



Wisconsin State Journal

Mayor hoping to speed up repairs to streets

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March 12, 2008

Drivers in this year's pothole derby take note: It's officially shaping up to be a record season in Madison, and Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and city staffers want to fill you in on what they're doing about it.

A new city Web site -- www.cityofmadison.com/potholepatrol -- now offers one-stop shopping for information on all things pothole, including what causes them, how to report them, where the most pothole-ridden streets are and when they will be fixed by something more than a temporary patch that, at this time of year, pops right back out.

"The real answer is to rebuild streets," Cieslewicz said Wednesday in announcing an effort to move up reconstruction of several of the city's main roads plagued by potholes as a result of this winter's severe weather, including record snowfall now at 92 inches.

"These are concrete streets that have heavy traffic," said George Dreckmann of the Streets Division, adding that crews have been patching them weekly, and in some instances, daily.

Eastwood Drive, the pesky stretch between Williamson Street and Atwood Avenue which had been scheduled for reconstruction in 2010, will be resurfaced this year instead. The city will continue pavement replacement begun last year along Mineral Point Road.

Also this year, pavement joints will be repaired on East Washington Avenue, Northport Drive and Packers Avenue, while the city works to move up repairs by the state not expected to begin until 2011.

The city will also look at moving up to 2009 replacement of pavement on Campus Drive, a project now scheduled for 2012, as well the eastbound section of University Avenue between University Bay Drive and Shorewood Boulevard scheduled for 2010.

The city is projected to spend \$269 million on street construction, replacement and maintenance over the next six years, including \$40.2 million this year.

More than just the comfort of drivers is at stake. A national transportation research group reported Wednesday that bad roads cost the average urban motorist \$413 a year in additional operating costs, including maintenance and vehicle deterioration. In Madison,

that figure was slightly above average -- \$431, according to Washington, D.C.-based TRIP.

Madison wasn't nearly as high in additional operating costs as Santa Rosa, Calif. (\$668 annually) or Palm Springs, Calif. (\$641), but not as cheap as Columbus, Ga. (\$64) or Provo, Utah (\$173).

The TRIP report also concluded that 23 percent of the nation's major metropolitan roads are in poor condition. In Madison, that figure was listed at 20 percent. The worst was Los Angeles, where 65 percent of the city's roads were listed in poor condition.

TRIP said pavement condition information was based on the Federal Highway Administration's 2006 survey.

Brett Cooper, service manager at Smart Motors, said Wednesday that his shop has seen more bent suspensions this winter, largely due to "curb shots" -- a motorist sliding into a curb on slick roads. "We did a lot of those this winter," he said.

And potholes? "Well, they are certainly out there," Cooper said.

Last year, the city used 540 tons of cold patch to temporarily fill potholes before warmer weather allowed a more permanent fix, said Al Schumacher, Madison streets superintendent. Already this year, crews have used 529 tons, he said, adding "It 's heading toward a record-type of pothole season."

"One of the roots of this is there's more traffic," said Dreckmann, who estimates crews have filled 41,055 potholes this year.

"We're patching like crazy. We're out there trying to get ahead of the problem," said Cieslewicz, who also attributes a large part of the pothole problem to heavier vehicles such as SUVs.

Mayoral spokesman George Twigg said the cost to set up the Pothole Patrol program was "minimal," but he did not have an exact figure Wednesday night. Costs consist mainly of staff time to collect already existing data and to set up the Web site.

He said staff started talking about creating the program in January.