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Russian Railways Says Goodbye to Historic Carriages

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Dmitry Rogulin / TASS

Russian Railways reportedly plans to phase out the legendary Soviet-era economy class carriages with stacked beds by 2025.

The *platzkart*, doorless sleeper coaches with open-plan rooms, have long been a cheap and popular way to travel Russia by rail. The overhaul is part of the state-owned railways' effort to battle airline competition by attracting 1.4 billion customers by 2025 – and laying off nearly 30,000 employees.

Russian Railways will begin replacing platzkart carriages with modern cars as early as next year, the Vedomosti business daily reported Tuesday, citing railway development plans for 2025.

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In place of the older one-story carriages, Russian trains will have cars with a shower cabin, a baggage compartment and vending machines, Vedomosti reported, citing an unnamed spokesperson for Russia's biggest rail car and equipment maker Transmashholding.

Sleeping carriages older than 12 and a half years will be upgraded to include USB slots and service areas with vending machines, according to the railway development plan.

Russian Railways estimates that the platzkart coaches make up 70 percent of ticket sales but only bring in 30 percent of revenues.

As part of its effort to boost ridership, the railway will increase train speeds, build new routes and purchase new noise and vibration-canceling two-story train carriages with first and second-class service. The Federal Passenger Co., the subsidiary which runs long-distance passenger services for Russian Railways, will get an investment of more than 800 billion rubles ($11 billion).

An unnamed Federal Passenger Co. spokesperson told Russia's RBC business portal that the railways have not yet abandoned platzkart cars altogether, and will still purchase the original carriage model through 2019.

"It'll be possible to abandon the old platzkart cars once the concept of a new platzkart is fully approved, and a decision is reached on their purchase and delivery," the spokesperson was quoted as saying.

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