

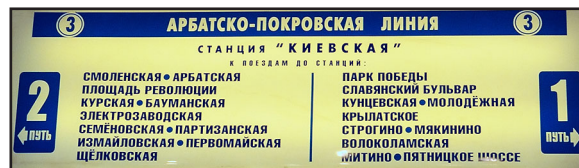
# NAVIGATING THE MOSCOW METRO: *a guide for the English speaker*

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## INTRODUCTION

Signs in the huge, heavily trafficked Moscow Metro system are almost entirely in Cyrillic. An example:

I struggled while learning to ride the Metro, but soon could navigate the system comfortably. These instructions describe my approach. They're far from perfect, and I offer no assurance that you won't get lost while using them. Still: they're what I wish I'd had before visiting Russia.



## ATTITUDE

Regard the English station names used in hotel and tourist guides as a potentially dangerous distraction. It does you no good to know that a place is next to the *Chekhovskaya* station if you're assured of never seeing the word *Chekhovskaya* in the Metro.

What you'll see instead is the Cyrillic Чеховская. You can't read Cyrillic, but can regard Чеховская as a word symbol. Чеховская is where you're going; Чеховская is what you'll look for on the signs.

## BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

- Download the .pdf of Ilya Birman's map — which I prefer to alternatives — at:

<http://ilyabirman.net/projects/moscow-metro/>

and use a commercial printing service like FedEx or Staples to print out several jumbo-sized copies. The .pdf is about 42" x 35". I printed mine at 16" x 13", and was grateful for the size.

A map with both Cyrillic and English is much more useful than an English only or Cyrillic only map. The maps I found in Moscow were small and difficult to read. I never found a valuable smartphone app.

- Study the map to get to know the system.

There are 12 lines, each with a number and color coding. You won't see the English names for the lines on Metro signage, but will see and depend on the line colors and numbers.

- Commit to memory the syllabic sounding out of a Russian phrase for *Please, do you speak English?*:

**пожалуйста, Вы говорите по-английски?**

Google will say this phrase for you, if you paste пожалуйста, Вы говорите по-английски? into Google Translate. My (admittedly very rough) sounding out of this phrase is:

**Paws-oww-sta, vuh guh va reet-zee pa ahn glee skee?**

- Print and bring to Moscow the visual at right:

поездок means 'rides' or 'trips'. This visual will inform a Moscow Metro ticket agent that you want to buy the Тройка IC card preloaded with payment for 60 rides. (If you are sure you will want fewer rides, you can cross off the '60' above and write in 40, or 20.)



Current fares are at:

[http://engl.mosmetro.ru/pages/page\\_0.php?id\\_page=8](http://engl.mosmetro.ru/pages/page_0.php?id_page=8).

In mid 2014, the cost for a Тройка card is about \$36 USD with 60 rides, \$30 with 40 rides and \$16 with 20 rides.

- Learn to recognize this phrase: **выход в город**.

It means ‘Exit to the city.’ You’ll see it often on Metro signage.

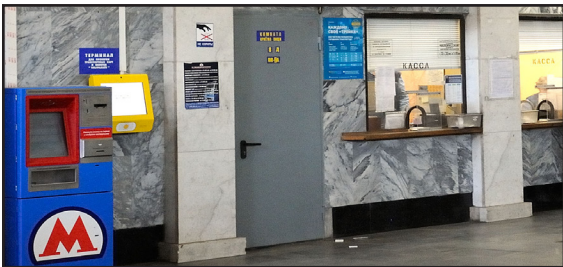
- Plan your Moscow itinerary so you won’t take your first Metro trips during rush hour!



## ENTERING THE STATION

Moscow Metro station entrances vary in appearance.

All station entrances will display a red letter M, like the one in the photo above. Enter through the doors with the rectangular green labels. The red-labeled doors are for departing riders.



*blue/red vending machine and KACCA window*

## BUYING THE ТРОЙКА CARD

Go to the KACCA window, display an appropriate quantity of ruble notes, and present the visual showing that you want to buy a Тройка card with 60 rides preloaded.

(As a fall-back, you could try your luck with the blue/red vending machines; one is shown in the photo at left. These include English instruction.)

## USING THE CARD AT THE FARE GATES

As you enter, tap your Тройка card on the yellow circle on the fare gate. A digital display on the gate will show your card’s remaining balance. (If it shows 59, for instance, you have fifty-nine rides left.)

While riding the Metro, you’ll see red and white boxes like the one on the left side of the photo below, with a button to press for information. I had no luck reaching an English-speaking agent.

## THREE RESOLUTIONS ONCE INSIDE

- When you need to consult your map, find a corner or wall to back up against, so you won’t be bumped while you think.
- Don’t rush to board a train. You won’t have to wait more than a few minutes to board the next one.
- Resist the urge to board a train before you know where it’s going, in the hope that “things might make more sense somewhere else in the system.” You might feel frustrated while trying to decipher signage in your first station, but at least you know where you are!



*New and old fare gates*

## SOME SIGNS IN A SAMPLE TRIP

Below are some of the signs encountered in one possible route of a sample trip between Белорусская station and Смоленская station. Many tourists will enter the Metro at Белорусская, as this is the terminus of the Aeroexpress train from Sheremetyevo airport.

