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For Immediate Release

[Four Simple Steps for Winter Maintenance of Protected Bike Lanes](#)

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The popularity of protected bike lanes as a way of increasing ridership and improving safety is growing rapidly in North America, from 78 in 2011 to 550 in 2018. Are concerns about winter maintenance holding your community back from adding these facilities to your roadways? Thanks to a number of clever innovations, you need not let that concern hold you back from deploying bike lanes and cycle tracks in your city.

What is a “protected bike lane” you ask? Think of it as a sidewalk for bikes. Using [flexible posts and bollards](#), planters, curbs, or parked cars to separate automobiles from cyclists, protected bike lanes are an essential element of a network of bicycle-friendly routes. There is at least one protected bike lane now in over 100 cities nationwide.

Protected bike lanes have been shown to increase ridership and improve the confidence of cyclists in many communities in recent years. For example, the City of Seattle found that ridership increased more than 400 % when a mere painted bike lane was upgraded to a protected bike lane using flexible posts. Other cities cite similarly large increases in ridership after installing protected bike lanes. A recent paper in the [Journal of Transport and Health](#) found that improved safety outcomes are “associated with a greater prevalence of bike facilities – particularly protected and separated bike facilities.”

However, in northern states which receive regular snowfall, concerns over how to maintain them in winter months have held some agencies back from deploying what otherwise is a healthy addition to their infrastructure. Typical snowplows are far too wide for five-to-seven foot bike lanes, so how do maintenance crews keep these facilities open for riders in the winter?

The solution to this problem lies in the development of downsized maintenance vehicles. Manufacturers like Avant, Ventrac, Kubota, Mathieu, Multihog, Polaris and others have developed small, multi-purpose tractors and utility vehicles which enable crews to efficiently clear snow-covered bike lanes in winter, and double as sweepers and washers for summer operations. Below are just a few examples of success stories.



Boston, MA, which receives 48 inches of snow in an average year, employs six model 760 mini loaders made by Avant Tecno USA in addition to three Polaris BRUTUS utility vehicles to effect snow clearing efforts on sidewalks and bike lanes during the winter season. For the rest of the year, these vehicles are utilized for neighborhood trash collection. These versatile vehicles can be used year-round, and have various attachments including a plow, snow blower and sweeper broom.

Salt Lake City, UT, recipient of 60 inches of the white stuff each winter, added an objective to create a prioritized “snow plowing schedule for bikeways” in their “Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan”. The City uses small Kubota plows that fit within the protected bike lanes to clear them of snow; plowing occurs at the same time as the streets on which they are located.

In Chicago, responsibility for snow removal in 248 miles of bike lanes is shared between the Dept. of Transportation and the Dept. of Streets and Sanitation. The City provides a response mechanism for reporting bike lanes which have not been cleared by calling a “311” service request line. Some of their bike lanes employ flexible bollards inserted into embedded anchor cups which can be removed during winter months, simplifying maintenance operations. To clear their 4 miles of protected bike lanes, Chicago crews use some of the same equipment used by Salt Lake and Boston.

Creating protected bike lanes – bike pathways separated from automobile traffic with devices like [flexible bollards](#) – both increases ridership and improves safety. Protected bike lanes are a positive addition to city infrastructure and cities in snowy climates need not shy away from implementing them due to concerns over winter maintenance. Many different styles of equipment are available for snow removal that have additional uses year-round.

For further information on these three installations, a paper prepared by the Volpe Center of the US DOT and published by NACTO, the National Association of City Transportation Officials provides additional details: “Downsized Street Maintenance Vehicles”, October 2019, <https://nacto.org/downsized-street-maintenance-vehicles/>

Further information on flexible posts and bollards for protected bike lanes is available here: <https://www.pexco.com/traffic/traffic-safety-solutions/posts-for-separated-bike-lanes/>

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