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Groups Propose Path for Bike Tours

By Lena Smirnova

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A group is proposing that a bike-friendly path be built from Moscow to St. Petersburg. Above, bicyclists riding in Moscow. **Denis Grishkin**

Need to get to St. Petersburg but don't like the Sapsan or Russian airlines? Try a bike.

The St. Petersburg-based club VeloPiter is proposing to build a bike-friendly track between Russia's two largest cities. Members of bike clubs from cities located along the route discussed the proposal at a meeting of the Public Chamber last week.

Bikers from the Fixed Gear Moscow group made the four-day trip to St. Petersburg last year and later wrote about the deplorable state of hotels and eateries in some areas on the route. The proposed route would be conveniently connected to interesting tourist destinations as well as good lodging and food services, according to VeloPiter.

Proponents of the proposal plan to map out a possible route over the coming months and then cycle down this route in August, taking note of work that needs to be done. This list could include potential spots for hotels and eateries, navigation signs, parking zones, lights

and other road improvements.

The complete list may be presented to government officials as early as the fall.

Vladimir Kumov, curator of the Let's Bike It! bike parade that took place in Moscow on May 20, has cycled from St. Petersburg to Lisbon and praises the bike infrastructure in Scandinavia, Germany and Holland. Russia has very little such infrastructure, but the number of bike tourists would increase significantly if the situation improves, he said.

"In Russia practically no one travels by bike, only hardcore bikers," Kumov said. "To get more people to cycle we need to develop the conditions for it."

Cycling is already popular in Moscow, Vladimir and Suzdal, said Ivan Khomyakov, initiator of the Active Youth project, which coordinates long-distance bike races. These local groups as well as foreigners would be most interested in developing the Moscow-St. Petersburg track, Kumov said.

"It is not a transportation route, but a tourist one," Kumov said. "Foreigners would be able to take these routes and leave their money as they ride around Russia on a bicycle."

No municipalities are formally supporting the project, but bike activists have noticed increased attention to their proposals.

The Tver and Veliky Novgorod administrations are particularly interested in having the Moscow-St. Petersburg track pass through their cities, Vedomosti reported. The Tver administration created a working group on biking and plans to put up bike racks in shopping malls and universities this year, a spokesperson for the administration said.

"Relations are changing, quite quickly," Kumov said. "Two years ago everyone laughed at us, but now the situation is changing and we are being listened to."

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