

## Potholes: Severe winter leads to jaw-jarring rides for metro Detroit motorists

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Pot Holes

**Cars move among potholes along Southfield Road in Southfield Friday. Roads officials say it's a combination of factors — among them, older roads already vulnerable to the fast-changing weather conditions — that have led to hundreds of complaints from drivers. 'It's a perfect recipe for massive amounts of potholes,' said Craig Bryson of the Road Commission for Oakland County. / Kirthmon F. Dozier/Detroit Free Press**

While metro Detroit drivers are wishing and praying for a fast end to the string of winter storms that have wreaked havoc on travel, vehicles and nerves, the potholes left over from record-breaking snowfall and topsy-turvy temperatures could ultimately do even more damage.

Roads officials say it's a combination of factors — among them, older roads already vulnerable to the fast-changing weather conditions — that have led to hundreds of complaints from drivers using metro Detroit roads.

"In a state and a region that has underfunded roads, the road surface is in poor condition and more vulnerable" to damage, said Craig Bryson, a spokesman for the Road Commission for Oakland County. "Then you throw on top of that a winter like we're having with 50-degree temperature swings, preceded by record snow, followed by rain and then record temperatures — and snow again. It's a perfect recipe for massive amounts of potholes.

"If the roads were better, there would be far fewer potholes around."

A pothole on 11 Mile in Southfield had Mary Stack at Belle Tire on South Stephenson in Royal Oak Saturday, spending money on a new tire and rim, five months after getting new tires for her Acura. She's not happy, and she said she wants state legislators to find money to fix the roads.

"Get a backbone," Stack said of the state's politicians. "It's a disaster out there."

Patrick Pocius, assistant manager at the Belle Tire, said Stack is far from alone.

The potholes "are everywhere. It's terrible," Pocius said. "I've been with Belle Tire 12 years, and I've never seen it this bad."

He estimated that a quarter or more of his customers are dealing with damage caused by potholes this season compared to perhaps 10% during a typical winter.

Pocius said customers want to know which government entity they should call to complain. He often suggests they contact their county government.

"They're absolutely frustrated ... and they have every right to be," Pocius said, placing the cost of an average new tire and rim at about \$350.

One man from Detroit had his Jaguar towed to the tire shop two weeks ago after potholes destroyed all four tires and rims.

In the repair area of the shop, the carnage is everywhere. On a rack where a handful of rims might normally sit, as many as 30 dinged, dented and cracked rims sat on Saturday after being removed.

Leo Ciavatta, the maintenance superintendent for Macomb County Department of Roads, said some of the newer potholes are the result of water seeping into cracks, then freezing when the temperature drops. That forces movement in the surface pavement to accommodate the new layer, pushing pavement out of place. Oftentimes, this happens with replacement pavement that's been set to cover a previously made pothole, making a larger impression than its predecessor.

"It's a repetitious cycle," Ciavatta said. "We've got road crews that are addressing (potholes). It's nothing new when you go from cold to warmer (temperatures), and with all the snow and rain."

Potholes have become such a problem that Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel said recently that [drivers should call 911 to report problematic potholes](#), promising that damage-causing potholes would be addressed within an hour. That was quickly disputed by Michigan State Police, who said they did not want emergency lines tied up dealing with pothole problems.

Hackel said his stance has not changed, mentioning that potholes capable of damaging vehicles are a public safety issue and, therefore, a matter for law enforcement.

"If somebody's on the side of the road after damaging their car, and other cars could hit that pothole, if you call 911 ... we'll get to it in an hour — and fix it," he said.

A bumpy ride to work in downtown Detroit from her home in Royal Oak prompted a quick tweet from Molly Marco last Monday morning warning others that would come after her — or reassuring others taking the same stretch of road that someone else felt their pain.

"Asteroid-sized potholes on Woodward," Marco wrote under the handle [@Lifeiskitsch](#).

She takes the road to work because a freeway during rush hour is nothing she's willing to endure. The tweet was only a small part of her disdain for the roads, and their lack of smoothness, this winter.

"Fortunately, the roads have been snowy and slick and traffic has been ungodly heavy, so you don't feel the potholes as much," said Marco, 33, who works for her family's business, Taylor Optical Supplies in Grand Park Centre. "Going around 30 miles an hour or faster and accidentally hit one of those? Your car will be toast. My car is an '06 Corolla with 192,000 miles on it. I'm pretty sure one day I'm not going to see one of the potholes coming and my whole car is just going to bottom out."

Wayne County Public Services Chief Operating Officer Cindy Dingell said the amount of pothole work that crews are doing in Wayne County is similar to past years. During this winter driving season, crews have fielded about 1,400 complaint calls from residents and drivers as of Jan. 31, with 242 of those regarding potholes. And her crews immediately tackle those potholes she calls "wheel busters," which are a bit deeper and sharper than others.

"Pay close attention to where you're driving — and put down the distractions."

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