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Thousands of Car Carriers Backed Up at Russia's Borders as Importers Rush to Beat Fee Hike

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Ilya Moskovets / URA.RU / TASS

Russia is facing major backlogs of car carriers on its borders with China and Kazakhstan as importers rush to bring in vehicles ahead of a sharp increase in the country's recycling fee, the Kommersant business daily reported Monday, citing auto dealers.

Roughly 3,000-4,000 car transporters carrying up to 10 vehicles each are currently stuck in lines at border checkpoints, according to estimates from Avtodom cited by Kommersant.

The heaviest congestion is on the Kazakh border, a key transit route for cars coming from China.

Market sources told Kommersant the situation has deteriorated significantly compared with October.

Long waits have fueled the spread of unofficial "paid queues," which themselves have grown

longer, one source told the newspaper.

Average waiting times have risen by more than a third over the past month, Yevgeny Zhitnukhin, COO of the Fresh automobile marketplace, told Kommersant.

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Avtodom added that delays are especially severe at crossings where cars imported by individuals are processed.

Russia's Federal Customs Service said checkpoints on the Chinese and Kazakh borders were operating normally and handling all vehicle imports.

The agency noted that cars also arrive by rail, by sea and under their own power, not only on transport trucks.

The government introduced the recycling fee last year as a one-time payment collected from importers, manufacturers and buyers to cover the future disposal of a vehicle.

Starting Dec. 1, the fee will be tied to engine power on a progressive scale, with a preferential rate maintained only for cars of up to 160 horsepower.

The levy will be indexed annually by 10%-20% from 2026.

Buyers who purchased a vehicle before Dec. 1 but fail to clear customs in time will still have to pay the higher fee, a market source told Kommersant.

"As usual in such cases, not everyone will make it," another source said.

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