

Municipalities eager for overnight snowclearing pilot

Department of Transportation and Works expects to make announcement soon

By NADYA BELL

THE TELEGRAM

Municipalities around Newfoundland and Labrador are pleased that someplace in the province will have the benefit of 24-hour snowclearing on provincial roads this winter, and they can't wait to find out where.

The official announcement for the 24-hour snowclearing pilot program has not been made, so it is not clear which areas will benefit from the pilot project, or what type of service they will have.

David Salter, spokesman for the Department of Transportation, says minister Dianne Whalen mentioned the project on VPCM radio station Wednesday, but the department is not ready to give further details about the project.

Salter says the department will make an announcement about the program in the next week or so.

"We think that this is a good step

forward, and it will certainly enhance the safety of the highways, especially for people travelling late at night, early in the morning or certainly, in the case of emergency vehicles, where they have to respond on a 24-hour basis," says Graham Letto, president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador.

Last year at the provincial municipalities conference, mayors made a resolution to lobby the provincial government to maintain 24-hour snowclearing on critical highways, or at least have one snowclearing crew per administrative district on 24-hour standby.

Proper direction

"We think that this is the right way to go," Letto says. "We're pleased that the minister is going to do that this year, and I think our membership will be pleased as well because they're the ones that have been asking for this."

In addition to calling for 24-hour

snowclearing on all major provincial roads, the Liberal opposition says they want to see mandatory winter tires on vehicles.

"This is where we're coming from with the snow tires and the 24-hour service. It's a safety issue," says MHA Roland Butler, Liberal critic for transportation. "You can't put a dollar value on a life."

Butler says it is a serious situation for the Heart's Content barrens in the Trinity area because residents there can't get to the hospital in Bay Roberts if the road isn't cleared.

The lack of overnight service also affects early morning school bus trips if the plows don't get out early enough, Butler says.

"I think it has to be dealt with and hopefully we'll hear an announcement soon on where the minister is going to carry out those pilot projects and see where they take it from there," he says.

nbell@thetelegram.com

SOCIAL