

For Information Only

Sewer Blockage Process

Presented To: Operations Committee

Presented: Monday, Nov 16, 2015

Report Date: Monday, Nov 02, 2015

Type: Correspondence for
Information Only

Recommendation

For Information Only

Finance Implications

The required funds have been identified in the operating budget.

Background

An earlier report for information was provided to council in February of 2015 (see Attached) with the expectation that the new process would be in place in 2015. This report provides a summary of the new business process which is now in effect. This new business process applies to private sewer lines between the building and property line.

Sewer backups can be caused by numerous factors, but the one thing that is consistent with any of these events is that they are inconvenient and stressful for the property owner. Most often, they are caused by aging infrastructure where pipes become cracked, allowing roots to enter, or a broken pipe creates an obstruction or a ridge where material cannot pass. The pipe could also settle and create a sag where sediment can accumulate and block normal flow. There are also instances where something improper has been flushed down a drain or toilet which can obstruct the pipe such as grease and rags. Regardless of the cause, W/WW would like to better support our customers through this process by making improvements to our existing business process.

The anticipated customer service improvements of the new process include:

- increased transparency and better information sharing with customers;
- a streamlined process to minimize the number of calls a customer needs to make to obtain service; and,
- better use of widely available and affordable technology to aid in more precise

Signed By

Report Prepared By

Paul Javor
Water/Wastewater Operations
Engineer
Digitally Signed Nov 2, 15

Division Review

Nick Benkovich
Director of Water/Wastewater Services
Digitally Signed Nov 2, 15

Recommended by the Department

Tony Cecutti
General Manager of Infrastructure
Services
Digitally Signed Nov 2, 15

Recommended by the C.A.O.

Kevin Fowke
Acting Chief Administrative Officer
Digitally Signed Nov 8, 15

decision making.

Current Process

The current process when experiencing a sewer backup is outlined below:

1. Customer both arranges for a sewer safety inspection with Union Gas and calls a plumber.
2. If the plumber suspects that the blockage is on the City side, the plumber contacts the City so that property line information can be verified while the plumber is onsite with their snake in the sanitary sewer service
3. If City staff determine that the blockage is on City side, then the plumber is instructed to send their invoice to the City for reimbursement (to a maximum of 2 hours)
4. The City will take any necessary follow-up actions to rectify any deficiencies on the City's portion of the sanitary sewer service to avoid future recurrences if the backup was a result of a problem on the City side.

New Process Description

Customers will have two options (A or B) that they can follow in the future, which are outlined below:

A) Customer Chooses City Service

1. Customer places a call to 311 to report a sewer backup.
2. The City contracted plumbing service is dispatched to the location of the blockage. The Plumber will call and arrange for the sewer safety inspection from Union Gas prior to mobilizing. The plumber will clear the blockage for the customer as well as perform a CCTV inspection of the sanitary sewer service.
3. The customer will get a copy of the CCTV inspection and report.
4. The next business day the responsible supervisor will review information related to the backup to determine responsibility for the blockage (cause of blockage, property line information, etc)
5. If the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the City, the City will take any necessary remedial actions to address the situation. If the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the customer, a fee will apply along with an explanation of the assessment of the information from the City.

B) Customer Chooses to hire a plumber of their choice

1. Customer will arrange for a sewer safety inspection from Union Gas
2. Customer will arrange for a plumber of their choice to attend to the blockage.
3. If the plumber and customer suspect that the blockage is the City's responsibility, the customer will need to submit information as part of the reimbursement process. This

process will have the same enhanced requirements for information as the contracted plumber requires so that all parties are operating with the same requirements

4. Should the information meet the requirements of the reimbursement policy, a reimbursement to the customer in the amount defined by the policy shall be paid (consistent with rates paid to the City's contracted service)
5. If the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the City, the City will take any necessary remedial actions to address the situation.

Discussion

The new process still allows the customer to choose their service provider. Should the customer choose the City to provide service, a more streamlined process with less calls is available to help them through the event they have experienced. It is anticipated that decisions will increase transparency and be easier to understand by using CCTV technology where a video of the service lateral will be obtained so that all parties can see what is going on inside the pipe. A copy of this diagnostic tool will be given to both the customer and to the City so that all parties have the same information. This is not a requirement in the current process and has been added to improve the transparency in decision making.

