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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears Live on PIX11 Morning News

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live today on *PIX11 Morning News* with Dan Mannarino to discuss ongoing public hearings on proposed fare and toll increases, mask usage, and contingencies to balance MTA budget in the absence of \$12 billion in federal aid.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Dan Mannarino: The pandemic has brought on massive financial issues for so many of the nation's largest transportation systems, right? New York's MTA facing the worst budget crisis today. We have talked about this for a number of times with the head of the MTA, Chairman Pat Foye, and Pat is joining me this morning to continue this conversation. So good morning to you, sir.

Patrick J. Foye: Morning Dan, how are you?

Mannarino: So you and I have talked a number of times about the dire MTA financial status. This is not news to anybody, but how much are you actually losing per week that is putting you more and more in the hole as we continue on with the pandemic?

Foye: Dan it's an extraordinary number. We are losing approximately \$200 million a week. It varies from week to week, but that's an extraordinary number. Most of that is a decline in fare and toll revenue, a result of the decline in ridership.

Mannarino: I mean, that is an extraordinary number, right? \$200 million. You're asking for \$12 billion, with a "b", in funding, something that we've talked about a number of times. If you got that money, if it's approved, where would it go? And how long, is the big question, how long would it last?

Foye: Well, the \$12 billion is our ask Dan, it would last a number of years. And where would it go? It would go to operating subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road; paying, paying salaries, paying electric bills to move subway cars, traction power is really critical to our business and expensive. Same thing on Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road. It would go to our day-to-day bills.

Mannarino: You know me, I love a repeat question. Last time I spoke to you, sir, you and I, I did ask you if you've spoken to the Biden transition team about the conversations in terms of funding. The answer was no then, have you had any conversation since?

Foye: The answer is many times including over this weekend. We had a Zoom call with the Biden transportation transition team on Saturday, we've had numerous calls in Zoom since the election, and they've been incredibly accessible to us.

Mannarino: Do they seem to understand the financial straits that you are in, and does it sound promising to do and get that funding?

Foye: They do. I'll just mention two members on that team. One is Phil Washington, who was a longtime public transit operator, senior manager, he runs LA Metro. Phil understands, LA Metro is in a similar situation. Now I'll note that Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, former MTA board member now New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner is on as well as a number of other highly qualified transit and transportation experts.

Mannarino: All right so it sounds like it's going in the right direction. Of course, you need the Senate and Congress to approve that. In the meantime, you and I have talked about public hearings, they have begun, what are you hearing from those hearings? I can't imagine people are in favor of service cuts or fare hikes.

Foye: No one is in favor of service cuts. No one is in favor of fare increases. No one is in favor of layoffs. And when I say no one that includes everybody at the MTA. We don't want to reduce service, we don't want to have to lay anybody off, but our hand may be forced if there isn't federal funding. There is hope, and I don't want to overstate it, obviously the election of President-elect Joe Biden is a really hopeful step. He is a longtime supporter of public transit and was a Amtrak customer on a daily basis when he was in the United States Senate, and it is reported that there were discussions going on between the White House, the United States Senate, the Congress on a lame duck COVID relief bill which would include funding for mass transit. I want to thank Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader Senator Schumer for their work in the past and ongoing.

Mannarino: I want to talk about these five MTA employees that have been accused of overtime fraud that that news broke last week. Obviously you took swift action, but how much does something like that actually cost the MTA and could, could this and similar incidents be the reason why there have been some budget gaps over the years?

Foye: Well look, the, these are outrageous charges. And I, I want to thank the US Attorney for the Southern District, the FBI and MTA Inspector General for their, for their important work. These are outrageous charges and on their face are, are shocking. The dollar amount involved is approximately a million dollars. This overtime was accrued in 2018. I want to report that when the overtime numbers for 2018 were announced in the spring of 2019 we convened a special meeting of the MTA board on overtime and we took action. In 2019 overtime compared to the prior year was down

\$92 million. In 2020 so far overtime is down \$73 million. What I'm doing is meeting on a monthly basis with the agency presidents -- Long Island Rail Road, New York City Transit, buses, Metro-North, etcetera, Bridges and Tunnels as well -- and we go through reimbursable, which is capital project overtime, and non-reimbursable which is, that's charged to the operating [budget], and that's had a significant effect. Over the next three or four years we expect to cut overtime by an additional couple 100 million dollars a year.

Mannarino: Pat I've got to quickly get to two last topics, and so let's be brief answers here. With news of a COVID vaccine distribution as early as December 15 will MTA workers be considered essential workers in getting early access to a vaccine?

Foye: The answer is yes. I've discussed the matter with Commissioner Zucker, the Commissioner of Health. Obviously, transit workers have made great sacrifices during the pandemic. The governor has characterized them quite properly as first responders and essential employees.

Mannarino: Good information there. And lastly, the MTA, you've been doing a lot to improve mask wearing. Launching a new campaign to remind everybody today to wear their masks, I'm honored to be part of it, but tell us more about it and when it kicks off.

Foye: Single most important thing people can do, our customers can do, is to wear a mask. Protects them, their customer, their fellow commuters and our employees. Dan, you're going to be heard in the subways, the familiar voice of Dan Mannarino, is going to be heard in the subway starting today at 12:15 p.m. on the numbered line subway line, 1 2 3 4 5 6 7, etcetera. Dan, we really appreciate your attention, and Channel 11's attention to this. And your participation will help get the mask word out. Mask compliance on subways and buses is 95%-plus, we want to get it even higher. Thanks for your help Dan.

Mannarino: I am honored to be a part of it, Mr. G, Stacy-Ann Gooden as also part of that campaign, and we really do want to get that number up as well. So looking forward to that campaign. Thank you for asking us to be part of it Chairman Foye and thanks for always making the time with us this morning.

Foye: Absolutely. Thanks Dan.

Mannarino: If I don't talk to you before the holiday, have a safe and happy holiday.