

## **WSDOT, State Patrol develop additional strategies for snow, ice responses**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : December 2, 2010 at 5:36 am

OLYMPIA — The next time snow or ice covers roadways in the Puget Sound area, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Washington State Patrol (WSP) will employ new tactics and strategies to keep traffic moving. Two, new Joint Response Teams, coupling a WSDOT snowplow and a WSP patrol car, will be deployed to priority collisions involving buses, semi-trucks or other large vehicles. The teams will work in the King County area and if the concept proves useful, it may be expanded to other areas of the state. Among many accidents during last week's snow, ice and sub-freezing temperatures, a series of collisions involving semis and buses on I-5 in Tukwila blocked all southbound lanes, stalling traffic for hours. The problem was compounded by deteriorating road conditions, the absence of passable shoulders, the inability of large sanding rigs to get through the traffic, and a shortage of Class C tow trucks capable of moving buses and semis.

During a 24-hour period Monday and Tuesday, the State Patrol responded to 1,044 collisions and 987 disabled vehicles in Western Washington — about 10 times the normal number. Many involved buses and trucks. Another new strategy is for WSDOT to convert existing pickup trucks into mini-sanders, which will more easily maneuver between stopped vehicles than full-size sanders or snowplows. The mini-sanders will work alongside troopers to reach collision scenes more quickly in highly congested areas. Equipment will be ordered soon for the vehicle conversions. "Our people in the field saw some opportunities for improvement and developed a good action plan," said Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond. "We want to improve our ability to respond directly to high-impact collisions, especially involving large vehicles, that potentially could impact hundreds of other motorists." WSP Chief John R. Batiste said large-vehicle collisions have been a problem for the State Patrol. "We're still seeing large semi-trucks, without chains, jackknifing and bottling up hundreds of other cars behind them," said Batiste. "Our troopers will be writing citations for all chain-up violations they spot, even if there hasn't yet been a collision." The State Patrol and WSDOT will consult on whether or not chains become mandatory as conditions warrant, recognizing that there are no good chain-up areas on Puget Sound-area freeways. WSDOT and the State Patrol will work with the Washington Trucking Association to address the issue. WSDOT and the State Patrol also plan to: Improve communication with off-freeway jurisdictions, particularly about emerging weather conditions, recognizing that decisions made by one entity can have significant impacts on others. Review how the I-5 express lanes are utilized during snow events, and improve coordinated decision-making within WSDOT and with transportation partners about altering normal schedules for reversing the lanes and other operational issues. WSDOT and WSP already work together on many issues. Under a Joint Operations Policy Statement, the two agencies routinely coordinate their responses to collisions, disabled vehicles and other events that block roadways. Hammond and Batiste said they are reluctant to over-promise during battles with Mother Nature, particularly because a daytime snow event such as the one last week is one of the biggest challenges responders can face. "If it snows at night, people have the option to stay home," Hammond said. "If it snows during the day, people have to try and get home."

That creates rush-hour traffic volume on roads that sometimes are nearly impassable.&rdquo;