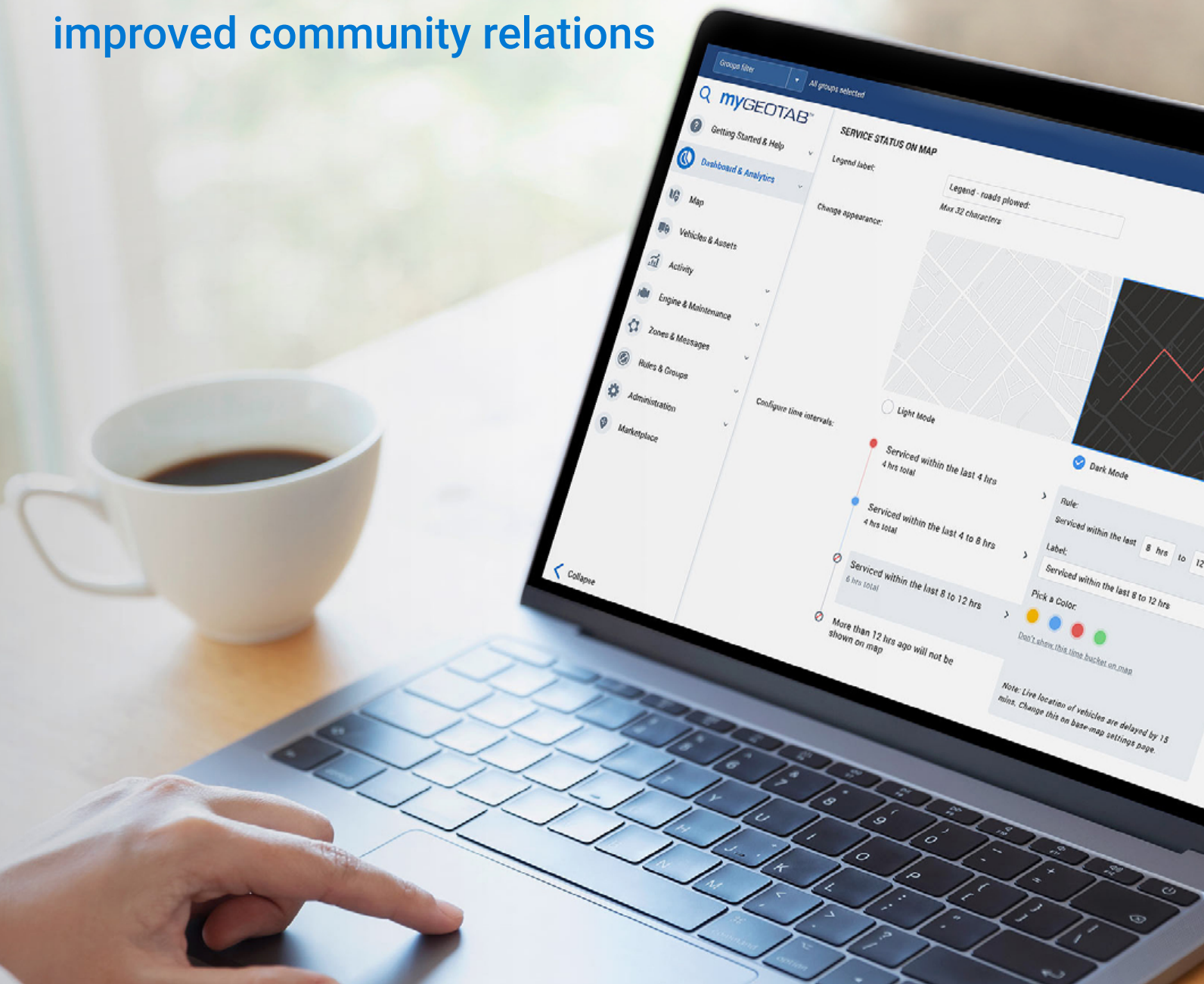# Gaining trust through transparency in the public sector

How sharing real-time road conditions can lead to improved community relations

GEOTAB

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks government agencies at any level face is building public trust. Constituents often feel left in the dark when it comes to decisions that impact their day-to-day lives. Or they lack the right channels to voice their concerns in order to make positive changes to policies and regulations in the community. Shedding light on more of the behind-the-scenes operations with constituents can have a very positive impact on building trust between the community and their local governments.

One area that citizens want more insight into is road maintenance and how their region is working to keep their roads safe and operating effectively. For municipal and local government departments it's not enough to provide road services when citizens need them. They want to know when and where services are being performed – particularly if these activities impact them and their ability to drive safely around their community.

Having knowledge of which roads are currently being serviced or where crews have already finished working can help bridge the transparency gap between government operations and their citizens. This level of insight into road operations, especially during winter, can greatly improve driver safety while providing citizens with a real-time view into how their government is working to keep them safe on the road.