Costing will be controlled by changing the policy from a payment of two hours to paying either the contractor or the plumber through the reimbursement policy under the same rules. If the customer chooses to use the City service, they will not have to make any further calls for reimbursement as no invoice for service will be generated and the City will have the information required to schedule and act on repairing the deficiency.

Currently a tender has been issued to procure the services of a preferred provider. The tender is requesting a fee structure for the sewer cleaning. Once the tender is closed, staff will prepare a corresponding fee proposal that will be charged to the resident for blockages that have occurred on the private side. This fee will be included in the Water Wastewater Rates Bylaw and presented to Council during budget deliberations.

Conclusion & Timelines

Staff coordinated a meeting with the members of the plumbing community in February of 2015. Changes were communicated, their input was received and incorporated. A competitive process to obtain a service provider is underway with an anticipated start date of January 18, 2016. This update report also serves to launch a communication program to educate the residents of the upcoming new process to have a sewer backup cleared.

For Information Only

Improved Sewer Service Surcharge Response

Presented To: Operations Committee

Presented: Tuesday, Feb 03, 2015

Report Date Wednesday, Jan 21, 2015

Type: Presentations

Recommendation

For Information Only

Finance Implications

There are no financial impacts identified at this time.

Background

Introduction

One of the priorities identified in the Water Wastewater Tactical Plan was to examine and prioritize business processes that required improvements. Given the sensitive nature of the sewer backup business process, it was given a top priority for improvements which are outlined in this report.

Background

According to the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI), the City of Greater Sudbury has a higher than average sewer backup rate when compared to other OMBI municipalities. Water and Wastewater Services is focusing on initiatives to improve not only this statistic but also the customer experience in this area. One such initiative is revamping the CGS's sewer backup process in an effort to improve the overall customer experience.

Sewer backups can be caused by numerous factors, but the one thing that is consistent with any of these events is that they are a huge inconvenience and often stressful for anyone who experiences them. Most often, they are caused by aging infrastructure where pipes become cracked, allowing roots to enter, or a broken pipe piece may create an obstruction or a ridge where things cannot pass. The pipe could also settle and create a sag where the gravity flow does not move along properly anymore. There are also instances where something improper has been flushed down a drain or toilet which can obstruct the pipe such as grease that hardens and constricts the pipe or an object that plugs the pipe.. Regardless of the cause, W/WW would like to better support our customers through this process by making some improvements to our existing business process.

Signed By

Report Prepared By

Cheryl Beam
Supervisor III Distribution & Collection
Digitally Signed Jan 21, 15

Division Review

Nick Benkovich
Director of Water/Wastewater Services
Digitally Signed Jan 21, 15

Recommended by the Department

Tony Cecutti
General Manager of Infrastructure
Services
Digitally Signed Jan 28, 15

Recommended by the C.A.O.

Doug Nadorozny
Chief Administrative Officer
Digitally Signed Jan 28, 15

In developing the revised program, other Canadian municipalities were surveyed to determine what the City of Greater Sudbury could learn from other municipalities' response practices. The new sewer backup program that is being proposed in this report is very similar to many programs that have been received successfully by customers in other municipalities.

The goals of the new process include:

- increased transparency and better information sharing with customers;
- a streamlined process to minimize the number of calls a customer needs to make; and,
- better use of widely available and affordable technology to aid in more precise decision making.

The process changes are not anticipated to create any new budgetary impacts, only an improvement to the service that we offer our community, and an improvement in the consistency of the quality of the information that we use operationally to make decisions.

