

Truck Ban Unpopular and Ineffective, Drivers and Experts Say

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More trucks are now traveling at night following the daytime ban for heavy vehicles on the Moscow Ring Road, but truckers are unwilling to use designated parking lots and instead prefer to wait by the roadside to be allowed inside the capital, a report by the Moscow region transportation department said.

Starting from May 1 all trucks with a capacity of over 12 tons are banned from entering the MKAD from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The current fine for violators is 3,000 rubles (\$93).

Over the last 3 months, the number of trucks that are traveling at night has increased by 5 percent, and their daytime numbers have decreased accordingly, said the report, which was released late last week.

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Traffic on the Small Ring Road, circling Moscow about 30 kilometers beyond the MKAD, also increased by 5 percent

Meanwhile, existing parking space for heavy trucks is used only at 30 percent of capacity. Trucks tend to come as close as possible to the MKAD and then line up at the side of adjoining streets, the ministry reported.

There is a total of 3,000 parking spaces for heavy trucks at lots in the Moscow region and on the territory of New Moscow. While some of them have facilities for drivers, most are just parking lots, with no services available, report said.

The reason why truckers are unwilling to use these lots is not only because they do not have services, but also because they are too far from major roads, experts said.

"The parking is used if it has facilities and is situated in a convenient place. If it sits 30 kilometers from a major highway, who will go there?" said Anatoly Fedorenko, a professor at the logistics faculty of the Higher School of Economics. "The authorities wish to say they have rid the MKAD of trucks but this is not backed up by anything."

The regional transportation department plans to set up 13 more parking lots with all the needed facilities near major highways. By this summer three parking lots are to be opened at the 50th kilometer of the M10 highway that goes to St. Petersburg, at the 82nd kilometer of the M5 going to Ryazan and the 91st kilometer of the M4, which goes to Rostov-On-Don.

But even if the parking lots are conveniently located and well equipped, some truckers say they will not be satisfied.

"We get paid when our wheels are turning, not for standing on a parking lot. I would rather transport goods on time and return to my wife and kids than wait all day to be allowed to enter Moscow and then work at night," said Nikolai Kotelnikov, a truck driver from Zelenograd.

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"Also, I prefer to take an order elsewhere and not go to Moscow if I can. But the city's demand for goods is very high, and so we go."

Kotelnikov said he believed the decision to make the ban was political. "Mayor Sobyenin wanted to please his car-driving electorate. Well, he did. Now everyone else has to suffer," he said.

While being unpopular among truck drivers, the ban also means additional expenses for logistics companies.

"Before, I could load about 30 pallets into a large truck, but with the ban in place we have to distribute the goods over several smaller vehicles. This not only means more expenses for us, but the number of vehicles on the road is increased," said Yulia Ryashintseva, transport specialist at SLG Operating logistics company.

And the transportation process has become less effective, other experts said.

"Loading and unloading goods from the truck, which before could be managed within one day, now has increased to three days. And this is not just one case, this is a system in which tens of thousands of transport units have to operate," said Valery Voitko, the head of Dalnoboischik, a labor union for truckers.

"For the situation to improve, more roads are needed and their quality has to be a lot better than it is today," Ryashintseva said.

The governments of Moscow and the Moscow region plan to present proposals on an overland metro system this summer, Andrei Vorobyov, acting governor of the Moscow region, said Friday, Interfax reported.

The system is expected to be launched in 2015, he said, adding that 200 billion rubles (\$6.5 billion) would be invested in the project.

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