



Department  
for Transport

From the Parliamentary  
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Dear Colleague

The resilience of the transport network in winter is a topic which colleagues in Parliament rightly raise with Ministers at the Department for Transport each year. I therefore thought it might be helpful to let you have the attached note, setting out the actions taken by the transport sector in advance of the coming winter.

I am pleased to say that transport operators continue to plan ahead to address the impact of severe winter weather and to commit resources to meet the challenges severe weather poses.

Last year we experienced a relatively mild winter. However, as we all know, the UK weather can be unpredictable and my officials have been liaising with the transport operators to ensure that they have robust contingency plans in place.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

**NORMAN BAKER**

# **WINTER RESILIENCE IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR 2012/13**

## **Introduction**

The Department for Transport continues to work closely with all key transport operators, local authorities, salt suppliers and others to make sure that that the country enters this winter season well prepared to meet the challenges of a severe winter and ensure that in the event of any period of extreme weather that any transport disruption is minimised; with suitable arrangements having been put in place to speed up the recovery of the network.

The Department also continues to work closely with the Met Office to make sure we have the best advice available at the earliest possible opportunity both in pre-winter planning and operationally should severe weather occur. The accuracy of the Met Office's short range forecasting is very high and their severe weather warnings help my Department, local highway authorities, the Highways Agency, train, airport and ports operators, to minimise the impact of any severe weather.

## **Salt Issues**

Actions we have taken include: (i) a substantial national strategic salt reserve with a robust distribution process in place; (ii) publishing a note on our website which provides local highway authorities with details on how, if required, to access the strategic salt stockpile; (iii) setting up a salt stock portal to monitor how much stock local highway authorities hold; and, (iv) highlighting the importance to highway authorities of making efficient use of their salt stocks.

At the end of September 2012, total salt stocks of over 2.5 million tonnes were held by local and national highway authorities in Great Britain, including strategic stockpiles. This is a similar level to that held at the same time last year, and considerably higher than was held in 2010. These figures do not include stocks held by salt suppliers which are understood to exceed levels held at this point in the last few winter seasons.

The Department for Transport has also been working closely with both the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association to ensure local authorities are aware of best practice on community initiatives such as encouraging the use of social networking sites to update local residents on roads that had been gritted, as well as snow warden<sup>1</sup> initiatives that have been deployed. We have also

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<sup>1</sup> As part of their winter service policy a number of local government authorities have formed a body of unpaid volunteers to act as Community Snow Wardens to help clear roads and pavements of snow on their local area. community

continued to make the public aware of the Snow Code. The Code reassures the public that if they use a common sense approach and want to show community spirit in clearing snow and ice from the front of their homes, pavements and other public spaces, then they can do so in a safe manner without fear of legal action. A copy of the guide is available on the Get Ready for winter website:

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/get-ready-for-winter/out-and-about/the-snow-code>

## **Strategic Road Network**

The Highways Agency delivers a robust winter service developed over a number of seasons and is well prepared for this winter. While last winter was milder than the previous few years the Agency still had the opportunity to fine tune and learn further lessons from its experiences. As in previous years, the Agency has developed severe weather plans specifically tailored to the local requirements in each of its regions. New guidance included in this year's plans includes advice on treating the network in extreme cold conditions. The plans also identify vulnerable locations (such as steep gradients and exposed locations) and include resilience plans for these. The Agency has recently introduced its new weather information service, which takes data from more than 200 weather stations on the network, together with forecast information, and makes that information available to its service providers and others to enable them to make informed decisions on how to respond to severe weather.

The Agency implemented a comprehensive winter communication campaign during 2011/12 and is running a similar campaign again for winter 2012/13. Details can be found at: [www.highways.gov.uk/winter](http://www.highways.gov.uk/winter). The winter campaign for this year was launched on 29 October and will run in unison with the Cabinet Office's '**Get ready for winter**' and Scotland's '**Ready Scotland**' campaigns, to encourage drivers and passengers to 'be informed' and 'be prepared' when considering any journey. Last year the Highways Agency undertook a comprehensive partnership marketing campaign. This year it has contacted over 300 partners - including AA, RAC, Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM), Road Haulage Association (RHA) and the Freight Transport Association (FTA), local authorities, airports and shopping centres and, for the first time, petrol companies – to work in partnership and deliver winter messages through partners' own communications channels, such as websites, newsletters, posters and social media channels. Members of the public can also report urgent road safety incidents to the Highways Agency's Information Line (0300 123 5000).

