

Seasonal Roads

Seasonality is an important aspect 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. It wasn't just efficient, it was necessary, given their general

An incredibly complex web of supply lines, technology, and infrastructure, has allowed some of us, perhaps briefly, to abandon those practices. We build the same building in all climates and simply burn more fuel to heat or cool it until its comfortable. Our homes and workplaces generally remain comfortable 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 aren't just conveniences, they're a structural part of a society that demands constant progress and profits no matter what the world outside is doing. Externalities like the salinization of everyone's drinking water and the death of huge swaths of our biosphere have to come after schedules and legal liability.

But they might not in a solarpunk society.

Packing the snow rather than plowing it

In rural New England in the 1800s, [snow rollers](#) were a common answer to the issue of snow piling up on the roads. These giant, heavy rollers were pulled by oxen and used to pack down the snow so sleighs could travel on it. People would either have a wagon and a sleigh, or would convert their vehicles to match the season. 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. You can find plenty of seasonal roads in rural areas today, but this suggestion would look more like the sort of broad yearly switch from wheels to skis you'd see in the late 1800s, rather than a handful of dirt roads closed to vehicles during winter and spring.

Seasonal roads would become winter trails, possibly 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 with a sort of corduroy texture, 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](#) for 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.

Rural areas that have undergone a population shift back towards denser towns and villages and more sparsely-settled areas everywhere else, might keep a handful of roads open between nearby communities or homesteads, while relying primarily on public transportation like trains and ropeways. More distant homesteads and villages would likely rely more on these seasonal options for reliable transportation.

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 reclaims streets into parks and other human spaces, more of them could be used as ski trails in the winter. Perhaps even old highway overpasses/aqueducts could be left unplowed for skiing.

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Last update: **2025/11/25 01:46**

