



For Immediate Release

CHANGES TO CITY SNOW CLEARING WILL MEAN MORE DANGEROUS ROADS AND NO REAL COST SAVINGS SAYS CUPE 503

Ottawa, July 5, 2016 – On Wednesday, July 6, 2016 the Transportation Committee of the City of Ottawa will debate a report from the accounting firm KPMG that calls for major reductions in the level of winter road maintenance in Ottawa.

“As a former City of Ottawa snow plow operator, I am very concerned about these proposals to decrease the City’s standards for snow and ice clearing. I know firsthand how hard city snow plow crews work to keep our roads safe in the winter and these proposed cuts would make it much harder for them to keep the public safe” says James Watson, Vice President of CUPE Local 503.

The plan being put forward by the accountants of KPMG would mean that plowing and salting of city streets would start only after higher levels of snow had fallen. It would also increase by several hours the typical response time for salt trucks and plows to reach many of the bus routes and neighbourhood collector streets across the City.

“Snow clearing is a basic public service that every resident – drivers, transit users or pedestrians – relies on to keep them safe and to allow them to get to and from work or school without major delays” said Watson. “City Council needs to listen to their constituents on this issue – people don’t want slower, less safe commutes.”

Ottawa's current standards for snow clearing are the same as those adopted by other major cities that share our harsh winter climate – including Winnipeg and Quebec City -yet the City has been able to keep its winter maintenance costs per kilometer of roadway to a level comparable to the much warmer City of Toronto.

With respect to the accountant's proposal to save money by contracting out more of the maintenance work to for-profit operations, Watson says you need only look to the Province of Ontario's experience to see why having firms looking to make a profit being responsible for winter road clearing is a bad idea. "Ontario's Auditor General in her 2015 special report found that contracting out winter maintenance of our major highways had made them less safe and had led directly to an increase in the number of fatal collisions due to snow and ice buildup. She found that contractors would scrimp on salt and use improper equipment to clear the roadways they were responsible for."

Noting that provincial highway contractors were fined more than \$10 million in 2015 for poor performance, Watson asked "Why would we want to bring the same failed system to Ottawa?"

CUPE 503 believes that the changes proposed by the accountants of KPMG are dangerous and should not be adopted by the City. City streets should continue to be plowed to the same standards as they have been for many years by dedicated city crews.

CUPE 503 is the largest CUPE Local in Eastern Ontario representing thousands of public and private sector workers across Eastern Ontario as well as up the Ottawa Valley.

For further information: James Watson, CUPE 503 Vice President
Office # 613-230-2456