

# Roadrunner *Express*

Nebraska ♦ Department ♦ of ♦ Roads

News in Brief

March 2016

## Highway Crews Earn A+ for Response to Groundhog Day Blizzard



The Groundhog Day blizzard, aka Winter Storm Kayla, hammered most of Nebraska with heavy snow and whiteout conditions powerful enough to go down in the record books as the “Blizzard of ‘16.” Snowfall ranging from 12-18 inches, driven by wind gusts of 50 mph or more, left much of the state paralyzed on February 2nd. The roads were so treacherous in some central Nebraska locations that even snowplows got stuck. Despite these formidable conditions, Nebraska Department of

Roads’ highway crews worked tirelessly battling the elements and clearing the roads, with safety the first priority.

While eastern Nebraska was spared from the worst of the storm, crippling blizzard conditions prevailed from southwest Nebraska up through northeast Nebraska and on into Iowa. In response to the perilous driving conditions, the Nebraska Department of Roads closed Interstate 80 from Lincoln to North Platte, roughly a 220-mile stretch, for over 24 hours.

The closure was temporarily extended as far west as Kimball, due to motels and truck parking filled to capacity. Westbound traffic was allowed the entire time from Ogallala, according to Roger Klasna, District 6 Operations & Maintenance Manager.

The decision was made as part of a unified effort between the highway districts affected by the blizzard and the operations center in Lincoln, as Roads officials monitored conditions across the state and around the clock.



Plowing the snow on I-680 in Omaha, near the Pacific Street Interchange.

Photos by Dan Luedert, NDOR





Snowplow forges a path on the I-680 off-ramp to Pacific Street in Omaha.



Marv Dethloff, Construction Tech II, gets the job done plowing the roads in Omaha.

### Safety First

“We didn’t want to get caught with one of those incidents where there could be thousands of stranded truckers and motorists,” said Tom Sands, NDOR Operations Manager. “By closing I-80 we were able to get the roads cleared without jeopardizing the safety of the traveling public and our roads crews.”

Those closure decisions paid off, with motorists – truck drivers in particular – giving the Roads Department and the Nebraska State Patrol high marks in the way they handled the blizzard. According to the State Patrol, there were no serious accidents or fatalities on the interstate

*“Everyone in the district came together and did an outstanding job of battling the elements to clear the roads in a timely and safe manner.”*

-Wes Wahlgren

during the blizzard. Some drivers even said that it was well worth the over 24-hour wait. According to Charlie Endorf, one of hundreds of drivers stuck at Shoemaker’s Truck Stop in Lincoln from Tuesday to Wednesday afternoon, “I would give the Nebraska Department of Roads an A-plus. The roads were just perfect when I got back on the road to North Platte.” In addition to the I-80 closure, a number of highways across the state were rendered impassable and were closed until conditions improved. It was a rare occurrence in the state with so many roadways closed at the same time due to weather conditions.

Grand Island, in District 4, received 18.3 inches of snow, the most recorded in the state during the February 2 snowstorm and a record amount for that date, according to National Weather Service reports. Other snowfall amounts included Hastings, with 15.7 inches, and Kearney, with 11 inches. District 4 Engineer Wes Wahlgren said this was the worst blizzard he had seen in the area since 2009, and he was impressed with the response of Allen Horak, District 4 Operations & Maintenance Manager, District 4 maintenance crews, and District 4 construction employees. “Everyone in the district came together and did an outstanding job of battling the elements to clear the roads in a timely and safe manner.”



Three tow plows make their way along I-80, just east of the South US-77 interchange, headed west to Grand Island to help with snow removal operations.

Photo by Jeff Oehm, Hwy. Maintenance Supervisor, Lincoln

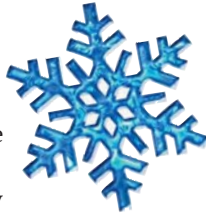


## Tow Plow Trio

Roger Kalkwarf, District 1 Operations and Maintenance Manager, said his district sent three tow plows loaded with materials, including salt-Ice Slicer and Apex (liquid) to spread on I-80 in the Grand Island area, which helped to speed up snow removal operations. He added that he was glad for the opportunity to help his neighboring district. "It is important to work together as a team during these types of emergency situations. You never know when the tables might be turned and we would need assistance."