The Agency has also developed its use of social media including its dedicated winter twitter channel (@winterhighways), which has 3,153

followers, while the total number of HA twitter followers is 41,152 as of 15 October 2012. As in previous years, ahead of and during wintry conditions, the Highways Agency will provide alerts and guidance through social media as well as formats such as press notices, media interviews, website and roadside variable message signs. The messages provide specific warnings of conditions such as snow, freezing rain or the risk of ice as well as general guidance on how to prepare for travelling in severe weather. Evaluation of this year's winter communications campaign will be undertaken to measure the impact of the campaign messages and to identify any behavioural change of road users over the course of the campaign period.

The Agency has its own fleet of 437 state of the art winter service vehicles (salt spreaders fitted with snowploughs), operated on its behalf by its contractors. With the addition of vehicles owned and operated by our contractors, in total more than 500 winter service vehicles are available for use on England's motorway and trunk road network. During the 2011/12 winter season, the Agency's winter fleet covered over 1.5 million miles while treating its network. As at 1st November the Agency is holding just over 270,000 tonnes of operational salt to treat the strategic road network, with further deliveries expected over the next few weeks, which is broadly comparable to the same position last year. In addition, the Agency continues to hold 120,000 tonnes of strategic reserve for use on its network as well as managing the national salt reserve of approximately 300,000 tonnes.

### **Rail Network**

On our railways, the Department for Transport and Network Rail have invested £38 million to help train operators keep tracks snow free and prevent rails, points and other vital equipment from freezing, and thus help meet the winter challenge. Steps taken by Network Rail and the train operating companies to improve winter resilience include the overhaul and enhancement of equipment on track, trains and signals, and the provision of specialised trains for snow and ice treatment and clearance.

The industry has commenced and continues to implement a comprehensive programme of improvements aimed progressively at improving the quality and accuracy of passenger information during disruption. In addition to information provided by individual train operators, the principal means by which the general public can keep in touch with the latest information on rail services is the National Rail Enquiry Service (NRES) which can be accessed online or by telephone (<http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/>, 08457 48 49 50).

### **Civil Aviation**

The UK's aviation industry has improved its resilience to severe winter weather. The busiest airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, have made significant

investments in additional snow and ice clearance capacity. Heathrow has invested £50million to triple its snow and ice clearance vehicle fleets and quadruple staff numbers available for snow clearance. Gatwick has invested £8million in further snow and ice clearance equipment. And both airports have revised their operational command and control procedures to improve their response to severe weather, including working in closer co-operation with airlines and other transport providers. Other airports around the country have similarly revised and updated their operational response procedures.

Airports and airlines provide continuously updated flight information via their websites and social media, so that air passengers can check the status of their planned flight.

Airlines, airport operators and aircraft de-icing companies have reviewed and improved aviation de-icer supply and contract arrangements and increased de-icer product storage capacity at airports. De-icer product suppliers are confident that they will be able to meet their aviation customers' requirements in another severe winter.

The Civil Aviation Authority monitors the aviation industry's performance in dealing with any identified weather problems, including those related to maintaining airports' operational performance. The Civil Aviation Authority also ensures airlines comply with European legislation on assisting passengers whose flights are delayed or cancelled.

The Government's Civil Aviation Bill proposes a new licensing regime for airports, with powers for the CAA to regulate more effectively, including appropriate measures to ensure an airports operational resilience as a licence condition. The target for the Bill's Royal Assent is spring 2013.

## **Marine Sector**

The Department has written to ports, via their port associations, suggesting some steps that ports might consider to improve their operational resilience for the forthcoming winter.

On the basis of shared experiences in dealing with severe weather over the last few winters, an updated winter resilience planning template setting out, in a simple check list form, the various issues that we believe it would be sensible for ports to consider has been circulated, again via the port associations. This is, of course, not intended to supersede a port's own plans, tailored to its specific operational requirements, but is intended to provide a useful benchmark against which to assess a port's resilience planning to meet the potential challenges posed by winter weather.

## **Cross-Department/Agency Engagement**

In advance of the winter season there was a cross Government launch of the national 'Get Ready for Winter' campaign on 22 October. This campaign is aimed at individuals, families and communities and offers useful tips to help prepare for winter and also includes links to a range of organisations. This year the Met Office is hosting the campaign on behalf of HM Government and the information can be accessed through their website at [www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/get-ready-for-winter](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/get-ready-for-winter).

In addition Department for Transport officials continue to engage formally with colleagues from other Government Departments and Agencies as part of a Winter Resilience Network to more effectively coordinate contingency planning and preparations for responding to any severe weather that might be encountered this winter.

**NORMAN BAKER**

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
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