant snowbanks on his mile-long walk to and from Brockton High School.

“It’s like rush hour out here,” Marsh, an 18-year-old student, said Tuesday afternoon. “Everybody is in a hurry to try and get home.”

And drivers in a hurry aren’t always the kindest people.

“A lot of them are very rude. They’re honking and yelling at you,” said Mary McKellar, 41, of Brockton. “People who drive, they think they own the road, but they don’t know what it’s like to walk in it.”

This winter’s blitz of snow now crowds everything in the city. Massive snowbanks form walls along major streets, blocking access to sidewalks and blocking drains, leaving a slushy, watery mess at the edge of roads for pedestrians to walk through.

The snowbanks challenge drivers as well, since the icy piles obstruct the view of motorists attempting to travel through intersections.

Clearing out those piles could cost the city dearly, in a year when the snow removal budget is already tapped out.

But with more than 50 inches of snowfall already this winter – and up to another foot expected to fall in the next day – the city’s Department of Public Works might be forced to scoop up the snow and dump it somewhere, an expensive proposition.

The DPW plows sidewalks on at least one side of the street on major roads within a mile of a school. But crews can’t always dig through the several-feet-tall snowbanks that build up at street corners, which then end up blocking access to the sidewalk.

Crossing guards at the Downey Elementary School actually walk with students for a small distance to make sure cars give them a wide berth when they have to walk around the snowbanks and into the street.

“We’re about to walk into head-on traffic on Crescent Street because the city of Brockton doesn’t plow the sidewalks,” said a frustrated Melody Semidey, a Brockton mother who walks her 6-year-old son, Vincent, to and from school every day.

“It’s about the safety of the kids – they’re in danger. All it takes is one (person) looking down at his radio and one of these kids will get hurt,” she said. “I don’t know how many times I’ve had to throw him into an ice pile just so they don’t hit him.”

If a lot more snow falls in the next 24 hours, DPW Superintendent Michael Thoreson said the streets might be too narrow to push it off to the side. He might be forced to scoop it into dump trucks and haul it away, likely to the Brockton Fairgrounds.

The massive mound of snow currently piled at the fairgrounds is not city snow, he said.

Thoreson said there’s no hard and fast rule for how much snow has to fall before the department hauls it away. The only time that’s happened in his tenure, he said, was the winter of 2004-05 when more than 100 inches of snow fell in Brockton.

“If we get another 12 inches of snow this week we may have to. We might not have any options,” Thoreson said. “It’s a very expensive proposition and costs a lot of money. We’d rather not do it. We’d rather hold the money in the snow removal budget for snow (plowing).”

That move would put greater stress on a snow removal budget the department has essentially exhausted already. The DPW is seeking permission from the City Council to spend up to an additional \$1.5 million in snow removal this winter.

Wendy Landman, director of WalkBoston, which advocates for walking-friendly policies across Massachusetts, said the solution to the walking dilemma is probably not a harsh city ordinance, but creating a sense of community obligation.

“One of the things we focus on is creating a social norm of shoveling,” she said. “This is not going to come about because of heavy-handed enforcement. It’s going to come about because people know what it means to be a good neighbor.”

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The walking advocates only have to wait until this city coughs up millions to the person(s) hit by a car because the city didn't make a reasonable effort to remove the snow from the sidewalks.

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I am lucky to be someone who does not have to walk. However, I am completely on the side of the pedestrians. It is extremely dangerous. I get so nervous when I see children walking to school & they are forced to walk in the middle of the street. I pay very close attention, but I know there are far too many drivers who do not & I fear that I am going to read about someone getting hit and/or killed. Something has to be done.

Also, as far as the extremely high snow banks at the intersections, that is a HUGE problem. We are forced to pull out in the middle of the street to see if there are any cars coming and with the way & at the speeds people drive an accident is extremely likely. They need to move forward with the plan to move the snow.

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