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New Khimki Mayor Touts Disputed Highway

By The Moscow Times

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A worker looking at a bridge being built at the site of the disputed highway. **Maxim Shemetov**

Khimki's newly elected mayor promised on Wednesday that traffic jams would ease significantly on Leningradskoye Shosse and connecting streets with the opening of the first stretch of the new Moscow-St. Petersburg highway.

Oleg Shakhov, who won a weekend election in Moscow's northern outskirts, said the new route would relieve 30 percent of the traffic on Leningradskoye Shosse when it opens in late 2013 or early 2014.

"About 50 percent of the section has been built," he said, according to Interfax.

Shakhov also said residents of Khimki and the neighboring town of Dolgoprudny would not have to pay toll fees to use the next road because the money would only be collected at toll stations outside the municipalities.

Construction of the multibillion-dollar highway prompted large protests from environmentalists, who expressed concern that it would cut a path through a centuries-old forest in Khimki. Shakhov's main challenger in the mayoral election was the leader of the protests, Yevgenia Chirikova.

Shakhov, who was the Kremlin-backed candidate, repeated the government's position that the highway — which no one disputes is desperately needed — had not harmed the forest.

"Only 5 percent of the forest was affected," he said. "And for every tree that was cut down, five new, good, young ones will be planted."

Shakhov also pledged on Wednesday to build new kindergartens, sports and recreation facilities, multilevel parking lots and a theater.

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