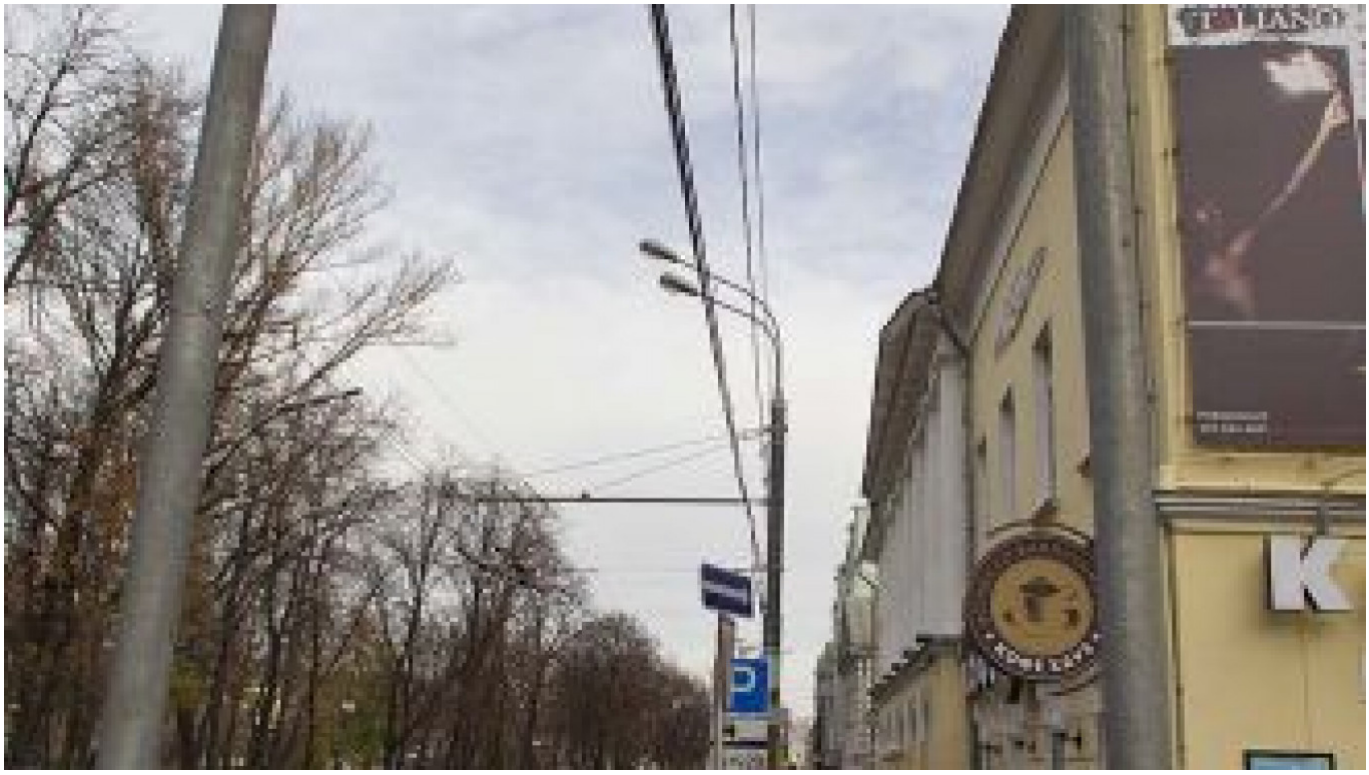
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Paid Parking in City Center to Start June 1

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

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A sign of paid parking zone on Strastnoi Boulevard. **Igor Tabakov**

Parking within Moscow's Boulevard Ring will be paid starting Jun. 1, a move that authorities hope will help reduce the number of cars in the city center and develop the public transportation system.

In 2010, Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said battling traffic jams in Moscow was of primal importance for the city government, with paid parking one of the most effective measures to meet the goal.

Introduced in several districts within the center last November, paid parking helped boost the speed of traffic by up to 9 percent and the number of pedestrians by up to 60 percent, Deputy Mayor Maxim Liksutov said at a news conference Wednesday.

During the testing period, car owners paid more than 20 million rubles ($634,000) in total

for parking, he said, adding that all the money would go toward the beautification of the districts in which the money was paid.

Moscow authorities, however, refused to expand the area of paid parking outside the Boulevard Ring, which was initially planned to be done by 2015. No other strict measures, like paid entrance into the city center, are expected to be introduced.

The price for one hour of parking is 50 rubles (close to $2), and it can be paid by text message, scratch card, personal account or by using a parking machine.

"There will be no exceptions for officials, we will control that by all possible means," Liksutov said.

Some concession will be available for residents of districts within the Boulevard Ring, who can buy an annual pass for 3,000 rubles if they plan to leave their car parked during the daytime. Parking in a building courtyard will still be free.

Car owners will be able to check the availability of free parking spaces via the website parking.mos.ru, or by using a mobile phone app.

The measure was designed to eliminate so called "floating traffic," or traffic created by drivers searching for a free parking space, said Igor Kuznetsov, head of the Moscow Parking Space Administrator, an agency within the Moscow government.

Kuznetsov said one of the main achievements was the way the parking would be controlled to rule out any possible cheating.

"There are certain risks in our country linked with corruption, so it was decided that no humans would be involved in controlling the parking rules," he said, explaining that the whole process would be electronic, with 110 control systems to record violations.

The information will then be sent to an electronic database, Kuznetsov said, after which a notification to pay a fine would be sent to the violator by mail.

Punishment for parking violations is set at 3,000 rubles, and at 2,500 rubles for not paying a parking fee. Violators will have 60 days to pay the fine.

Liksutov said the introduction of paid parking was an important part of the city's program to increase the overall attractiveness of public transportation. The next step would be launching new buses equipped for disabled people, he said.

Citing opinion polls, Liksutov also said that more than 80 percent of Muscovites supported paid parking.

"If the transportation situation doesn't become better by 2015, one in five car owners will spend five hours to commute to their job and back home, while now it is about three hours," he said.

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