In Lincoln, Kalkwarf said that I-80 was closed at Mile Marker 399 (airport), instead of the usual closure location, Mile Marker 395 (Shoemaker's Truck Stop), due to the high volume of traffic there as a result of the large amount of snow and the 50+ mph winds received in District 4. Kalkwarf noted that it was a challenge to manage the truck traffic, with large numbers of trucks at the Pleasant Dale and Milford Interchanges due to travel on US-6. Message boards were activated at N-2 at Nebraska City and Syracuse, notifying the public that I-80 was closed in Lincoln. This helped to slow the number of trucks arriving at the Palmyra gas station and Bennet truck stop, which were already overflowing with truck traffic.

District 2 snowplow drivers, including Jeff Stolp, were out in force in the Omaha area. "We were doing what was necessary



## NDOR Heroes in Action

An example of heroism in action occurred during the February 2nd blizzard when District 4 employees coordinated with first responders to get a snowplow and caravan of vehicles to plow through the high snow drifts to get Dan Griffin, of Elba, to the Nebraska Medical Center in time to receive the lifesaving heart transplant he had been waiting on for over a year.

Because of their amazing efforts, not even the worst blizzard in years could stop it from happening. According to Dan's wife, Peggy, "These guys that got us here are unbelievable. We have a great rescue team in Elba and Nebraska Department of Roads are unbelievable, and State Patrol. Thank you for plowing a path to save my husband's life."

Link to the story as told by NebraskaTV  
<http://www.nebraska.tv/story/31132933/nebraskans-plow-a-path-to-save-a-mans-life>



A rotary blower clears snow on District 1 highways, including, (top left) N-92 near Wahoo; (right) N-92, between Brainard and N-15, south and east of David City; (bottom left) Junction of N-92 and US-81, headed toward Columbus.

Photos by Dallas Hayes, Hwy. Maintenance Supervisor, Lincoln



Motor grader and rotary blower work in tandem widening N-92 from Arnold to Merna, in District 6.

Photo by Andrew Chapin, Hwy. Maintenance Supervisor, Broken Bow



to push all of the snow back as far as we could... to make it safe out there," Stolp said. His supervisor, Jim Laughlin, Highway Maintenance Superintendent, noted that his team worked 12-hour shifts to make sure the highways and the interstate system were in acceptable shape.

### Challenging Conditions

District 3, which includes Norfolk and Columbus, had such poor visibility in many areas, that snowplows were pulled off the roads until the conditions improved. Ray Branstiter, District 3 Maintenance Operations Manager, noted, "Our snowplow drivers couldn't tell where they were and it was an extremely dangerous situation. We were also having issues with some of them getting stuck. Once the snow let up, the trucks were able to get back out there and clear the roads without any problems."

According to Rodney Weber, Highway Maintenance Superintendent at Norfolk, "At least 10 of our personnel were not able to make it to their homes during the blizzard and had to stay in motels, with friends or with co-workers. We worked long hours and had an emergency watch in place for 48 hours for the NDOR, State Patrol and County Sheriff's in case we were needed. After the blizzard we had several days of very high winds which caused many more hours and full days of snow removal because of drifting problems. Winging back and widening with blowers continued until the roadway was completely cleared."

Carlos Campa, Highway Maintenance Superintendent at District 6 in Lexington said his crews worked around the clock during the blizzard, dealing with zero visibility that posed a major challenge. "Once the winds diminished, we were able to make headway in getting the roads cleared."

### Outstanding Effort

District 7, which includes the McCook area, had several road closures, including US-6 between McCook and Cambridge, and a stretch of highway near Stockville, due to drifts as high as 12 feet, according to District 7 Engineer Kurt Vosburg. He noted that when their normal equipment was unable to open the road, a specially-equipped snow blower was dispatched to the area to get the job done. Ray Walrod, Highway Maintenance Supervisor in Imperial, said they were able to keep area highways open throughout the storm, with



Rotary blower opens N-18, 13 miles east of Stockville in District 7.



Motor grader with a "V" plow attached widens N-18, east of Stockville, in District 7.