Current Process

The current process that a customer experiencing a sewer backup would follow is outlined below:

- 1) Customer both arranges for a sewer safety inspection with Union Gas and calls a plumber.
- 2) If the plumber suspects that the blockage is on the City side, the plumber contacts the City so that property line information can be verified while the plumber is onsite with their snake in the sanitary sewer service
- 3) If City staff determine that the blockage is on City side, then the plumber is instructed to send their invoice to the City for reimbursement (to a maximum of 2 hours)
- 4) The City will take any necessary follow-up actions to rectify any deficiencies on the City's portion of the sanitary sewer service to avoid future recurrences if the backup was a result of a problem on the City side

New Process Description

Customers will have two options (A or B) that they can follow in the future, which are outlined below:

A) Customer Chooses City service

- 1) Customer places a call to 311 to report a sewer backup. Customer will be advised to call back once they have arranged for their sewer safety inspection from Union Gas.
- 2) A contracted plumbing service is dispatched to the location of the blockage. The plumber will clear the blockage for the customer as well as perform a CCTV inspection of the sanitary sewer service.
- 3) The customer will get a copy of the CCTV inspection
- 4) The next business day the responsible supervisor will review information related to the backup to determine responsibility for the blockage (cause of blockage, property line information, etc)
- 5) If the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the City, the City will take any necessary remedial actions to ensure that there aren't future recurrences; if the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the customer, a flat rate fee will apply along with an explanation of the assessment of the information from the City.

B) Customer chooses to hire a plumber of their choice

- 1) Customer will need to arrange for a sewer safety inspection from Union Gas
- 2) Customer both arranges for a sewer safety inspection with Union Gas and calls a plumber
- 3) If the plumber and customer suspect that the blockage is the City's responsibility, the customer will need to submit information as part of the reimbursement process. This process will have the same enhanced requirements for information as the contracted plumber requires so that all parties are operating with the same requirements
- 4) Should the information meet the requirements of the reimbursement policy, a reimbursement to the customer in the amount defined by the policy shall be paid (consistent with rates paid to the City's contracted service)
- 5) If the cause of the blockage is determined to be the responsibility of the City, the City will take any necessary remedial actions to ensure that there aren't future recurrences

Discussion

The new process still allows the customer to choose their service provider. Should the customer choose the City to provide service, a more streamlined process with less calls is available to help them through the event they have experienced. It is anticipated that decisions will increase transparency and be easier to understand by using CCTV technology where a video of the service lateral will be obtained so that all parties can see what is going on inside the pipe. A copy of this diagnostic tool will be given to both the customer and to the City so that all parties have the same information. This is not a requirement in the current process and has been added to improve the transparency in decision making.

Costing will be controlled by changing the policy from a payment of two hours to paying either the contractor or the plumber through the reimbursement policy under the same rules. If the customer chooses to use the City service, they will not have to make any further calls for reimbursement as no invoice for service will be generated and the City will have the information required to schedule and act on repairing the deficiency.

Conclusion & Timelines

The next step in the process is to meet with interested parties in the plumbing community to present the proposed changes to them in a forum that allows them to ask questions and get the information that they may require to make changes to their processes or to get information to get better aligned to bid on our tender. The consultation meeting is anticipated to take place in February.

The City will issue a service contract for competitive bidding in March with an anticipated start date at the beginning of April. Corporate communications is compiling new reference material for customers to be posted on the website in March ahead of the implementation of the new procedure as well as hand-outs.



Updated Sewer Backup Process: (for backups in sewer service lines)

Presentation By:

Nick Benkovich, Director of Water & Wastewater Services;

