

Mayor Seeks Foreign Expertise to Expand City

By [The Moscow Times](#)

December 08, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Moscow City Hall will seek the expertise of international architects and developers to help draw up a plan for the capital's biggest expansion in a half century, Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said.

"This year we will announce a tender to create a development concept for Moscow and the region as an agglomeration," Sobyenin said in an interview late Wednesday in his office in central Moscow. "Leading architectural companies that deal with city development will take part."

Moscow, Europe's biggest city, with a population of 11.5 million, will more than double its territory by expanding to the southeast, shifting federal ministries outside the city center under a plan unveiled by President Dmitry Medvedev last June. Relocating the government would ease congestion in Moscow and spur infrastructure upgrades in the surrounding areas.

The municipal government will spend more than 1.5 trillion rubles (\$48 billion) on transportation development over the next five years, Sobyenin said, giving priority to public transport. The city will reconstruct all of its 19 motorways and the outer ring road.

"We should not regard Moscow in isolation from other regions of the country, especially from the Moscow region," Sobyenin said. "Within the next year we need to decide how to realize this project."

Sobyenin has vowed to focus on easing transportation and uprooting corruption after Medvedev last year ousted Yury Luzhkov, who had governed the city for 18 years. The local government is hosting a two-day urban forum starting Thursday where Sobyenin will address planners, businessmen, architects and experts from Russia, Spain, France, Britain and China.

By adding 1,600 square kilometers to its territory, Moscow will try to break up its historical concentric layout, creating governmental, business, educational and cultural clusters and dispersing about 4 million people who commute to downtown Moscow every day.

The city's expansion effort won't require an "extraordinary" amount of financing, Sobyenin said, with infrastructure investment covered via the federal budget and contributions from the country's monopolies and energy companies. The Transportation Ministry and Russian Railways have agreed on financing roads and railways, he said.

The city's new territories will accommodate 30 million square meters of new housing and double the size of park zones, Sobyenin said. Enlarging the city also dovetails with government efforts to turn Moscow into a global financial hub. Goldman Sachs Group chief executive Lloyd Blankfein said earlier this year that traffic jams are the biggest obstacle to bolstering Moscow's role in international finance.

The average Muscovite motorist spent a "whopping" 2 1/2 hours stuck in traffic at least once in the last three years, International Business Machines said in its first global study on the "emotional and economic toll of commuting" last year.

More than 40 percent of drivers in the Russian capital reported jams exceeding three hours, or three times the average for the 20 cities in the Commuter Pain report.

The city's metro will be extended by more than 30 stations with 500 billion rubles in planned investment over the next five years, according to Sobyenin. Russian metro builders may team up with international companies, Sobyenin said.

The city has no immediate borrowing plans but doesn't rule out attracting loans in the future, the mayor said.

"So far we are managing with our own resources," Sobyenin said, adding that Moscow's current debt stands at 240 billion rubles.

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