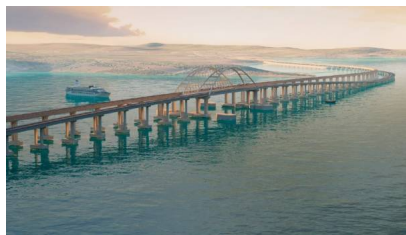


CRIMEAN BRIDGE TO OPENED SOONER THAN EXPECTED



Crimean bridge will be the largest bridge in Europe. More than 10 thousand builders are working at the site to construct the 19-kilometre-long bridge connecting the Crimean Peninsula with the Russian mainland, which should open ahead of the summer season.

The bridge across the Kerch strait is estimated to become one of the main attractions of the peninsula, which will additionally attract tourists. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, **the bridge could be opened earlier than planned - after May 9**, at least in terms of automobile transport. Initially it was planned to open in December this year. The railway section of the Crimean bridge is planned to be put into operation at the end of 2019.

According to authorities, with the opening of the bridge, growth of the sector is expected once again. Head of Crimea Sergei Aksenov expects an increase of 8-10 million visitors per year, mainly after the opening of the railway section. Earlier it was reported that last year the tourist flow to the republic fell by 3.2% to 5.39 million as a result of the Turkish revival.

Experts also believe that the Crimean bridge will create routes alternative to Sochi - Crimea cruises. There will be routes that will allow to see both Crimea and for example the Kuban region. As a result, tourism is also expected to grow in the Krasnodar region. The region was visited by about 16 million tourists in 2017 and it is projected to grow further on this year.

However, all is not as rosy regarding the construction of the huge bridge. Among Crimean carriers there is a fear that the roads of the peninsula will not withstand the loads, and big trucks will not be allowed to enter the bridge at all.

One of Crimean carriers, who wished to remain anonymous, believes that "the quality of rendered services" of bus transportation will significantly worsen for passengers.

"Our transport infrastructure is not ready for this. The amount of transport is at the limit, the buses are idle for a long time in traffic jams, they do not arrive on time. Especially in the summer in traffic jams, older people feel unwell. After the increasing of the number of cars, the situation will only worsen," the carrier noted.

According to the source, **the May opening of the bridge will be formal**. Until all technical nuances are fixed, transport through the Kerch Strait will be a spare option for those who will travel from the mainland and plan to use the ferry.

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