

City Hall Blamed for Epic Traffic Jam

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Prosecutors on Tuesday blamed Moscow city authorities and the Federal Road Agency for a massive traffic jam on Leningradskoye Shosse that caused thousands of people to miss flights at Sheremetyevo Airport in late June and early July.

The Prosecutor General's Office said City Hall failed to provide sufficient oversight over the stretch of the highway that it closed for repairs, causing an epic weeklong traffic jam north of the capital.

The law requires all federal highways like Leningradskoye Shosse to be federal property, but the part of the highway where the repairs took place — a stretch that passes over the Oktyabrskaya Railroad — was nevertheless registered as Moscow city property in 2007, prosecutor Alexander Rusetsky said.

The Federal Road Agency, on its part, neglected to repair the bridge over the railroad in a timely manner, even though the bridge was deemed dangerous in 2002, Rusetsky said, Interfax reported.

He said the Prosecutor General's Office had filed its findings with the agency, and Moscow authorities but did not say whether they faced any penalties.

Federal Road Agency head Anatoly Chabunin denied responsibility Tuesday, saying the part of the Leningradskoye Shosse that Rusetsky described had always belonged to Moscow.

City officials had no immediate comment.

Some news reports have suggested that City Hall allowed the traffic problems to provide a boost to city-owned Vnukovo Airport, the crosstown rival to Sheremetyevo Airport.

Traffic on Leningradskoye Shosse came to a near-standstill after city authorities closed off four of the highway's six lanes above the railroad for urgent repairs in the last week of June.

Two lanes were reopened after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin intervened and ordered an investigation, but traffic remains jammed. The repairs are scheduled to end Nov. 1.

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