Cheryl Beam, Supervisor III - Water Distribution and
Wastewater Collection



February 3, 2015



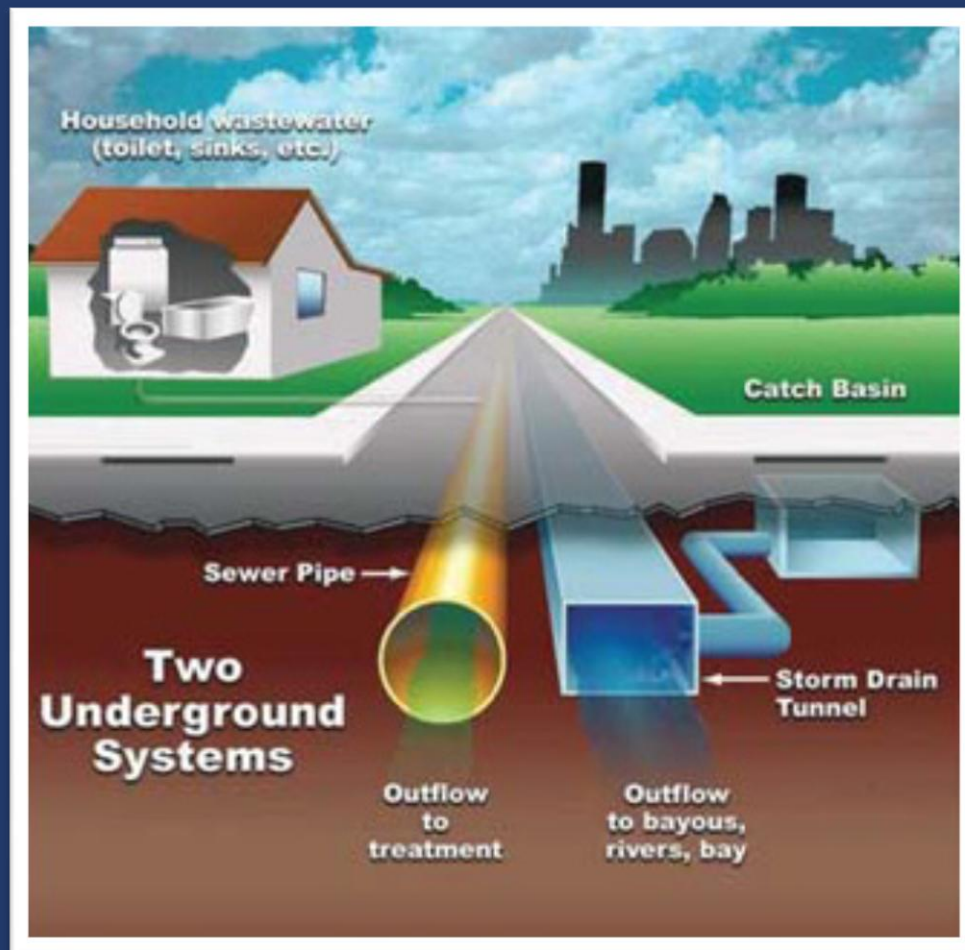
Tonight's Topics

1. Introduction / Overview
2. Current Process
3. Updated New Process
4. Timelines