Providing visibility into winter operations

Over 70 percent of the nation's roads are located in snowy regions according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Most of these areas will receive more than five inches of snow annually making them susceptible to winter driving conditions. In areas where snowfall is heavy or where drivers are not well-equipped to navigate winter driving, this can result in very dangerous driving conditions and an increase in accidents.

State and local agencies are doing their best to increase road safety and budget accordingly for proper road maintenance, often spending millions of dollars each year to repair infrastructure damaged by snow and ice. Even with this increased focus on maintenance, winter driving continues to be a real danger across the nation.

Snowy road conditions have been blamed for over 1,300 annual deaths and more than 116,000 people injured annually on winter roads. Each year, almost a quarter of all weather-related vehicle crashes occur on snowy, slushy or icy roads, with another 15% occuring during the snow event itself.

Keeping drivers safe during the winter season has proven difficult and has left citizens struggling to understand what it takes to clear their community roadways in a safe and timely manner. Finding a solution for sharing road conditions in real-time while working towards hitting scheduled targets for plowing could be a good start to increasing winter road safety while also building trust in the community.

Snow plowing Q&A

Every winter, municipalities and local governments are bombarded with citizen inquiries regarding snow removal. Particularly when a large snow storm has rolled through and left communities shut in, citizens can grow restless wondering why their streets have not been plowed sooner.

It is a delicate balance between sharing non-relevant information about snow removal operations and level-setting expectations in the community. Roads often are tiered in priority sequencing for faster snow removal on the main roadway arteries with residential streets closely following. Operators can choose to prioritize their routes as well, impacting the order in which a street may get cleared.

In these scenarios when improving mobility and increasing driver safety are imperative to a government's winter operations, having a way to communicate road services with citizens in real-time would be of tremendous benefit. This would alleviate call-in inquiries and make sure drivers are choosing the safest routes on cleared roads.

Lessons learned from Charlottesville, Virginia

A system that allowed for a higher level of shared transparency and keeping citizens up-to-date on road operations was exactly what the city of Charlottesville, Va. was hoping for.

Ron Cook, the systems performance analyst for the city, chose to implement the Citizen Insights platform from Geotab in order to push information to the public in real time.

Cook is in the process of launching a pilot program with the City's leaf collection service to get used to the system and promote it to the public before putting it to the real test for winter operations.

During the pilot, citizens will be able to see up-to-date information on which streets are set for leaf collection and which streets have already been collected. The goal of the pilot is to reduce callbacks, increase service with better routing – and perhaps, even finish the program early.

For Cook the real test of Citizen Insights – and the primary reason he selected the system – was to give real-time status updates to the public about snow removal on their streets. This is where the majority of callbacks happen and during snow events, any chance to eliminate as much inefficiency as possible while still meeting community needs and expectations is paramount.

During a typical snow event, Cook and his team receive numerous calls, sometimes multiple ones from the same resident. They want to know the status of when their street will be plowed, often worrying their street has been missed altogether.

With Citizen Insights, residents are able to see in real time which streets have been plowed, and more importantly, when their street will be plowed, and it is safe to venture out in their vehicles.

Cook expects Citizen Insights to also improve routing of the snow removal and salt spreader trucks helping to pinpoint inefficiencies and eliminate them.

Offering citizens new insight

With Geotab's newly released Citizen Insights solution, government agencies can tap into near real-time data available through their telematics solution and create a fully configurable, public-facing website that can provide citizens with the knowledge they need and want about government services.

This data will give those citizens insight into the agency activities that impact them most — when a service has been or is set to be performed for their street or area, including garbage pickup, snow clearing, salt spreading or other routine or emergency route-based services.

Similar to checking a weather app or site, Citizen Insights can become part of a commuter's daily routine to make sure they are traveling clear, serviced roads whenever they are moving through their city.

Benefits of the system

Charlottesville illustrates the three major benefits of the Citizen Insights platform:

Increase trust:

With a system built on transparency and the sharing of critical information, agencies can build trust within their communities. Provide data to the public and stakeholders to prove targets are being met and service levels are meeting expectations of the community.

Maintain control:

Manage the fine balance between sharing relevant and timely information while also keeping control of internal processes. Customize the portal to share only the information that matters most to your citizens.

Reduce inquiries:

Free up contact centers and cut costs related to inquiries. Redundant inquiries affect the ability to get the job done. With the information freely available, the public can see when and where their streets are scheduled for service.

Having an informed, engaged community is one of the most effective ways to build the kind of trust successful government agencies depend on. By sharing real-time road service updates, agencies can not only expect an increase in public trust but also improved efficiencies in their daily operations.

See how **Citizen Insights** can help government agencies provide the public with relevant, up-to-date road condition information.

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