

DOT Projects A Headache For Queens Residents

By CRAIG McGUIRE

From a major rehabilitation project on Main Street to neglected potholes along Queens Boulevard, many residents from Astoria to the Rockaways are frustrated with sweltering in traffic while they bounce on swollen roadways.

However, with the city's Department of Transportation (DOT), reeling from deep budget cuts announced earlier this year, motorists can expect further delays.

"We are still assessing the effects the budget cuts will have upon our capital projects," said DOT spokesman Allan Fromberg.

Even longer than the choked lines of traffic crawling through Queens' congested streets is the long list of grievances harbored by countless motorists.

"It seems like everywhere you go, the streets and bridges are blocked, especially in the last year," said Robert Harris, president of the West Cunningham Park Civic Association. "We are willing to wait for smoother safer roads, but why so much, so fast?"

While Harris and countless other motorists are feeling overwhelmed by a perceived increase in road projects, in actuality the number of projects is declining.

"While the number of in-house resurfacing projects in Queens has heightened in the last two years," explained Frank Bocchichio, DOT Bureau of Highways acting Queens superintendent, "outside contract resurfacing and major capital projects are down."

Confronted by ravaged roads and buckling by-ways, residents often turn to their community board.

"When a project is approved, the DOT gives us a date we pass on to the residents," said Community Board 2 District Manager Dolores Rizzotto. "When the DOT does not show up by that date, (the residents) get mad at us, but we don't have the authority to tell the DOT to go anywhere."

"We have made requests for work in this board like the potholes in the west-bound main road of Queens Boulevard at 69th Street, that have yet to be addressed," added Rizzotto, whose board includes Long Island City, Maspeth and Woodside.

According to Fromberg, delays stem not from ineffi-

A perceived lack of cooperation among the various agencies and utilities, resulting in multiple same-site projects at different times, has left many motorists upset.

"After they are all finished at one site, the DOT will close and resurface the street, only to have a utility come a few weeks later and tear it up again," said Rose Rothschild, district manager for CB 4. "The DOT does a good job, but if they keep opening the street, it's as if nothing was done in the first place."

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"Right after a project was completed on 57th Avenue (between Grand Avenue and Queens Boulevard in Elmhurst), Con Edison came in and reopened the street," said Rothschild. "And, at a project on Broadway between Queens Boulevard and Baxter Avenue, the contractor kept the street open to the point he almost received a violation. The day after the street was closed, Brooklyn Union came in and opened up the street to work."

Said Fromberg, "Certainly, this is not some thing that happens often, but it does. Scheduling is done to try to coordinate with other agencies, but while it is rare, sometimes there are mistakes."

With a tight schedule strained by slowly evaporating

resources, DOT crews are forced to leapfrog from one community board to another.

"In this community board we have had problems after the DOT has finished projects and went on to another board," said CB 5 District Manager Gary Giordano. "While it's not a very high percentage, there are spots where problems develop, specifically with ponding." Ponding is the accumulation of water following a rain storm.

"To get (DOT) to come back once they've went to another community board is almost impossible," noted Giordano.

According to Bocchichio, most of the problems that develop once a project is completed — roughly 75 to 80 percent — are due to pre-existing conditions. "These are problems that would require major reconstruction to remedy," he said.

"Unfortunately, residents have to cope with a certain amount of ponding, which should take between 24 and 48 hours to seep into the ground. If it takes longer than that, you may have a more serious problem."

But while community board managers are sometimes frustrated by street repair problems they praise DOT for listening to their concerns. "In the last few years, the DOT has improved a lot," said Giordano. "They have been receptive."

Residents who are experiencing difficulties with damaged roadways should contact their community board. The DOT also offers a help line at 520-3311.