

Huge Traffic Jams Put a Damper on Carfree Day

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Moscow participated in World Carfree Day for the third year running Wednesday, but the city suffered worse traffic jams than usual — even as officials abandoned their cars for the cameras.

Traffic jams, worsened by rainy weather, clogged many city streets throughout the day, and few drivers appeared willing to give up their cars for public transportation, even though ticket prices were slashed in half.

The city's environment — the main reason for the international day — also saw no significant improvement, City Hall said.

While many Muscovites seemed unaware of the day, First Deputy Mayor Pyotr Biryukov said City Hall had made an effort to encourage people to leave their cars at home by cutting the one-way ticket for surface transportation to 12 rubles and deploying an additional 600 buses, trolleybuses and trams, RIA-Novosti reported.

Biryukov himself walked about 2 kilometers to a City Hall building on Voznesensky Pereulok, accompanied by a pack of journalists.

Another first deputy mayor, Yury Roslyak, and Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky announced that they traveled by metro.

City Hall's parking remained almost empty Wednesday, Interfax said.

World Carfree Day has been celebrated on Sept. 22 on four continents since 2000, according to its web site, Worldcarfree.net.

"As the climate heats up, World Carfree Day is the perfect time to take the heat off the planet, and put it on city planners and politicians to give priority to cycling, walking and public transport, instead of to the automobile," the web site says.

But Alexei Popikov, spokesman for the city's environmental monitoring agency, said the environmental situation remained unchanged throughout the day, Interfax reported. He also said only a few motorists chose to change their habits for a day, without providing any figures.

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