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TRANSCRIPT: NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on PIX11

NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on PIX11's News at 5 with Tamsen Fadal and John Muller to discuss the impact on transit of New York City's Phase 3 reopening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Tamsen Fadal: Well if you went back to work in Phase 3, you've probably seen a lot more people in and around New York City this week. That means mass transit, more critical than ever. Sarah Feinberg, president of the Transit Authority, joining us via Skype to talk about how it is all going. Sarah, thank you as always, I know it's been a busy week so far.

Sarah Feinberg: Hey, good to see you. Thanks for having me.

Fadal: So let's talk about it, New York City entered Phase 3 yesterday. How are things going right now?

Feinberg: Great, it's just good to have people back in the system, right? So some folks were with us throughout the pandemic, essential workers who had to depend on us to get them to their jobs at pharmacies, hospitals, grocery stores. But as we entered Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, more and more people come back. It's great to see, it feels great. And a lot of these folks who haven't been in the system since March are reentering the system for the first time and they're noticing a very different system, a clean system, gleaming, sparkling. We've got masks, if you've forgotten your mask, we have a mask for you at the station booth. We have hand sanitizer everywhere, so we're trying to make it an easy reentry.

Fadal: Now let's talk about it, because I know the latest ridership numbers are up. How's that working with regard to social distancing for people who, as you said, have not been in the system for a while, and are a little concerned about it?

Feinberg: So we're at about a million riders in the subway and a million on buses as well, so there's a long way to go to get back to our regular ridership, but we're making a lot of progress. Look, on social distancing, at some moments during the day, it's very easy to social distance. At others in those peak times, it can get a little bit crowded and so the most important thing is that everyone wear their mask. People have got to be vigilant about their mask usage. We've seen very good compliance throughout the system, 90%, 95%, which is great. That means that folks are following the guidance, keeping themselves safe and that's the most important thing.

Fadal: And helping everybody else around them, because that was going to be my next question. I'm wondering how the compliance was going with the masks, certainly good news. Let's hop over and talk about bus barriers, those have now been installed. How do they work and how is it going?

Feinberg: Well we've just started installing them, and it's going to take us the whole summer to actually get to the entire fleet of buses. So these are going to be dividers that exist between the operator and the rider. So right now, there's quite a bit of space between riders and operators, there's probably about 10 feet of space. And, look, it's important for us to do two things. One, make sure that as more riders come onto buses, they've got enough space on the bus, they're not crammed in tightly. And two, we have to open the fare box up again, right? Most people have been coming onto the bus on the rear door, they've been bypassing the fare box as we've been trying to make sure there's distance between riders and operators. But look, our financial situation is dire. We have to open up that fare box. So to your point, we're building these barriers, innovative solution, I don't think any other transit system in the country, maybe the world, has built what we're building. Basically plastic dividers that can be moved back and forth so that the operator can interact with riders, but then sort of rewrap the divider to keep themselves safe.

Fadal: And fare boxes, when do those open? Are we looking at August for that?

Feinberg: August, yep. I don't have a specific date yet but we'll come back to you when we do. But August, fare box baby.

Fadal: Alright, we're ready, we know it's important, we'll be ready. Sarah as always, thank you so much for joining us.

Feinberg: Thank you.