**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 4, 2021**

**ILLINOIS TOLLWAY PREPARED FOR WINTER STORM**

**AND DANGEROUSLY COLD TEMPERATURES**

*Storm cleanup will be followed by Zero Weather Road Patrols to assist drivers*

**DOWNERS GROVE, IL –** The Illinois Tollway is opening its Snow Operations Center to manage the agency’s response to a winter storm bringing sleet and snow into the region today, and then launching extra road patrols to aid drivers during the dangerously cold temperatures expected to follow on Friday and continue through the weekend.

The Illinois Tollway is deploying its full fleet of 196 snowplows to clear roads during the storm, which could bring a mix of sleet and snow, possibly affecting drivers during their Thursday evening commutes and overnight travels.

Following the storm, with sub-zero temperatures and windchills forecast to settle across northern Illinois, the Tollway plans to begin operating around-the-clock Zero Weather Road Patrols to more quickly locate and assist customers who become stranded on the Tollway system.

“We’re prepared for these challenging winter conditions and will take whatever actions are needed to keep our roads clear and our customers safe,” said Illinois Tollway Executive Director José Alvarez. “We’ll have full crews out plowing and spreading salt during the storm and after that work is completed, we’ll shift gears and focus on running additional road patrols to safeguard customers who need assistance during the extreme cold weather expected to continue into next week.”

The Illinois Tollway typically operates Zero Weather Road Patrols whenever temperatures or sustained wind chills fall below zero degrees to bolster the roadway assistance already provided by Tollway H.E.L.P trucks and the Illinois State Police.

Drivers who becomes stranded or need aid along the Tollway system should dial \*999 for assistance and remain in their vehicle until help arrives.

The 24-hour Zero Weather Road Patrols search for drivers stranded in disabled vehicles and also respond to calls that come in to \*999 motorist assistance, Illinois Tollway dispatch or Illinois State Police District 15.

While the Illinois Tollway’s Highway Emergency Lane Patrol (H.E.L.P.) trucks sponsored by State Farm run from 4 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday, a minimum of 12 Zero Weather Road Patrols provide additional coverage throughout the day and night, including weekends.

Additionally, Illinois State Police District 15 patrol the Tollway system 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Zero Weather Road Patrols consist of crew cab trucks equipped with arrow boards for directing traffic around accidents or stranded vehicles and accommodate passengers if motorists need to be transported to a Tollway maintenance garage or Tollway oasis while service is obtained. As a precaution against the spread of COVID-19, glass partitions have been installed between the front and rear seats in motorist aid trucks and H.E.L.P. trucks to protect customers and Tollway workers operating the vehicles. Those vehicles also carry masks and hand sanitizer as additional precautions against COVID-19.

Cars or trucks with empty fuel tanks, flat tires, batteries needing a boost, or overheated radiators are just some of the most frequent problems reported among drivers needing help.

The Illinois Tollway reminds motorists the state’s “Move Over Law” ***requires*** motorists to change lanes or to slow down and proceed with caution when passing any vehicle on the side of the road with hazard lights activated. Drivers  may visit <https://www.illinoistollway.com/roadway-safety> for more information on *Give Them Distance*, *Drop it and Drive*, and other Tollway safety campaigns aimed at making the road safer for everyone.

**Winter Weather Travel Tips**

The Tollway offers the following travel tips to keep safe during dangerously cold weather:

* **Be sure your** **cell phone is fully charged** before heading out.
* **Be sure tires are properly inflated** during cold weather. Tires lose a pound of pressure for every 10 degrees the temperature drops.
* **Keep your gas tank at least half full** to avoid gas line freeze-up and ensure that you have extra to account for additional driving time if the weather is unfavorable.
* **Keep a cold weather safety kit** in your car that includes gloves, boots, blankets, road flares, water and a flashlight with fresh batteries.
* Stranded motorists should **turn on their emergency lights and remain in their vehicles** until help arrives.
* Cell phone users should **call \*999 motorist assistance** for roadway assistance and note the roadway and direction of travel and nearest milepost or crossroad.

**About the Illinois Tollway**

The Illinois Tollway is a user-fee system that receives no state or federal funds for maintenance and operations. The agency maintains and operates 294 miles of roadways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355), the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90), the Tri-State Tollway (I-94/I-294/I-80) and the Illinois Route 390 Tollway.

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