

\$12.6Bln Allotted for New and Better Roads

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Road builders will be responsible for maintaining the roads they build for years to come under draft legislation. **Vladimir Filonov**

The government plans to increase financing of road construction next year to 364 billion rubles (\$12.6 billion) and introduce new regulations on construction work to better control road quality, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said Wednesday.

"We're increasing expenditures on road construction," he told Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at a meeting devoted to the issue, adding that the figure had been agreed on with the Finance Ministry.

According to Ivanov, a total of 309 billion rubles have been set aside in this year's budget for building and maintaining federal roads across the country, with 208 kilometers of new roads and 6,300 meters of bridges and tunnels to be built by the end of the year.

Ivanov also said that a bill has been drafted to establish the responsibility of road construction companies for maintaining the roads that they build.

According to the document, a company that wins a tender to build or repair a road will sign a contract with the government to maintain the road for the next 12 or 24 years.

The bill, if passed, would allow the government to control the quality of roads, Ivanov said, adding that the document might be discussed at the cabinet meeting next week.

The officials also discussed regional road funds, which will begin operating on Jan. 1 to finance road construction and maintenance. According to Ivanov, only 12 regions have decided to establish such funds, although the idea was initially supported by all governors.

Putin, who held a video conference with six regions where building road infrastructure is underway, including the Far East, Tatarstan and the Volgograd region, said that the length of the country's roads is expected to double over the next 10 years.

During the conference Putin, who spoke from Sochi, inquired about the quality of the Amur highway, which he tested last year driving a canary-yellow Lada.

He talked to the participants of a rally initiated by the public group Shabby Roads, asking them to provide feedback on the quality of the road and the surrounding infrastructure.

The motorists, who are undertaking a trip from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad to check road quality, complained that the quality of the service roads providing access to the Amur highway, which runs from Chita, in the Zabaikalsky region, to Khabarovsk, near the Pacific coast, was very poor.

They also noted a shortage of traffic police checkpoints along the way and the absence of mobile communications on some parts of the road. Ivanov promised that mobile communications would start working along the whole road by Oct. 1.

Unlike the motorists, some officials who participated in the conference seemed flustered, confusing figures and speaking amiss despite reading from notes.

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