

Seasonal Roads

Seasonality is a big part of solarpunk. For most of the existence of our species, the understanding that the world changes throughout the year and that we should change our behavior to match was a huge part of the human experience. Our technology, cultures, routines were all linked to our surroundings and the seasons.

An incredibly complex web of supply lines, technology, and infrastructure, has allowed some of us to, perhaps briefly, abandon some of those practices. We build the same building in all climates and simply burn more fuel to heat or cool it until it's comfortable. Our homes and workplaces remain the same temperature indoors, whether it's a scorching summer day outside, or a howling blizzard, and our ability to travel during winter storms [comes at a tremendous environmental cost](#).

These

Packing the snow rather than plowing it

In New England, rural areas used to use sleighs in the winter, and [snow rollers pulled by oxen](#) to flatten the roads for travel. The idea of shoveling an entire road bare so you could drive on it would probably have seemed pretty extravagant to them.

A solarpunk society might carefully consider whether every road has actually to be kept bare of snow all year. Roads that see very little use in the winter might be closed to vehicles, or used as winter trails, packed down with electric snow groomers. These are a staple of ski mountains in the region today, but they're also a popular way to prepare snowmobile trails. They create a wide flat swath about eight feet wide which is generally dense enough to walk on comfortably in boots (similar to packed wet sand).

Packing the snow this way takes far less energy than physically pushing it out of the road. It also doesn't require road salt or other de-icers to keep the pavement clear enough to maintain traction with rubber tires. And because a nicely-packed trail is something of a convenience rather than a necessity for the types of ski-and-track vehicles that might travel on it, a ski groomer could make far fewer passes while still meeting the community's needs, whereas a plow truck fleet has to patrol throughout a storm in order to keep the roads clear and safe.

There are numerous types of vehicle suitable to these conditions. They're not as fast as a car on a highway but that's another tradeoff you might accept if you live in a remote location in a solarpunk world with a low reliance on automobiles. Some are purpose-built, others are seasonal conversions: much as the old farmers used to swap wagon wheels for sleigh skis, [people used to adapt their motor vehicles to meet the conditions](#).

These kinds of trails are also excellent for cross country skiing and snowshoeing, or just hiking.

Seasonality in Cities

[In Amsterdam and other European cities, people use the frozen canals as ice skating highways](#). Urban Cross Country Skiing is comparatively rare, but [some cities already do it](#). And there's certainly [some demand for it](#). In my current city, today, I often see cross country skiers getting up early to use the clear, smooth snow on the bike path before the plow trucks come through. Perhaps as a solarpunk city turns reclaimed roads into parks and other human spaces, more of them could be used as winter

trails. Perhaps even old highway overpasses/aqueducts could be left unplowed for skiing.

I've been thinking about doing some winter scenes - I've also noticed the lack. One thing I've been considering is if snow rollers, or a modern take on packing down snow instead of plowing it out of the way, might make a comeback in a society with fewer cars.

Seasonal roads - plowing the roads in deeply rural areas is a practice a little newer than automobiles. At least in New England, snow rollers were a common answer to the issue of snow piling up on the roads. These giant, heavy rollers were pulled by horses and used to pack down the snow so sleighs could travel on it. People would either have two wagons, one with skis, or would convert their vehicles to match the season. There are mods for trucks and vans that swap wheels for skis in the front and tracks in the back. And ski groomers could function well in the roll of snow rollers, turning seasonal roads into effective winter trails.

There's also this sort of capability to scale down roads and our expectations which might be really important given current infrastructure debt and likely incoming societal crumbles (at least in some places). By accepting a slower pace and scaling down our vehicles and expectations, we can get by with a much reduced road network - something that'll be pretty necessary if a large swath of the solarpunk scene gets the no cars future they want or if the next decades see a continued procrastination of expensive maintenance. Roads fall apart pretty rapidly even today, and our bridges and highway infrastructure are already past their design lifetimes in many parts of the US (I'm not qualified to speak to other areas).

Basically we can throw good money after bad forever trying to maintain the current state (which will entail a lot of rebuilding and new work) or we can scale it down and lower our expectations and put our prioritization on other stuff. Low Tech Magazine did a cool article on chinese wheelbarrows, and how they fit into this specific post-collapse-era when the road network fell apart that I think fits this thinking:

<https://solar.lowtechmagazine.com/2011/12/how-to-downsize-a-transport-network-the-chinese-wheelbarrow/>

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