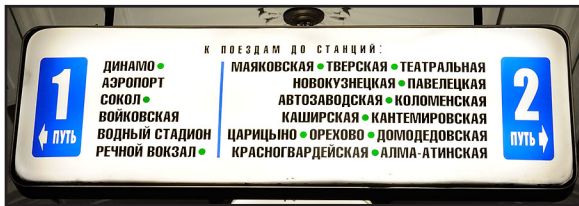
Please follow along on your map. In English, Белорусская is Belorusskaya; Смоленская is Smolenskaya.

As you'll see, we'll be entering a station where the No. 2 Green line and circular No. 5 Brown line intersect. We must find:

- the No. 5 Brown Line, rather than the No. 2 Green Line
- the platform for counterclockwise-bound Brown Line trains bound for Краснопресненская and Киевская, so we can transfer at Киевская

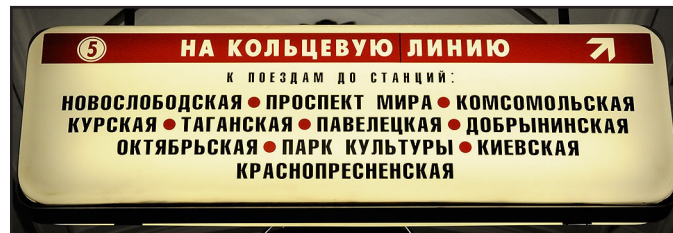
After transferring at Киевская, we must find:

- the No. 3 Blue Line, rather than the No. 4 Light Blue Line
- the platform for eastbound trains for Смоленская



This sign shows that trains for Динамо and points beyond can be boarded at left, and Маяковская-bound trains can be boarded at right. If you study your map and note the green circles next to the station names, you'll see that this sign is for the No. 2 Green Line, and not the No. 5 Brown Line. Динамо is indeed the first Green Line station northwest of Белорусская, and Маяковская is the first station southeast.

But we don't want to get on the Green Line, so must keep walking.



Progress! The sign above indicates that we must go up the stairs to the right to access the No. 5 Brown Line platform, and includes brown circles next to the station names.

The sign below is on the wall across the tracks from a No. 5 Brown Line platform. I regarded platform signs like this as my best friends in the system; every platform had one, and the sign always told me where I was and where the train was going.



The directional arrow at the top indicates that the train is traveling from right to left. The present station, Белорусская, is in red font. The next station -- reading from right to left, following the directional arrow -- is

Новослободская, and the one after that is Проспект Мира. Transfers to other lines are shown in the vertical rectangles underneath the station names.

As the sign makes clear, we're on the platform for trains going the wrong way! We don't want to head clockwise toward Новослободская; we want to go counter-clockwise toward Краснопресненская.



We explore a bit more, and soon find the platform with the sign below:



This No. 5 Brown Line sign also shows that our current station is Белорусская, and that the next station indicated by the directional arrow is Краснопресненская, followed by Киевская. We're transferring at Киевская, so this is the train we want.



Because we boarded a relatively modern train, we can watch our progress during the ride on the digital display shown in the next shot. Look for it over the doors. Older trains don't have it.



The red rectangle flashes under the name of the station coming up next.

You will not be able to read station names on the walls as the train arrives at each station. Recorded announcements are only in Russian. Plan on counting off the stations on your map if riding a train without the digital display.



We have gotten off at our Киевская transfer point, and contemplate the potentially confusing sign below:



The sign says that we can **выход в город** by going either right or left -- but **выход в город** means ‘exit to the city,’ and we want to keep riding. Please avoid confusing **выход в город** directional arrows with other directional arrows.

Fortunately, the sign also indicates that we should bear left to go to both the No. 3 Blue Line and the No. 4 Light Blue line. But the colors have faded, and the sign’s “light blue” for No. 4 looks darker than the blue for No. 3.

Expect similarly inaccurate color renditions on other Moscow Metro signs. Thankfully, you can count on the line numbers.



This way to the No. 4 line!



The light blue is accurate, in this case ... but we don’t want the No. 4, so keep walking.



We have reached the No. 3 line!



Trains bound for Парк Победы and points beyond are on the right; trains bound for Смоленская are on the left. Смоленская is where we want to go, so we turn left ...



... and look for the sign to tell us that we’ve found the correct No. 3 platform. The sign above says that we have. The current station, Киевская, is indicated in red (or a red faded to orange). The next station indicated by the directional arrow, Смоленская, is where we want to go.

## IF YOU GET STUCK

Many young Muscovites speak English. Look for someone under thirty, and try out that phrase you rehearsed before you left: Пауs-оwв-stа, vuh guh va reet-zee pa ahn glee skee? (Or, in Cyrillic: пожалуйста, Вы говорите по-английски?)

If you can't remember the phrase, you probably could approach a succession of young people with something like 'English? Do you speak English, please?' until you found an English speaker.

I found no middle-aged staff conversant in English, and several tourist pamphlets advised steering clear of the Russian police.

## ONE MORE WARNING

Moscow Metro signage wasn't always adequate, particularly at stations connecting two or more lines. I remember an irritating hunt for one line at the station connecting the Red, Blue, Light Blue and Gray subways.



Image files used in this guide are online at: [transitophile.com/chango/files/moscowmetro](http://transitophile.com/chango/files/moscowmetro). This guide was first posted in a blog entry at: [transitophile.com/chango/moscow-metro-guide-for-english-speakers/](http://transitophile.com/chango/moscow-metro-guide-for-english-speakers/)