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State Duma Drives New Rules

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New legislation could limit the days of self-made taxi drivers in Moscow. **Vladimir Filonov**

State Duma deputies intend to impose regulations on the activities of taxi drivers in all cities across Russia. A Moscow law on taxi services won't help in the battle with illegal taxi drivers and traffic jams, market participants are contending.

Early this month, the State Duma's committee on constitutional lawmaking and government formation is planning to take up amendments to the draft legislation on controlling taxis in a second reading of the bill. According to its first reading on Feb. 8, the bill is proposing an increase in fines for unsanctioned parking and other infractions.

Committee co-chairman Vladimir Pligin told Vedomosti that by the bill's second reading, it will contain another article, which will regulate at the federal level the activities of those who transport passengers.

Because of this change, the draft legislation will achieve the status of a standalone federal law with the new purpose, Pligin said.

The bill — which has the not-so-short title of "on the entering of changes to separate lawmaking acts of the Russian Federation in relation to improving the organization of road traffic" — is co-authored by Pligin, committee co-chairman Martin Shakkum and Pligin's first deputy, Alexander Moskalets. All are members of United Russia, the nation's dominant party.

The new laws on taxis would apply in Moscow, St. Petersburg and all city districts. The cities' administrations will be authorized to issue a permit for running a private taxi service using one's own car for at least five years, and that permit can be issued to individual people and individual representatives.

This approach is supposed to fall under the principle of "one car, one permit."

Determining just how many taxis a city actually needs will be the job of local authorities. If the number of permit applications increases, then those same local authorities will conduct special auctions.

There will be other conditions connected to a taxi permit if the bill becomes law. There will be a requirement for cars to pass a technical inspection every six months and to have a checkered panel on the car's body, a special sign on the car's roof and a fare meter.

In addition, a city's administration can require the same color for the body of all of the cars in the city and conduct both scheduled and unscheduled checks for those requirements.

(Imposing and using such requirements depends on local laws, however.)

If the taxi undergoes the check while on the road, then the check will have to be done by the local GIBDD — that is, the traffic police.

A scheduled inspection can be conducted a year from the day the permit is handed out, while an unscheduled check can be carried out according to an announcement made to the authorized state agency, a personal representative, a government agency and the media about legal violations that pose a threat to other people, the environment or property.

The test is coordinated with the prosecutor, though notifying the taxi's owner in this situation wouldn't be obligatory.

Punishment for violations isn't registered or set down. But Russians can expect the responsibility to be tied to practice: In each region the responsibility may lie with each region, as the text of that document isn't finalized, Pligin said.

A law on taxis from 2009 is already operating in Moscow. In St. Petersburg there isn't such a law, as in the majority of big cities in Russia.

In the Moscow law, there are features similar to those proposed by the members of United Russia: the registration of cars that have been assigned permits and requirements for drivers.

A difference between the federal version and the version on the books in the capital: In the federal version, the checks on the taxis don't carry any requirements for being fluent in Russian or the environmental standards for the car.

Yet, in practice, the law hasn't started working. Most Russians don't buy into it — it's difficult to document who is an illegal taxi driver — but the taxi stands haven't shown an effect, said Svetlana Kosorukova, brand manager for the company Taksi, or "Taxi."

In all, the problem of unregulated taxi service is relevant not just for Moscow. Instead, the government is addressing the issue systematically, at the federal level, Pligin noted.

Editor's note: Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this article that appeared on the web site incorrectly said that, under the proposed legislation, local police would impound a taxi if its driver tried to dodge an inspection. The article should have said that the local traffic police would perform an inspection if the taxi is on the road.

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