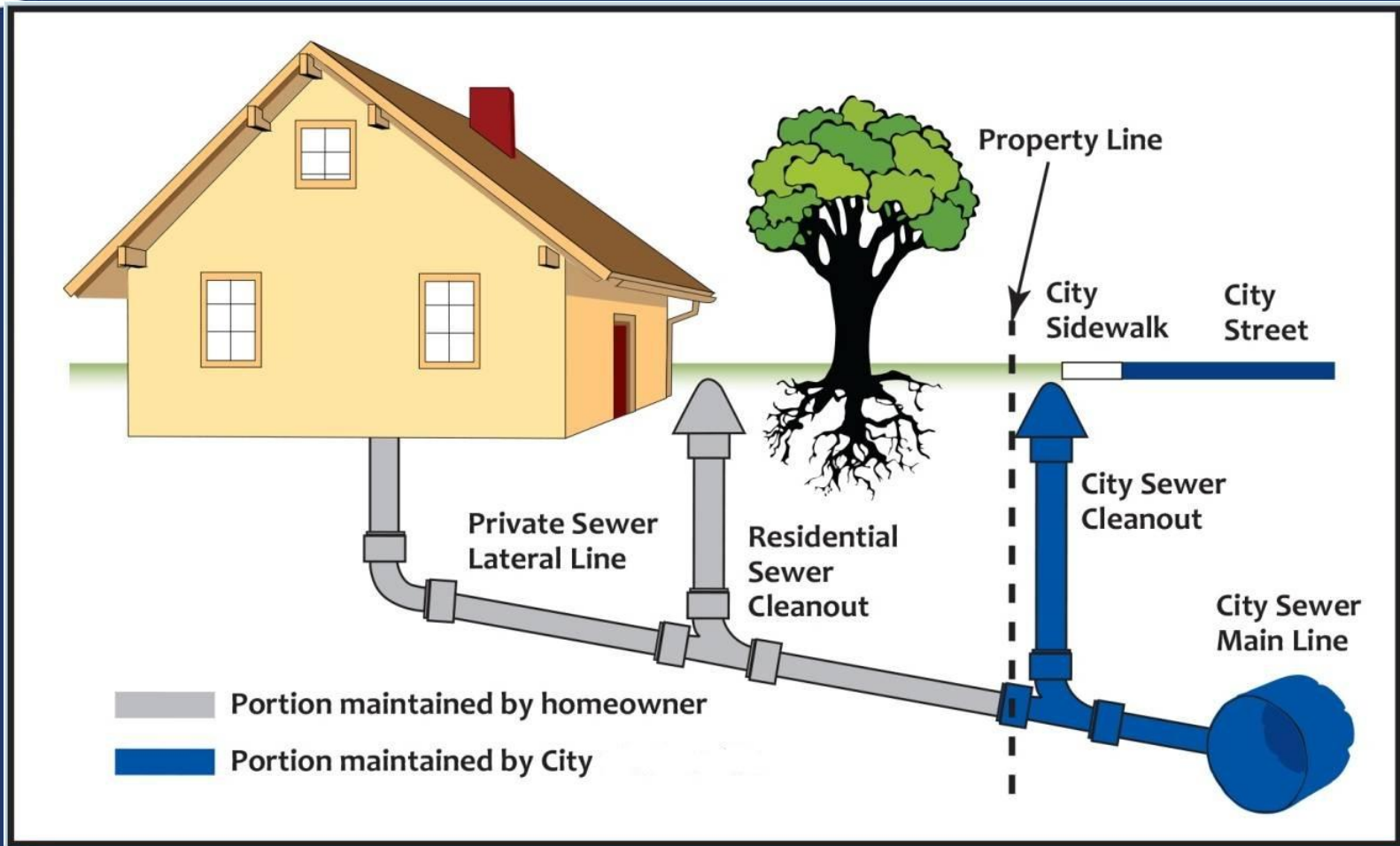
Introduction: Two Sewer Systems

- Sanitary Collection Systems: **(773 km)**;
- Average Pipe Age (Public): **(about 48 years)**;
- Customer connections: **(approx. 46,000)**;
- Typical annual reported call volume: **(approx 200)**



