

Epping Forest District Local Highways Panel

Winter Maintenance Update

Essex County Council aims to grit its precautionary treatment network in accordance with our Winter Service Operational Plan, with the aim of keeping the strategic routes within the County free from snow and ice. In addition to this precautionary network, the County Council has undertaken work on key urban pedestrian routes, attended locations at the request of the emergency services and worked alongside District Councils to clear key sites. The County Council operates a fleet of over sixty gritting vehicles, with 120 personnel on call over a 24 hour period. Each gritting run by our gritting fleet uses approximately 170 tonnes of salt. The Winter Maintenance Engineers involved with the gritting decisions use highly accurate weather forecast as well as dedicated weather stations and roadside sensors to decide when to grit. For the first time this year on the county Council's web site it will be possible to track the gritters as they do their routes

The county of Essex covers a large surface area and there is also a large coast line. This leads to variations in temperature and weather patterns across the county. As such for Winter Maintenance the county is divided into five areas or "weather domains".

The weather domains and a summary of the main areas within them are:

Three Valleys – Uttlesford and Braintree

Colne – Colchester and Tending

Roding – Harlow, Epping, Chelmsford and Brentwood

Blackwater – Maldon

Thames - Rayleigh, Basildon and Castle Point

When any gritting decision is made the weather predictions for each domain will be considered and the gritting fleet are then instructed to go out as necessary per domain.

Action is taken during the early mornings and late evenings to minimise disruption to traffic. The Winter Maintenance Team is currently considering options of how best to keep our Customers informed of our gritting decisions. One method that is currently available is the twitter service offered via the ECC Traffic Control Centre. To sign up please visit; http://twitter.com/essex_travel

The primary method of treating the precautionary gritting network is with crushed rock salt, also known as grit. The salt or grit works by lowering the point at which water on the road surface freezes. To work effectively the salt has to be driven over by vehicles to work it into any ice and turn it in to water.

The Precautionary Gritting Network covers just less than 1900 miles or 3032.4km, which equates to about 40% of the highway network in Essex. It consists of the following;

- “A” roads which ECC is responsible for so would exclude the A12, A120 and A130
- “B” roads to ensure that road users can travel between towns and villages
- Rural link roads from settlements of over 50 houses to the main precautionary gritting network
- Also routes which are served by at least 4 public bus services per day for 5 days per week or more.

Resource prioritisation means that the County Council cannot treat minor roads or pavements in residential areas and those that are not part of the public highway for example car parks and footways/cycle ways.

As part of the Winter Maintenance pre-season preparation all of the County Council Salt Bins are audited (including condition data noted/GPS co-ordinates/photographs) and should clearly be identifiable by an ECC sticker. During the audit process each bin had their exact GPS location recorded, as well as their condition and photos taken of the general area. All bins that are the responsibility of the County Council will also be re-stocked before the start of the Winter season.

In addition Essex County Council is currently encouraging Parish/Town Councils to take part in the Salt Bag Partnership. This involves each Parish/Town Council within the partnership being given one tonne of salt for use on the pavements that are important to their community, such as footpaths to local shops and services, doctor’s surgeries etc. It is then for the Parish/Town Council to decide where the salt is used. Currently our Winter Maintenance Team have sent out an email to Parish/Town Council Clerks promoting this scheme and asking if they wish to either continue to take part or join the scheme.

Jon Simmons

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