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Metro to Try Wi-Fi in Motion

By Roland Oliphant

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Metro managers worry too much Wi-Fi access could slow passenger flow. **Igor Tabakov**

Passengers on the Moscow metro will soon be able to check the news, plot Twitter revolutions and download e-mails as they travel, if the latest plans from City Hall come to fruition.

The Moscow metro plans to introduce Wi-Fi access in a small number of cars as a trial later this year, city transportation chief Maxim Liksutov said Thursday.

"Going on the results of the trial, we'll decide whether to expand Internet provision on the metro," he said at a news conference.

He did not say how many carriages would take part in the experiment, or which lines they would run on.

The possibility of installing Wi-Fi on metro trains was first mentioned by Mayor Sergei Sobyanin in September.

An expert close to the industry told The Moscow Times that the technology is available, but

metro management is reluctant to cooperate because of fears that Wi-Fi would encourage people to loiter in the metro.

"They want to get people through the system as quickly and efficiently as possible. And the networks can't do research or install equipment without the metro's permission," said the source, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Attempts to reach Moscow Metropolitan for comment failed Thursday. But two networks confirmed their interest to The Moscow Times.

"We have the technical abilities, and we are ready to deploy a Wi-Fi network in the metro if the metropolitan expresses an interest," MTS said in e-mailed comments.

VimpelCom said in an e-mailed statement that it was "ready to propose any technical solutions to provide high-speed Internet access that would be convenient to passengers and will not disturb the work of the metro."

At the moment, all of the "big three" mobile service providers — VimpelCom, MegaFon and MTS — have base stations providing mobile phone coverage at most of Moscow's metro stations.

VimpelCom says its subscribers are also able to use 3G and 2G access in most stations.

MTS, which acquired 95 percent of the metro's service provider Metro-Telecom in 2010, said it already had Wi-Fi access in the platforms and transit passages of several central Moscow metro stations. It has also run experimental Wi-Fi provision on city buses.

Metro-Telecom owns the fiber-optic network that all three of the large networks' underground base stations rely on.

MegaFon did not reply to requests to comment by late Thursday.

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