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CONSUMER WATCH

Lakefront path's holes finally getting patched

Winter took its toll, as did wait for asphalt plants to open

Jon Yates

What's Your Problem?

May 12, 2009

If you think the potholes on the city's streets are bad, you should check out some of the doozies on the lakefront trail.

Sharon Porta has. Every morning, the Chicago resident pedals her bike along the path, bobbing and weaving as she goes.

Porta said she called the city several times in April to complain but was told she would have to wait.

As the weather improved and the path grew busier, her patience wore thin.

On April 27, she e-mailed What's Your Problem? for assistance. Several days later, she took the Problem Solver on a walking tour of the most egregious areas, between the North Avenue and Oak Street Beaches.

The largest holes were outlined with yellow spray paint, a makeshift warning to passing runners and cyclists. By far the worst spot was a roughly 15-foot stretch of the northbound lane near East Banks Street that had been stripped to rubble.

"It's a mess," Porta said. "This is a truly dangerous situation."

The Problem Solver called Jessica Maxey-Faulkner, spokeswoman for the Chicago Park District, who said the trail, particularly the stretch between Oak Street and North Avenue, was badly damaged by a March storm.

Robert Rejman, director of capital construction for the Park District, said the storm threw broken concrete and asphalt onto the trail. After the storm passed, Park District workers plugged some of the holes with cold patch but had to wait to make more permanent repairs.

Rejman said the most severely damaged sections, like the one near East Banks Street, had to be ground down. Crews could not begin final repairs until the asphalt plants opened in late April, he said.

On May 4, Park District crews started work on the area between North Avenue and Oak Street, but by Monday afternoon they still hadn't fixed the hole at East Banks Street.

Rejman said the entire stretch should be completed by Friday.

"The asphalt is easy," he said. "It's the concrete that's a little difficult to do."

Rejman said that most springs the district budgets \$50,000 to \$100,000 for fixing potholes along the trail. This year the district expects to spend about \$200,000.

"We're on it," he said. "It's a long trail and it's very well-used and we do our best to keep it repaired, but wintertime does take its toll."

Porta said she still thinks the trail should have been repaired more quickly. After she gave the Problem Solver the pothole tour, she saw a bicyclist swerve to avoid the hole at Banks Street and almost topple over.

"Those need to be repaired before the bike path becomes crowded and dodging those potholes results in collisions," she said.

Update

Rob Holden has finally regained his independence.

The 53-year-old, who has cerebral palsy, had been virtually trapped inside his second-floor condo since a flood knocked out the elevator to his building Sept. 13.

The Rolling Meadows man, who moves with the aid of a wheelchair, was featured in the March 24 column. At the time, a spokeswoman for Otis Elevator Co. said repair efforts were hamstrung by a missing part.

In an e-mail to the Problem Solver, Holden said the repairs were completed Wednesday.

"I did some errands and a little shopping," he said. "Boy did that feel good!"

HAVE A PROBLEM? E-mail your story, providing as many details as possible, to yourproblem@tribune.com or write to What's Your Problem?, Newsroom, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. Please include your name and a way to contact you. We cannot respond to everyone, but we'll get to as many as we can and publish the results Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays.

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