

Mayor Blames Malls for MKAD Mess

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Mayor Sergei Sobyenin compared a market near the Moscow Ring Road to an Indian slum and ordered the destruction of dozens of illegally constructed roads leading from the highway to shopping centers Saturday.

Sobyenin, accompanied by City Hall officials, criticized the owners of the retail centers and the city officials who authorized the construction of the roads during a drive around the Moscow Ring Road, or MKAD.

He said the roads would have to be widened and lengthened or face destruction to ease the flow of traffic on the often-jammed MKAD.

"We won't raze everyone," Sobyenin said. "If some of them at least have some kind of permission, we will cooperate with them."

At least 42 retail facilities along the MKAD have "no documents" for their roads, a senior City Hall official, Kharis Nozhipov, told Sobyenin in televised remarks. About 100 shopping centers

and markets are located along the MKAD.

Sobyanin said most of the roads are too short and narrow, significantly slowing down traffic on the MKAD.

Sobyanin stopped by the Emeral market on the 25th kilometer of the MKAD, and he said it resembled "sheds in the jungle."

"I've seen this somewhere in India," Sobyanin said on NTV television, looking at two-level shacks where workers both live and work.

He also said municipal officials responsible for authorizing the roads would be reprimanded when found. He did not elaborate.

Ironically, a report about Sobyanin's tour on NTV television, filmed from inside the mayor's bus, clearly showed the cortege of city officials traveling briskly in the left lane, while cars in the right lane stood mired in a long traffic jam.

Sobyanin has made the fight against traffic jams a priority since taking office late last month. He unveiled a plan to tackle the problem last week that included measures like opening toll roads, banning trucks during the daylight hours and removing many pedestrian street crossings.

Nikolai Lyamov, deputy mayor for transportation and road construction, said pedestrian street crossings on main roads will be replaced with aboveground and underground crossings, *Rossia 24* reported.

Alexander Strelnikov, a researcher with the Central Urban Planning Research Institute, said it was a mistake to allow the mass construction of shopping centers along the MKAD like "shashlik on a spit."

"It is really a huge problem. But it had to happen," Strelnikov said, noting that most shopping centers are located outside the MKAD, where land leasing prices are cheaper.

He said Sobyanin's efforts might not be enough to resolve MKAD jams because of the sheer number of cars that travel the road.

"A new parallel road is needed along the MKAD to take part of the traffic," Strelnikov said by telephone.

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