

**Testimony of
Javier Lojan, Acting Commissioner
New York City Department of Sanitation**

**Hearing before the New York City Council
Committees on Transportation & Infrastructure, Disabilities, and Sanitation & Solid Waste
Management
Friday, February 27, 2026 1:00 P.M.**

Oversight: Pedestrian and Transit Accessibility During Winter Weather Events

Good afternoon Chairs Abreu, Hanif, and Sanchez, and committee members.

I am Javier Lojan, Acting Commissioner of the New York City Department of Sanitation, and I am joined today by Chief of Department Anthony Pennolino and Joshua Goodman, Deputy Commissioner, Public Affairs & Customer Experience. I am also joined by colleagues from the New York City Department of Transportation, including Commissioner Mike Flynn, First Deputy Commissioner Margaret Forgione, and Assistant Commissioner of Intergovernmental Affairs Rick Rodriguez as well as Emily Sweet, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel from the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.

In my 27 years with the Department, I have learned firsthand that no two storms are alike. Knowing this, we plan all year for all possibilities, revising routes, evaluating performance, and overhauling equipment so that we have a playbook for every possibility.

Long before there is the slightest chill in the air, we have more than 2,200 vehicles ready to be turned into snow plows, more than 700 salt spreaders, 47 pieces of specialized equipment to clear protected bike lanes, 7,000 uniformed Sanitation employees trained for snow clearing, and 700 million pounds of salt on hand. We also have in place agreements with other city agencies and contracts with private vendors to provide snow clearing assistance if needed, and every year we build a roster of Emergency Snow Shovelers who can be dispatched on a day's notice.

By the time you see the temperature dropping, we transition operations to a winter schedule known as Night Plow, with additional employees working overnight hours to allow for quicker and more effective snow operations work. We are also constantly tracking weather, with forecasts from three different vendors, as well as our colleagues at NYC Emergency Management.

When forecasts indicate a possibility of winter weather, we fill salt spreaders citywide at our 42 storage sites and, if we anticipate the slightest possibility of two inches of snow, we will attach plows to collection trucks. We also have the capability to pre-treat roadways with brine, a saltwater mix that helps prevent accumulations.

If forecasts continue to predict snow, we dispatch spreaders so they are ready to go at the very first sign of precipitation. The same goes with plows: the minute snow depths reach two inches, we are ready to begin plowing. Our PlowNYC map allows anyone to go online and see when their block was last visited by a plow. At the same time, as we remind New Yorkers every year, plow blades are not designed to scrape the pavement clean. Streets are uneven, so the blade is generally an inch or two off the ground. A plowed street will not show blacktop.

Thanks to a recent commitment to something we call Snow Equity, all streets are on a route – no more waiting days for so-called tertiary streets to be plowed. We also service vehicle travel lanes and bike lanes at the same time, so that New Yorkers who use bikes to get to work or to do their work can continue to do so safely, even as we open vehicle travel lanes for emergency vehicles and other motorists.

We hold ourselves accountable with a state-of-the-art tracking and management system for snow operations, known as BladeRunner 2.0. This gives us real-time insight into both salting and plowing operations in every corner of the city, allowing us to dispatch resources as needed.

This is all outlined in the Department’s borough-based snow plans, submitted to the City Council at the end of September pursuant to Local Law 28 of 2011.

As we have seen over the course of the last month with Winter Storm Fern on January 25, and Winter Storm Hernando earlier this week, each storm has unique conditions and challenges, and we must adjust our operations accordingly.

First, Winter Storm Fern: Our forecasters told us this was going to be a significant snowfall, and we knew that temperatures were going to remain below freezing for at least several days. Hour-by-hour, we monitored forecasts, putting into motion our snow plans, and making adjustments as forecasts became clearer. Senior leadership started our days with 5 a.m. in-person snow meetings, with teams working around the clock to execute snow operations.

Given that this was not a rain-to-snow event, we pre-treated all major roadways and protected bike lanes with salt or brine on Friday, Jan. 23. We also began messaging to all New Yorkers, in sync with the mayor’s office and other city agencies, asking New Yorkers to stay off the roads so that Sanitation Workers could clear them. We filled all spreaders, attached plows to trucks, and activated 2,600 Sanitation Workers to be on split 12-hour shifts. That meant over 2,600 Sanitation Workers working in the field from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and over 2,600 workers working 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

On Saturday, as we stood with the mayor at our Spring Street Salt Shed for the administration’s second daily in-person briefing, we had a clearer sense of the forecast and began activating emergency contracts with outside vendors to assist with shoveling, plowing and hauling.

When flakes started to fall, we ran the playbook, monitoring and making adjustments in real time: we salted the entire city at the first sign of precipitation, and our snow plows were out as soon as depths reached two inches. We notified our Emergency Snow Shovelers as early as Saturday that they should report to their local Sanitation Garage on Monday morning right after

the snow to clear public areas like bus stops, crosswalks – including pedestrian ramps, fire hydrants, and step streets. And, unlike previous storms, we activated an extremely rare night shift for our Emergency Snow Shovelers to give more people the opportunity to do this work.

By Monday morning, nearly every street and protected bike lane in the city had been plowed at least once, and by Tuesday, at least twice. Our Sanitation Workers plowed, salted, plowed, salted, repeatedly as needed around the clock – and we began to clear snow and ice from pedestrian infrastructure.

