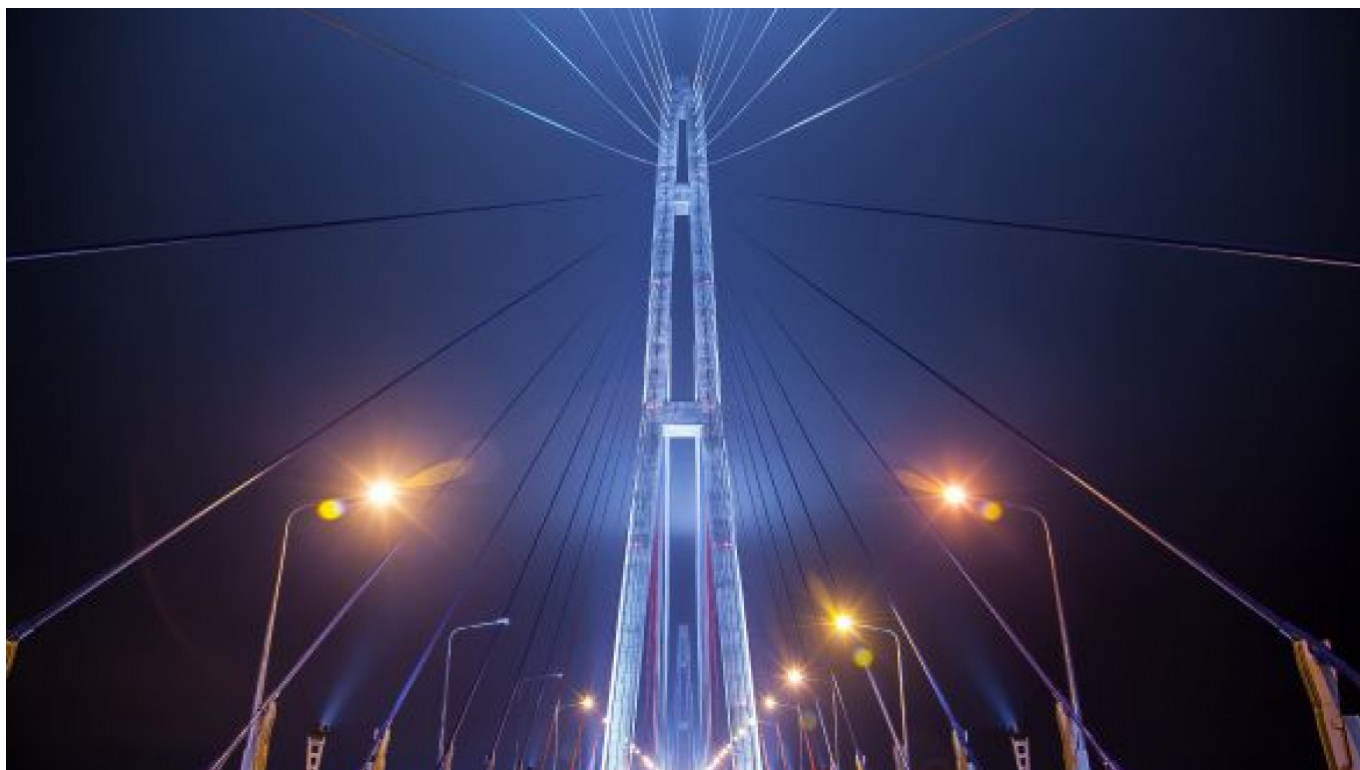


Minister Proposes 7km Bridge to Sakhalin Island

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The \$930 million bridge linking Russky Island to the Far East mainland was closed for repair soon after opening.

The Far East Development Minister has proposed building a massive bridge from the mainland to the island of Sakhalin in order to turn the island into a "third door to the Pacific."

"Today there is a shortage of port capacity [in the Far East] and scientists say the ports will be unable to meet requirements if the volume of cargo transportation grows," Far East Development Minister Viktor Ishayev said Thursday. "This will be Russia's third access point to the Pacific Ocean."

Russia currently has access to the Pacific Ocean via the Trans-Siberian railroad, running across the country from west to east, and the alternative Baikal-Amur mainline. Both railroads lead to Russia's eastern ports.

A bridge to Sakhalin would become part of a planned 580 kilometer railroad from Selikhin in the Khabarovsk Region to the Nysh station on Sakhalin Island, proposed by Transport Minister Igor Levitin in 2009, Railway Gazette reported. That would allow full integration of the rail network with the island's ice-free ports.

Experts estimate the cost of building a bridge across the 7 kilometer stretch between the mainland and Sakhalin Island at its narrowest point in the Nevelsky Strait could be at least \$10 billion.

The Sakhalin Region is currently working jointly with rail monopoly Russian Railways on technical specifications for the project, which could take about two and a half years, he said.

Russia could one day build a bridge across the 45 kilometer strait from Sakhalin Island to Japan's island of Hokkaido, creating a single rail corridor from Europe to Japan, Ishayev said. A rail tunnel link between the two islands has also been proposed previously by Russian officials, Railway Gazette reported.

Ishayev proposed the mega-bridge project just two days after President Vladimir Putin criticized the federal government and local authorities over their failure to ensure effective development of the Far East, which has a massive 3.8 trillion ruble (\$115 billion) investment program.

"Are you going to work, or what?" Putin asked participants on Tuesday at a Sakhalin region development meeting. Putin said only 20 percent of regional development targets set in December had been met, and called on officials to get moving.

Putin previously criticized the Finance Ministry for only providing 296 billion rubles for the Far East Development Program until 2020, despite the approval of an estimated budget of 3.8 trillion rubles through 2025.

Several major bridge and road construction projects have ended in financial scandals and disasters in recent years.

A newly-built 1,104 meter bridge opened by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in Vladivostok ahead of the 2012 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, had to be closed for "waterproofing and asphalt laying," not long after it was finished, builder TMK said at the time.

In June last year, a \$930 million road, built to connect the airport in Vladivostok with Russky Island via that bridge, collapsed after heavy rains. Medvedev demanded punishment for those responsible for its poor construction.

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