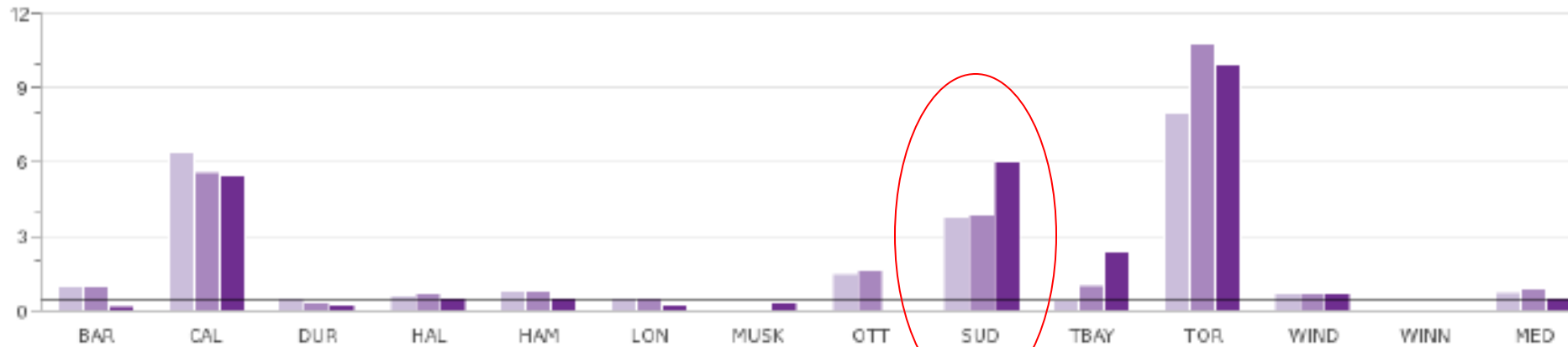


Shared Responsibilities: Property Owner & City





Benchmarking Comparison: Sewer main backups per 100 km

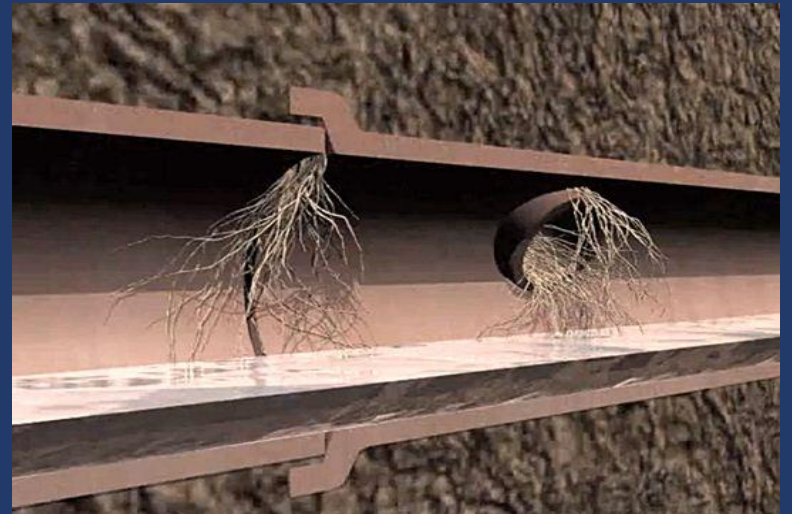


2010	0.93	6.42	0.54	0.56	0.81	0.51	0.00	1.46	3.77	0.39	8.01	0.69	N/A	0.75
2011	0.94	5.57	0.34	0.67	0.80	0.43	0.00	1.62	3.90	0.98	10.79	0.69	N/A	0.87
2012	0.19	5.42	0.24	0.49	0.45	0.23	0.32	0.01	5.97	2.35	9.96	0.69	N/A	0.47



What might cause a sewer backup in the service?

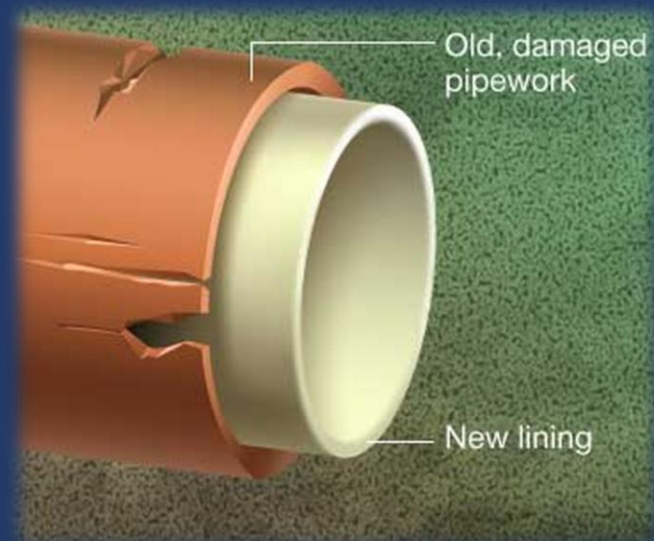
- FOG
- Roots / Debris
- Structural





Types of repairs

1. Clear blockage (FOG, debris);
2. New service line required ;
3. Install service liner (structural, roots)





Current Process

Customer
Experiences
Backup

Plumber
relieves
blockage

CGS called as
witness to
determine
responsibility;

Private:
Plumber
invoices
customer

Public: City
pays;
(maximum of
2 hours)



