



# MATERIALS



## Levels of Service

Setting the appropriate level of service is vital to an agency being successful. Levels of service are defined as the condition to which a roadway will be maintained during a winter season. These can vary from a bare pavement policy to a roadway that is closed during the winter season. In many cases level of service is based on the usage of the roadway and the traffic volume of that roadway. Generally, high volume roadways are maintained at a very high level, and lower volume roadways or secondary roadways are often maintained at a lower level. These varying roadway conditions can sometimes be confusing for roadway users and highway maintainers alike.

Often levels of service are pre-existing and set by policymakers or elected officials. Normally levels of service are not something that an agency can vary from or change without bringing policy changes forward. What agencies can do is help educate policymakers and elected officials on what levels of service should be and perhaps influence changes that make good sense.

Additionally, levels of service during a storm will differ from those following a storm. An agency may want to achieve bare pavement following an event, but it does not necessarily mean it will try to achieve bare pavement throughout an event.

Levels of service do not just vary from roadway to a roadway but also from agency to agency.

Each agency, be it state, county or city, is able to set its own levels of service for the roads in its jurisdiction. This can cause a disparity because there is a lack of continuity along roadway systems.

It also makes it difficult for operators to determine if they are achieving the level of service their agency is supposed to be providing. Public perception and complaints play a big role in setting the level of service initially but also in how an agency maintains a roadway throughout the winter.

This can often lead to an agency exceeding the level of service for a roadway and thereby utilizing more salt.

**Levels of service provide a roadmap for an agency in their winter maintenance work.**

Roadway users come to expect the level of service that is normally provided throughout the winter. An agency that exceeds its normal levels of service will find it very difficult to try and lower the expectations of its customers.

Good communication is vital to roadway users and to agency operators to ensure they both understand how a roadway is expected to be maintained during and following a winter event. This should be clearly defined in the agency's policies on their website and even using roadway signing when possible.

Visual aids are also a great tool to show a roadway and how it will be kept during the winter. This is especially useful when a roadway is only supposed to be partially cleared or snow packed.



**The numbers:** When an agency conducts winter operations guided by its various levels of service, it will likely find that it can achieve those levels with a bit less effort than it has traditionally expended. The expected savings could be as high as 30%, but this will depend on how closely an agency is currently following its level of service.

**The Alternatives:** If you are not basing your operations on your levels of service, then first the old saying applies: If you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you have got there? And second, you are almost certainly using more material and time than you should, on at least some of your road system.

**The needs:** The first need is an explicit statement of the level of service goals for your agency. This may already exist, but it may also need dragging into the light of day, dusting off, and then making sure that everyone (including the political authorities who typically set levels of service) knows what is in it. Then, you have to stick to it.

