

Article updated: 3/17/2014 7:09 AM

Snow-blocked sidewalks upset suburbanites

By Marni Pyke

Nothing like hitting a nerve. Last week's column about pedestrians in peril on unshoveled sidewalks provoked an avalanche of articulate emails. Let's start with Nancy Johnson who writes, "I live in Elgin where shoveling sidewalks is not required and I struggle to trudge through the snow every winter to walk my three dogs.

"Two winters ago, I fell on an icy sidewalk that resulted from the homeowner never shoveling, and did serious damage to my back. I have tried putting friendly notes in neighbor's doors reminding them to be good citizens and shovel, but to no avail," Johnson said.

"I live in an area where disabled persons walk to a Jewel store to work each day, and are forced to walk in the street and take their life in their hands. There are three schools in my area and students either have to weave on and off unshoveled sidewalks or stand in the street to wait for the bus each morning."

Longtime Schaumburg school bus driver Dick Voegtle is worried that his young passengers sometimes have to wait on the street for the bus, "often standing in traffic."

"We often find that kids cannot wait on the sidewalk as many of the corner bus stops are piled with snow," Voegtle said. "Sometimes we can't even see if there are any students at the corner until we get up next to it. Many times, the residents will clear the snow from the driveways, but neglect to clear the sidewalks.

"The village of Schaumburg has let out contracts for the removal of snow to many subcontractors, (some of whom) don't have much concern about the safety of our children. They just continue to 'plow the streets' as they have been told to do and often the snow winds up in the residents' driveways and on the sidewalks.

"After complaining to various village departments, we have always been told that the village's responsibility is only to clean the streets for the benefit of any emergency vehicles. No thought is ever given to the safety of the children or perhaps the pedestrians, dog walkers and elderly who must navigate these unsafe areas."

JR Beck joins three Hanover Park neighbors to clear sidewalk snow near a school and church.

"We all have snowblowers so the work is not as taxing as it once was a few years ago," he said. "We have managed to keep the walkways clear for the blocks on which we all live.

"But no thanks to the snowplow jockeys who: plow in all the corners where the kids have to cross the streets; and drive so fast that the plows throw snow over the medians and onto the cleared walkways.

"The plowed snow is much more difficult to deal with than fallen snow as it is partially ice chunks and much deeper than the fallen snow. I am sympathetic for the job the jockeys have to do to keep our streets clear but should they not be also sympathetic to the needs of the kids ... and to those of us who volunteer to try to make this possible?"

Steve Burval of Des Plaines hopes "to see action taken in Des Plaines and many of the surrounding suburbs to make our communities safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

"Many Des Plaines residents who are on a limited income, are seniors, and/or don't drive are forced to walk on major thoroughfares due to uncleared walks. This situation isn't limited to record-breaking snow years. While roadways are now cleared we also find ourselves with melting conditions that still leave walks covered with ice and now standing water," he wrote.

But Neal Underwood of Arlington Heights said he just gets "excuses and bureaucratic stonewalling" from the village when he contacts officials about the problem, which gives him "another reason to move to Florida."

"I had suggested that commercial property owners be required to plow their sidewalks. They all have services that plow their own lots and sidewalks or have able-bodied employees. All I got was the 'elderly' excuse," Underwood wrote, referring to concerns that seniors may not be able to shovel or afford shoveling.

"When I replied that I was only talking about commercial properties — dead silence. I have seen people walking in the streets on extremely busy Golf Road and Algonquin Road during rush hour because sidewalks in front of these main commercial strips are impassible."

Meanwhile, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is preparing a Complete Streets kit for municipalities that will offer guidelines for pedestrian-friendly communities. To learn more, go to www.cmap.illinois.gov/about/updates/-/asset_publisher/UIMfSLnFfMB6/content/snow-removal-on-pathways-and-at-transit-stops.

And if you've got a question, gripe or comment on any transportation issue, drop me a line at mpyke@dailyherald.com or follow me on Twitter at [dhintransit](#).

Gridlock alert

The construction news is coming fast and furious. It's no April Fool, Kane County — you can expect lane closures on Route 25/Stearns Road in two weeks. Reconstruction with added lanes and a new bridge for the Union Pacific Railroad extends from the juncture of the two roads to Dunham Road in South Elgin. Work starts April 1.

You should know

Let's squeeze in another traffic note, this time from Lake County. CN Railroad will close the Ela Road crossing in Lake Zurich starting at 6 a.m. March 25 until evening March 27.

Upcoming

The Northeastern Illinois Public Transit Task Force, which will make recommendations to improve the RTA, Metra, Pace and CTA this month, meets at 10:30 a.m. today on the 5th floor, Michael Bilandic Building, 160 N. LaSalle St., Chicago. Testifying will be state Inspector General Ricardo Meza ... should be interesting.

Copyright © 2014 Paddock Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.