

Russian Railways Passenger Lines to Bypass Ukraine

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Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency

Russian Railways (RZD) passenger trains will bypass Ukraine on their way to Western destinations starting Dec. 11, the state-run TASS news agency has reported, citing RZD's head of passenger transportation Dmitri Pegov.

RZD delivered on the promise to bypass Ukraine by the end of 2017 as part of larger Kremlin strategy that will cut Ukraine out of Russia's connections to its main customers in Europe.

The construction of the 55 billion ruble (\$928 million) bypass line, which spans 37 kilometers, started in 2015 after the annexation of the Crimea by Russia and the resulting showdown with the West. It connects the Voronezh and Rostov regions in Russia and replaces an existing line that crosses the Ukrainian separatist region of Lugansk.

The construction was a priority for the Kremlin and has ended a year ahead of schedule

Other projects include the extension to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to the north of Ukraine and the Turkish Stream gas pipeline to the south that will cut Ukraine out of Russia's gas transit system to the West. Work on both these has started, although Nord Stream 2 is facing strong resistance in the European Commission.

Ukraine faces going from a traditional bridge between east and west to becoming an "island" as a result of Russia's actions.

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