

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FIRST SURVEY

WHAT COMES NEXT



NOTEWORTHY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FIRST SURVEY

A number of developments have emerged that bear on the smoothness of city streets, in New York and elsewhere, since we undertook our first survey. Six examples follow:

1. Starting after the completion of our first survey, the Mayor's Office and the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) announced the first of what has become an annual 'Pothole Repair Blitz' – "a comprehensive Citywide initiative designed to identify and repair potholes on roadways throughout the five boroughs." The city reports: "In 1998 DOT received 4,748 pothole complaints and filled 29,711 potholes. In 1999, DOT received 4,819 pothole complaints and filled in 31,881 potholes. This year [2000] DOT has received 2,900 pothole complaints and, thus far, [as of October 16, 2000] has filled in 52,018 potholes."³ Perhaps this regular concentration on pothole complaints and repairs accounts for the finding, reported here, that riders are encountering fewer significant jolts than they had in 1997.
2. The New York City Comptroller's Office reports that in fiscal year 1998, claims filed for roadway-related personal injury numbered 1,552, the highest number of claims filed in a year in the past ten years. In fiscal 1997, 1,417 roadway-related claims were filed. The dollar amount of settlements and judgements obtained in response to personal injury claims against the City of New York resulting from roadway conditions was \$9,611,729 in fiscal 1998 and \$11,544,090 in fiscal 1997. One of the ten largest settlements made in FY 1998 was a roadway-related claim; the "claimant alleged defective roadway resulted in car accident causing brain injury and quadriplegia. *Settlement \$3.75 million.*"⁴ [Italics theirs.] Clearly, poor roadway conditions continue to be costly in human and monetary terms in New York City.
3. A study of New Jersey's highways by the New Jersey Alliance for Action reports that "rough roads cost each motorist 160 dollars a year in extra repairs and operating costs."⁵
4. Several state transportation agencies (Georgia, Arizona, Kansas, for example) are using profilometers to gauge the smoothness levels of the work of their paving contractors and are offering bonuses for extra effort to meet "finely calibrated smoothness standards." According to the Wall Street Journal, a state official in Arizona reports that "the roads are as much as 50% smoother and that incentives didn't significantly increase costs." Federal Highway officials are reported to have said: "Smoother roads are a top priority of drivers and last longer."⁶ Arizona also paves roadways immediately after milling them – a process not applied in New York City, but one that could reduce accidents and prove more effective than the current method in which several days of rough, milled streets are exposed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic.
5. The Center on Municipal Government Performance has presented the work it has done on measuring the smoothness of New York City streets at two annual meetings of the national Road Profilers Users Group (RPUG). RPUG consists of international government transportation officials and members of the academic community who are experts in road surface measurement and maintenance. Comments from experts there confirm that our approach is consistent with the state-of-the-art in roadway measurement.

³ Press Release #397-00, Monday, October 16, 2000. Press Office, Office of the Mayor, City of New York

⁴ *New York City Comptroller's Annual Claims Report*, Fiscal Year 1998, August 1999

⁵ Associated Press, October 25, 2000

⁶ *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 1999, page one.

6. Findings from the first street smoothness survey have been used at the community level to request meetings to discuss street conditions with officials from the Department of Transportation and to help formulate community district budget requests for street repairs.

WHAT COMES NEXT

We expect to conduct, sponsor or otherwise assist in future surveys so that changes in the smoothness of the streets can continue to be monitored by the public and government and problem areas can be targeted.

These surveys can also serve to stimulate government to experiment with new approaches to repairing the streets that may be more efficient and effective than those currently being applied. One example of a desirable change could be combining the process of milling streets with paving them, instead of leaving an interval of days in between the two processes during which accidents and car damage are likely to occur. New technologies may provide other opportunities for improvements.

We will be looking at technological and other opportunities that can assist the perpetuation of these surveys and their accessibility to the public in general, and to all communities in the city.

Along with our ongoing work with government officials in New York City, we continue to discuss with and encourage other cities to apply and adapt our approach so that information exchanges can flourish and inter-city comparative data can become available.