

Moscow Traffic Havoc

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

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Lubimov Andrei / Moskva News Agency

Моя улица: My Street

If you come to Moscow this summer, 15 minutes after you leave the customs area at the airport you will hear talk of моя улица (my street). Actually, you'll be hearing talk of “Моя улица” — a Moscow city program that the mayor's office calls крупнейший проект благоустройства в современной истории Москвы (the biggest urban improvement project in the modern history of Moscow). The project has three parts: реконструкция улиц, ремонт фасадов, подсветка зданий (reconstructing streets, repairing facades, and lighting buildings). The goal: создать комфортную городскую среду и сделать Москву местом, удобным для жизни (to create a comfortable urban environment and make Moscow livable).

Who wouldn't want that, right?

Well, it's complicated. The reason you'll hear about it right away is because the person who

meets you at the airport will moan about the hours he or she spent in traffic jams due to road work. As proof, your driver will show you his smartphone navigator dotted with thousands of little pictograms of tiny people and miniscule shovels. The signs used to be called дорожные работы (road work), but now they've been renamed работы по благоустройству (urban improvement work). Doesn't matter what you call them — it's still guys with shovels wreaking havoc with traffic.

If you drive or are driven you'll want to pay attention to a few very important phrases: Движение по нескольким улицам ограничат (There will be lane closures on several streets, literally "traffic will be limited on several streets"). Translation: you will crawl a half meter per minute in your lane while two-ton Jeeps try to push in front of you and the guy yakking on his cell behind you nudges your bumper every time he stops.

You might also hear: Часть улицы перекроют (Part of the street will be closed.) Translation: Even if you don't drive within 10 kilometers of that street, you'll still be stuck in traffic jams for half the day.

Another version of this is: Проезд по улице будет закрыт (The street will be closed to traffic.) Translation: Get your car out of the courtyard the night before.

Pay attention to the weather reports, too. Phrases that should give you pause: На Москву надвигается мощный циклон (A powerful storm system is moving towards Moscow.) В Москве ожидается тропический потоп (Moscow can expect a tropical downpour.) Москву накроет очередной сильный ливень (Another powerful rain storm will hit Moscow.) You should be particularly concerned if you hear or read this word: Ветхозаветный (Old Testament), as in Ветхозаветный потоп (Old Testament flood). If you do not have an ark or one of those nifty cars that turns into a boat, cancel our meetings and stay inside.

Why? Because if you plan to go out, you won't. Your driver will call and tell you about one or more of these events: Улица затоплена! (The street is flooded!) Вода сносила машины и хлестала из канализационных люков и решёток ливнёвки! (The water washed away cars and surged out of manholes and screened-over storm drains!). Движение полностью парализовано! (Traffic is completely paralyzed!) Улица превратилась в большую реку глубиной до 30 сантиметров (The street turned into a big river that was up to 30 centimeters deep!) And finally: Машина заглохла (The car has stalled.)

But just when you think you will give up on Moscow and move to higher ground, you hear a quip like this: Из Мэрии сообщили, что причалы для гондол в столице тоже будут платными (The mayor's office announced that docks for gondolas in the capital will be paid parking.) And you think: Okay, I'll stick around for a while longer. At least the locals haven't lost their sense of humor.

But still, we'd like to know when this will end.

We finally got the answer this week. Pyotr Biryukov, deputy mayor in charge of all this work said: Меня часто спрашивают — когда закончится программа "Моя

«улица»? Отвечаю: никогда. (I'm often asked — when will the My Street program end? I tell them: Never.)

Forget summer. Forever.

Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, author of “The Russian Word’s Worth,” a collection of her columns. Follow her on Twitter @MicheleBerdy.

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