### Snowfall totals - February 2-3, 2016

Omaha, 4.9 inches	Dakota Dunes
Lincoln, 6.4 inches	(So. Sioux City), 14.5 inches
Valley, 8.0 inches	Vermillion, S.D., 13 inches
Norfolk, 14.2 inches	Sioux Falls, S.D., 5.7 inches
Pierce, 18 inches	North Platte, 11.4 inches
Columbus, 13 inches	Grand Island, 18.3 inches
Stanton, 15.8 inches	Hastings, 15.7 inches
Sioux City, 12.5 inches	Kearney, 11 inches

Info. from Omaha World-Herald, February 3, 2016  
[http://www.omaha.com/weather/omaha-dodges-blunt-of-blizzard-as-storm-blitzes-areas-with/article\\_aa3e3027-5220-5b5e-8269-5523d9014bac.html?\\_dc=687270649243.1462](http://www.omaha.com/weather/omaha-dodges-blunt-of-blizzard-as-storm-blitzes-areas-with/article_aa3e3027-5220-5b5e-8269-5523d9014bac.html?_dc=687270649243.1462)

temporary delays in plowing when visibility dropped to near zero. Walrod added that he couldn't recall the last time the region had seen a storm of this magnitude. Highway Maintenance Superintendent Dan Jones of Holdrege agreed. "I've been here for over 40 years, and I've seen a few. This one ranks right up there at the top."

NDOR Director Kyle Schneeweis commended everyone for their efforts, both during and in the aftermath of the blizzard. He thanked those who worked closely with first responder partners, including city and county road crews, state troopers, local law enforcement, fire and rescue squads, noting, "I think the communications we had with our partners and the coordinated effort was impressive. With the roads closed during some of the snowstorm, the positive feedback we received was tremendous. It was an outstanding effort by everyone involved." ♦

N-18, 13 miles east of Stockville in District 7, after rotary blower tunneled through a 10- to 12-foot snow drift.



District 7 photos by Brad Geisler, Hwy. Mechanic District Supervisor, McCook

## We Get Mail, Email and Tweets ... Thanks to our winter operations teams



Here are a few of the many kudos received for NDOR's response during the February 2nd snowstorms...

### Via Email...

"Thank you for doing an amazing job of clearing I-80. We are traveling from Wisconsin to Utah and impressed with the job you all did clearing the interstate... couldn't have been easy."

-Nick Kovacs

"Just a quick note to say thanks to your crews for the good work the past few days. They put in some long hours and I think the area looks good for what we got for snow and wind."

-Sergeant Robert Veal #322, Nebraska State Patrol

"I just want to thank the great employees who operate the snowplows between Bayard and Scottsbluff on Hwy. 26. I live in Bayard and travel to Scottsbluff 5 times per week to get to and from work. If it were not for the great people who operate the snowplows on this stretch of highway I would not be able to do my job and help others. Thank You for the great job and commitment you have!"

-Jeffery Kildow

"My compliments to the maintenance crews trying to keep this section open/passable/clear due to blowing snow. We traveled to Cheyenne WY the morning of February 3rd and it was kind of tough in spots but crews were working on it. When we returned later in the day, we could see it was still drifting but crews were still there. Thanks again to all of your crews, especially District 5, for the effort they put into snow removal."

-Rick Wallace

### Via Mail...

I just wanted to say 'thanks' for doing such a great job of getting the roads cleared after the February 2nd blizzard. Highway 13 and Highway 20 were perfect when I traveled them on the 4th! Thanks again for all the good work.

Jan Jorgensen - Creighton, NE

### Via Twitter...

"Shout out to @NDOR for doing a great job on I-80! Drove from Shelton to La Vista with no problems! Great work!"

"@NDOR plow trucks have done a very nice job cleaning i80"

"serious props to @NDOR. I could barely scrape my windshield this morning but they managed to have the LNK-OMA interstate spotless."

"@NDOR thank you to the plow drivers who made our commute into work @Iso this morning a safe one!! Kudos!!"

"@NDOR are out doing a great job. Keep it up so we can all get back to work tomorrow."

"Two plows clearing three lanes! These guys are killing it out here! @NDOR#SnOMAhog"

"Antelope County thanks @NDOR for all it does! Stay safe through this storm!"