



February 8, 2015

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are ready for yet another weekend snow storm. This week's letter discusses weekend snow removal, the need for an infrastructure plan and the automobile tax.

With another storm approaching, the Mayor's office announced that schools will be closed tomorrow (Monday), and that a parking ban will begin at midnight tonight. Also at that time, the City will activate its "Snow Ready" hotline, which you can reach by calling 680-8080.

In his inaugural address, the Mayor announced the New Providence would be "A City That Works," a phrase the administration added prominently to its [Web Page](#). To support that goal, the City Council last Thursday approved a [Resolution](#) I introduced urging the administration to provide a telephone number residents can call on nights and weekends if their street needs to be plowed. Currently, the Public Works number (457-7950) is staffed only during the working week, and the "Snow Ready" hotline only works during an officially declared emergency; otherwise, a call to either number generates a prerecorded message. Pawtucket, East Providence, Johnston and North Providence all maintain 24/7 telephone lines for snow plowing service (even when it is not an emergency) in different, cost-effective ways. I met with the Chief Operating Officer to discuss the snow removal issue on Thursday and he said he would find a solution very soon, so that Providence can be a "City That Works" on snowy Saturday mornings.

In last year's election cycle, many candidates discussed the unmet infrastructure needs (streets, schools, sidewalks, etc.) that detract from economic growth and our quality of life. Like many cities, Providence issues bonds to fund capital needs, and today's Providence Journal published an [Op-ed](#) I wrote that offers an overview of Providence's needs and capabilities. I hope to work with the City Council to prepare a detailed report concerning the City's bond program, reviewing current outstanding bonds, the City entities that have the authority to issue bonds, and the City's infrastructure needs that can be addressed through bond financing. Such a report can provide the foundation for a comprehensive plan to address the City's longstanding infrastructure deficit.

On Thursday, January 29, Nick Freeman of the City Council Policy Research office and I made a [Presentation](#) at the annual meeting of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns concerning the low-value exemption to the car tax. The General Assembly is looking at certain aspects of the tax, including the data source the State uses to determine used car values, which is the retail "cream puff" price that includes a dealer's preparation and warranty. It would make more sense to use a lower figure, such as "trade in" value; however, while such a change could benefit taxpayers by lowering taxes across the board, it would also have a multimillion dollar impact on municipal budgets for such key programs as snow removal and road repair. In recent months, the steep decline in the price of gasoline has saved car owners hundreds of dollars, leading some to conclude that the timing is right to increase the gasoline tax to address the federal and state infrastructure budgets. In a similar way, the presentation proposes viewing the motor vehicle tax in the context of its prior history, the practice in other states, the cost of owning a car in Providence and the City's cost of maintaining roads for motorists. Oliver Wendell Holmes famously described taxes as "the price we pay for civilized society," and while it is clear that everyone believes their car taxes are too high, I am hopeful the presentation will support a discussion about ways to distribute this burden in a way that is fair to everyone, even if it is not enthusiastically embraced by anyone.

Sincerely,