

1,700 kilometre line is serviced by ... only one model 646 passenger ship, built in 1952, and known as the "granddaddy of the Russian fleet."

What is the reason for this? At one time, when working out a program for providing steamship lines with a modern passenger fleet, officials at the Ministry of Inland Water Transport of the RSFSR did not get around to considering the shallow river basins of the west. As a result, ships were designed with so-called "depths" in mind. The Lena River Basin, however, is very limited with respect to large passenger ships because of the size of its waterway: some years water depths in the middle of the Lena fall as low as 170 centimetres. In addition to this, it must be noted that we cannot afford a modern fleet. For example, the passenger ship "Dem'yan Bednyi", obtained by the steamship-line three years ago, is 45 times as expensive as a model 737 passenger ship. This is indeed a "golden" ship!

The problem of replacing the large-capacity passenger fleet on the Lena River was raised at the highest levels more than once, yet it remains unsolved to this day. There is no shallow, large-capacity fleet to be found in this country, nor is one being built. True, the Passenger Transport Laboratory at the Gor'kiy Institute of Water Transportation Engineers came up with a design for a shallow vessel, but once again, this was a tourist class ship, whereas vessels are needed here for the development of a regular passenger service in a region having no other transportation network! Furthermore, according to preliminary estimates, the new ship will cost from 6 to 10 million roubles.

It must be noted that there has lately been a significant increase in the cost of all types of