

Date: October 29, 2021

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Eric Lopez, Director of Public Works 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Street Sweeping Update**

Cleaning city streets is a critical public health and safety function managed by the Public Works Department (Department). Keeping streets clean is necessary to comply with the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, which is put in place to protect litter and debris from entering the storm drain system and eventually the ocean. Street sweeping not only removes debris-like litter, but also sediment that can carry heavy metals and bacteria into waterways.

Background

The Department's Street Sweeping Division (Division) is designed to provide weekly service to Long Beach residents and businesses, including sweeping of streets, beach lots, bike lanes, special events, emergency response cleanups, State-owned roadways throughout the city, and upon request. The operation has up to 14 routes to service per day, and on an annual basis, sweeps approximately 140,000 miles of streets and collects approximately 11,000 tons of debris. Routes are designed so that only one side of each street is swept on a particular day making parking available on the other side of the street each day.

Budgeted staffing for the Division includes 17 Motor Sweeper Operators (MSO's) and 1 Supervisor. The fleet includes 20 mechanical broom and regenerative air sweepers. A shortage of staff or operable equipment may result in "open routes" that do not have an operator and/or vehicle assigned to them. Every effort is made to sweep open routes, and operators are instructed to converge on these routes after completing their assigned route and time zone. When doing this, operators must service the open area during the posted time zone and cannot return afterward or the next day as vehicle parking will obstruct the sweeper from completing a proper sweep. Staff are tasked with rotating open routes to avoid a particular street from being missed two weeks in a row. However, there have been occasions when one side of a street will be missed one week and the other side of the street is missed the following week. This may erroneously give the impression that a route was missed two weeks in a row.

Challenges

The Division has been operating with three vacant MSO positions and a vacant supervisor position for several months. During this time, an MSO has been acting as an interim supervisor creating a fourth vacant MSO position. These vacancies have been further impacted by staff's normal use of sick time, vacation/personal leave time, approved Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) time, and required quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19. At the lowest point, the street sweeping operation had only 9 MSO's on an average day to complete between 12 to 14 routes, which does not meet the minimum requirements to effectively complete operational assignments.

In previous years, the Division could utilize Refuse Operators or Parking Checkers to fill in as MSO's and support street sweeping when necessary. This is no longer an option as each of these job classifications are now represented by different labor organizations, which restrict this change in job duties. However, staff plans to discuss this matter with the labor organizations with the goal of creating more flexibility during urgent and emergency situations to minimize service impacts to the public.

There have also been staffing challenges in the Fleet Services Bureau (Fleet) in the Financial Management Department, which have impacted street sweeping activities. Although the Fleet team has well trained street sweeper mechanics, they have recently been experiencing additional staffing shortages due to COVID-19 exposures and vacancies. These shortages often result in the Division utilizing air sweepers along broom sweeper routes or, in rare cases, the operation not having enough vehicles to service each route.

There are also some inefficiencies with the type of equipment in the street sweeping fleet. The street sweeping fleet is comprised of 14 mechanical broom sweepers and 6 regenerative air sweepers. Broom sweepers are the preferred vehicle in most circumstances as they are more effective and efficient compared to the air sweepers when used on city streets. Air sweepers must be driven more slowly to provide a quality sweep on street routes. They are also not equipped to dump their collected load in the field like broom sweepers and must return to the Temple and Willow facility each time they are full of debris to empty their load, which may happen several times per day. These inefficiencies leave staff with much less time to converge on open routes when necessary.

In addition to staffing and equipment challenges, a few years ago, the Department reduced street sweeping parking restrictions along parking impacted routes from four-hour time zones to two-hour time zones to alleviate parking challenges in those particular neighborhoods. These shorter time zones have also made it much more difficult for operators to converge on open routes and complete those assignments.

Solutions

To help alleviate some of the staffing challenges due to vacancies, the Division has partnered with other departments and bureaus to receive assistance from employee classifications that are in the same labor organization as MSO's and are allowed to drive sweepers in emergency situations. The Civil Service Department recently completed a recruitment for the MSO job classification, which allowed the Department to hire three additional MSOs. One MSO started on September 20, 2021, a second started October 25, 2021, and a third is scheduled to begin in November. The Civil Service Department has also committed to prioritizing the recruitment for the vacant Supervisor position. Additionally, the Department received authorization to hire unbudgeted non-career MSO's to provide support when the operation experiences shortages and to ensure sweeping is completed along non-traditional routes, such as protected bike lanes.

To help alleviate the equipment challenges, staff are working with other departments to identify vehicles the Division may borrow, if necessary, as well as making progress toward updating the street sweeping fleet. To help the Division, Fleet has reallocated their resources to train additional

mechanics on repairing street sweepers to ensure that there are enough vehicles to service assigned routes each day. Additionally, Fleet is working with the Environmental Services Bureau to replace a portion of the regenerative air sweepers with mechanical broom sweepers on an accelerated timetable. The City will retain two to three air sweepers to be used at special events, beach lots, and other areas where they are most effective.

Moving Forward

Fall tends to be the most challenging time for street sweeping. The period from October to February is referred to as “leaf season” due to trees shedding their leaves and creating an unusual amount of debris in the streets, especially along streets lined with canopy trees. To compound the challenge this creates, residents often blow their leaf debris into the street, adding to the piles of leaves that street sweeping vehicles are not designed to collect. Often, MSO’s must make four or five passes along one street to remove the piles of debris to the best of their ability.

To reduce the challenges experienced during this time of year, staff will conduct an annual education outreach program primarily focused on residents along high debris routes, advising them that they should bag their debris and place the bags in their trash can or, if there is no space, they may schedule a free special collection through the Refuse Hotline at (562) 570-2876.

To address concerns of routes having been missed in consecutive weeks, staff have developed a new route tracker to better manage rotating open routes, with the goal of not missing any route more than once per month. While this goal may prove challenging with staffing and equipment shortages in the short-term, staff believe it is attainable in most circumstances and will be consistently met once staffing and equipment challenges are overcome.

Moving forward, residents should not have routes missed two weeks in a row, however, they may call (562) 570-2890 to report missed routes or express other concerns regarding the street sweeping operation.

Conclusion

Staff believe that by implementing the solutions described above, including hiring new, permanent MSO’s, adding non-career MSO’s, accelerating the replacement of certain vehicles, training additional mechanics, and hiring a permanent supervisor, the street sweeping operation will be able to provide the quality service our residents and businesses expect from the City.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Diko Melkonian, Deputy Director of Public Works, at Diko.Melkonian@longbeach.gov or 562-570-2804.

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