Snowstorm 'Juno' shuts down much of northeastern US

By Sandy English
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On Monday night and Tuesday, a massive snowstorm hit the northeastern US, knocking out electricity for thousands and prompting a shutdown of transportation in major metropolitan areas such as Boston and New York City.

Thousands of flights into and out of the Northeast's major airports were canceled with Boston's Logan and New York City's LaGuardia and Kennedy airports shut, stranding thousands of passengers. Governors of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York and Pennsylvania declared states of emergency. Mail delivery was suspended in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

The storm, a nor'easter dubbed Juno by the media, dumped nearly two feet two of snow on Boston and Eastern Massachusetts. Areas of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island saw over foot of snow, and, in some cases, hurricane-force winds of nearly 80 mph. Over 30 inches of snow had fallen by mid-Tuesday in some areas west of Boston.

In Connecticut and Massachusetts, over 35,000 residents and businesses lost electricity, including the Massachusetts coastal communities of Provincetown and Plymouth. Plymouth's Pilgrim nuclear power plant shut down. A seawall in the coastal community of Marshfield, about 100 feet in length, collapsed, and other coastal towns have reported that that streets are under four feet of water or more. Communities in the south of Massachusetts were evacuated and whiteout conditions prevailed throughout Tuesday, grounding most aircraft.

The Massachusetts island of Nantucket lost power on Monday night, effectively cutting off most of its 12,000 residents from mainland with landline, cellular, Internet, and television communications either down or with intermittent service. Some downtown streets were flooded and there were reports of evacuations. Widespread coastal flooding was expected by Tuesday night. Many of Nantucket's year-round residents are seasonally employed in providing services for the wealthy and the political elite who crowd the resort island in the summer months.

The public transit system in Eastern Massachusetts, the Metropolitan Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), with over 1.3 million daily riders on its subways, buses and commuter rails, was shut on Monday night and all day Tuesday. Travel was banned from many Massachusetts communities, including Boston.

The worst of the storm bypassed New York City, and less than 10 inches of snow fell in most areas of the metropolis. The response of Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio at the outset of the storm, however, was to ban all traffic aside from emergency vehicles from the city's streets after 11:00 PM on Monday and to shut down the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) services. The MTA subway, bus, and commuter rail system was closed for the first time in its 110-year history from 11:00 PM on Monday to 7:30 AM on Tuesday.

The Long Island Expressway, one of the busiest arteries in the US, was also closed. Suffolk County at the east of Long Island was particularly badly hit, with over two feet of snowfall, high winds, and large snowdrifts. One 17-year-old boy in the county died sledding and an 87-year-old man with dementia was found dead in his back yard.

The storm, widely regarded by scientists to be part of a pattern of severe weather brought about by human-induced climate change, was clearly a physical threat to infrastructure of the northeastern US.

The shutting down of transit systems and roadways was an admission by the authorities that the present infrastructure, especially public transportation, could not dependably support normal everyday functioning during a severe weather crisis. Hurricane Sandy in 2011 exposed the fragility of the subways and commuter rails run by the MTA and the PATH system in New Jersey. Repairs to a number of lines impacted by the storm continue to this day.

The decrepit state of infrastructure, however, was compounded by what could only be described as a homeland security method of dealing with a weather emergency, including the seemingly arbitrary shutdown of roads and subways. It is notable that the response by the ruling elite to a snowstorm is now to declare a lockdown for tens of millions of people in a broad range of communities, from rural to suburban to urban.

In a news conference on Monday, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker said, "I don't think people feel at this point that it's much beyond what would typically be the case for this kind of event." This is coming from the chief government official of a state where millions were locked down in its most populous area in April 2013 during a police manhunt for a single teenaged alleged terrorist in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing.

Social anger among the great majority of the population remains high in New York and Boston, the product of years of wage-cutting, unemployment and high levels of social inequality, as well as police violence and the impunity of law enforcement officials for their crimes. New York City witnessed mass protests last month after it was announced that the police officer who choked Staten Island resident Eric Garner to death in July would not be charged with a crime.

After it became apparent on Tuesday morning that Juno had largely bypassed New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio defended the shutdown of city transportation as a "no brainer…Would you rather be safe or unsafe?" the mayor asked at a press conference.

According to the *Brooklyn Paper*, subways continued to run all night, but the public was simply banned from using them. Officials have claimed that this was a part of routine snow removal. On Monday, MTA Chairman Thomas Prendergast told the media that there would be no reason to stop subway lines that remained underground: "I don't believe so, because there'd be no reason—because we'll be able to run trains an essential service for people who must get around, including our own employees."

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