Property owners had an important responsibility here: By 12:30 pm Monday, they were required to clear a four-foot path on the sidewalk to allow pedestrians, including people using wheelchairs and strollers, to pass safely. They were also required to clear around fire hydrants, unsheltered bus stops, and paths to crosswalks—including pedestrian ramps—and catch basins. We issued more than 4,500 summonses to property owners who failed to meet this responsibility.

Due to the unprecedented cold temperatures that turned the snow to ice, making it more difficult for property owners to remove, we took on much of this work ourselves. With a focused commitment to making the city safe for all, we cleared 13,278 bus stops, 78,087 crosswalks and 16,031 hydrants, and readdressed some of these locations additional times. This was by far the most the City has ever cleared, even compared to storms with significantly more snowfall. To help us with this work, we hired 500 Emergency Snow Shovelers and got assistance from over 500 employees from our sister agencies each day. In determining where to focus our efforts, we prioritized commercial corridors with the most pedestrian traffic and along bus routes as well as locations where we received complaints from people with disabilities.

In the two weeks following this storm, the average high temperature was just 24 degrees, meaning this snow was not going anywhere. While snow was still falling, we began activating snow-melting operations so that by Wednesday morning, we had snow melters active in all five boroughs. Sanitation Workers and private vendors worked around the clock to break up and haul snow from every neighborhood in the city. In the four weeks following the storm, we melted more than 600 million pounds of snow—more snow than we have ever melted previously—and impossible without having plans in place months before winter.

During snow operations, New Yorkers continued to put out 24 million pounds of trash and recycling every day. The same Sanitation Workers who collect trash also drive plows and salt spreaders, and historically, this has meant frequent collection delays during winter weather operations. For this snowfall, we had the people in place to resume collection operations just two days after the first flake, while continuing with massive ongoing snow operations. Compare that to 2021, when we resumed collection four days after the first flake, or to the Boxing Day storm of 2010, when we resumed collection eight days later. We prioritized trash and compost and encouraged property owners to hold recycling when able.

Turning to Winter Storm Hernando, which blanketed parts of the city with over two feet of snow earlier this week.

The forecast for this storm ramped up rapidly, and what was first projected to be 1-2 inches of snow quickly escalated. On Friday afternoon, we started calling in Emergency Snow Shovelers, notifying them that we would be mobilizing them starting Sunday night. Also on Friday afternoon, we initiated our contracts with private vendors for additional equipment starting Sunday night. On Saturday, as the forecast continued to grow worse, we recognized that we may need additional mechanized equipment and initiated the process to gain approval to activate our emergency contracts.

Starting Sunday morning, DSNY went into full force mode, with over 2,600 Sanitation Workers working 12-hour shift after 12-hour shift. 700 salt spreaders spread more than 150 million pounds of salt, and 2,200 plows worked across the city to clear every street. But with high winds causing heavy drifts, many areas needed to be readdressed over and over for several days. This storm had unique challenges, particularly in Staten Island, where hilly and narrow streets posed challenges for our larger equipment, which required us to deploy smaller equipment, which is more time intensive.

This is what it means to be prepared – not just having plans in place, but being ready to pivot whenever and however needed.

We also went out and cleared pedestrian infrastructure earlier than ever before. With the help of 1,500 Emergency Snow Shovelers working both day and night shifts, including during the active storm, as well as over 500 pieces of equipment from outside vendors, we have cleared snow from 40,000 crosswalks, 13,000 bus stops, and 10,000 hydrants so far in the five days since the storm. Winter Storm Fern showed how critical prompt removal from these important pieces of infrastructure is, and we have since geocoded bus stops and crosswalks to help us track this work. We also took steps to increase the number of Emergency Snow Shovelers, including offering increased pay and easing restrictions to become one, such as allowing walk-ins without an appointment. And we deployed vans to distribute shovelers more efficiently. Thankfully, the warmer temperatures made this work faster than the last storm, but we are still continuing melting operations given the significant quantities.

And of course, property owners continue to play a critical role in ensuring the city is accessible for all. By 8:30pm Monday, property owners were once again responsible for clearing a four-foot path on the sidewalk, as well as around fire hydrants, unsheltered bus stops, and paths to crosswalks and catch basins. So far, we have issued nearly 600 summonses to property owners who failed to meet this responsibility.

Thanks to the unprecedented number of Emergency Snow Shovelers, Sanitation Workers were able to continue salting and plowing while resuming collection Wednesday night. Trash and compost collection is underway and New Yorkers should follow their normal schedule, even if material is collected at a different time of day than they are used to. We are once again asking New Yorkers for their patience, and to hold their recyclable material until next week, if possible.

Together these two storms demonstrated what we already knew, that no two storms are alike, and that our response must be tailored to the specific conditions. Having served with the Department

for seven out of the ten biggest storms in the city's recent history, I have continued to be impressed at how we are able to adjust our operations to meet the needs of each unique storm.

Lastly, we are grateful to our partner agencies for working with us on snow removal, especially NYPD, DOT, MOPD, Parks, DEP and NYCEM. Together, we work around the clock to ensure that the city that never sleeps can run smoothly and safely after a snowfall. We also appreciate the Council relaying constituent concerns and hope that we were able to address them quickly.

Our storm response was the culmination of years of planning and refinement to our operations, coupled with a new commitment to clearing more areas of the city. We know New Yorkers can't wait for the snow to melt, so our workers went above and beyond to make it easier for all New Yorkers to get around this great city.

Of course, there is always more to do, and I look forward to discussing next steps as we answer any questions you may have about our work after you hear from my colleague from the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.