Technology = Improved Information

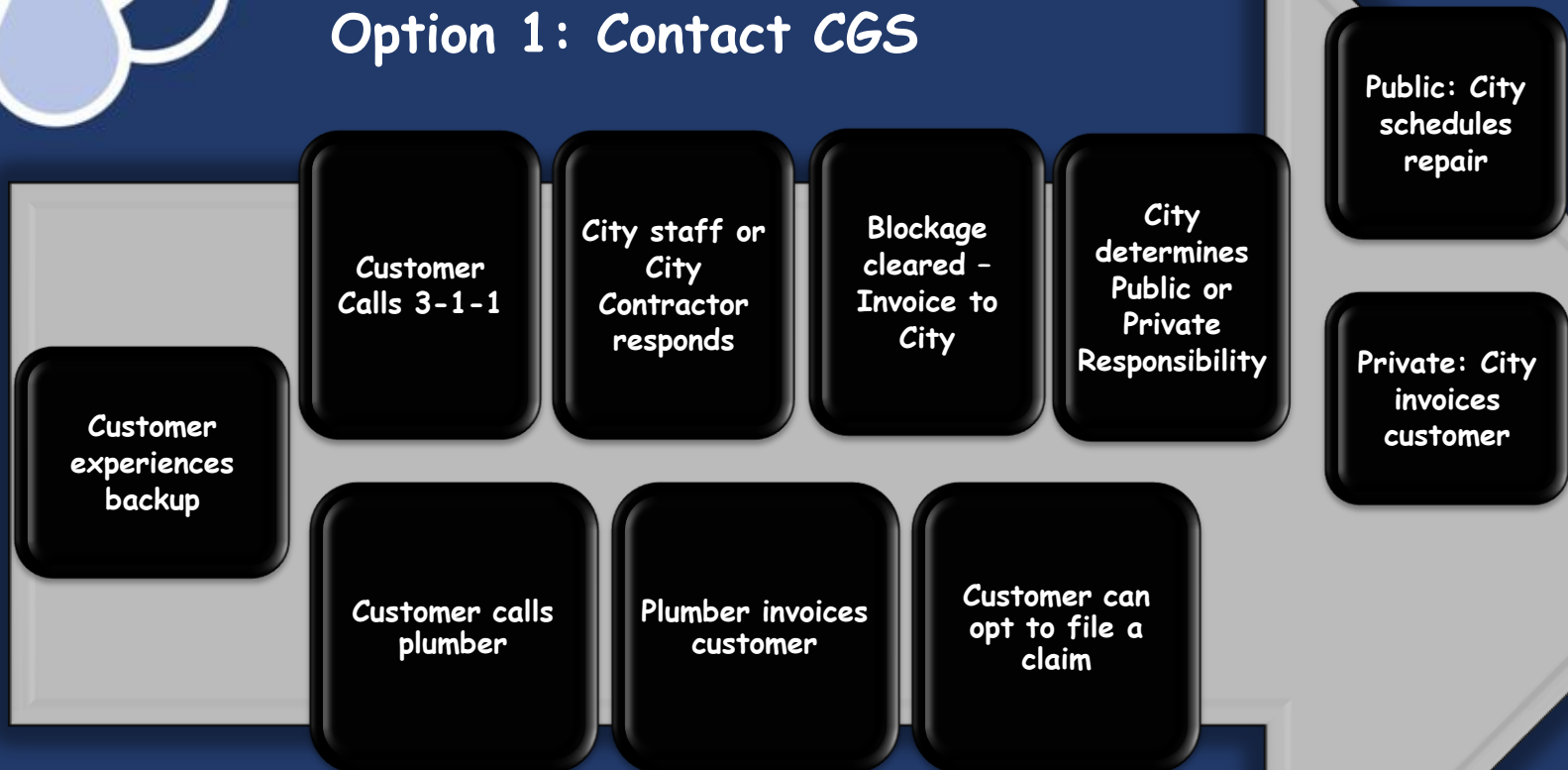
- CCTV
- Transmitter indicates precise location





Updated Service Options

Option 1: Contact CGS



Option 2: Contact Plumber



Timelines:

- Feb 2015 - Operations Committee;
- Feb 2015 - Plumbers stakeholder meeting;
- Mar 2015 - Release Tender documents;
- Public Communications;
- April 2015 - Award Tender & Go live

Questions?