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Press Release

March 31, 2020

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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears on MSNBC with Ayman Mohyeldin to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

Ayman Mohyeldin: This morning from New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio on the "Today Show", more than 900 people here have died as a result of the coronavirus and that includes five more members of the world's largest mass transit system. Eight MTA workers in total have died in less than a week. More than 3,000 workers have been ordered quarantine at home, nearly 600 have tested positive for COVID-19 and that includes MTA Chairman and CEO, Pat Foye. Mr. Foye good to have you with us, let me bring you in here, he's joining us by the phone I should note let me bring you in here, first of all, by asking you how you are doing, sir, how are you feeling after testing positive for the coronavirus?

Patrick J. Foye: Ayman, morning, thank you for having me, I'm feeling fine. I appear to be fortunate and suffering from a mild case, I'm more concerned about my 582 colleagues at the MTA who are confirmed and we mourn the deaths of the eight MTA family members who died as well as one of our operators who was murdered in a fatal fire Friday morning, so this is not about me, it's about my colleagues who are doing heroic work. The reason we're operating the subways and buses, Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road, is to move first responders and essential workers to and from work. We're not carrying people on leisure. We're talking about doctors and nurses and utility workers and people working in supermarkets, pharmacy, transit workers, utility workers, etcetera, getting them to and from work. It is incredibly important in terms of being able to have the city and the region respond to the pandemic and we are, our MTA workers are rising to the occasion and on subways, buses, commuter rails continuing that heroic work.

Ayman Mohyeldin: Do you have a sense of how many people are riding this on a daily basis, the entire system as a whole? I mean, I know you obviously keep track of the number when things are in normal conditions, but as things now have changed, as our society and our city have changed, what are the numbers of commuters looking like that you just outlined?

Patrick J. Foye: Well look, compared to pre-pandemic days, on subways work down about 90%. That's a good thing. That means that people are heeding Governor Cuomo's direction to reduce social density, to increase social distance and that's reflected in our ridership. But the 10% that we are carrying, whether it's on subways, buses, or the commuter rails are first responders, essential workers, and we'll continue to carry those folks during this pandemic.

Ayman Mohyeldin: Let me get your thoughts really quickly on what the MTA is doing to protect worker safety. The MTA announced a few days ago that it would be distributing 75,000 masks to workers. Why wasn't that done weeks ago? I want to share with you just what one union official says, that this is a bit late in the game. Are there other steps that you're taking to ensure worker safety right now?

Patrick J. Foye: Well, let's talk about masks first, right. The CDC, we're not a medical people or public health people, so we've taken direction from the CDC and other public health officials. Crazy, the CDC's direction is still not to provide mask except to those who are ill or medical people. We have decided not to take that advice going for as far back as last week, and indeed the World Health Organization yesterday affirmed the same advice. That doesn't make sense to us. So we're distributing north of 75,000 masks to our frontline workers. That number, that's a weekly number, that number we expect, and that number will grow. We put a number of steps in place, we're disinfecting all workplaces, stations, rolling stock, subway cars, commuter rails. We have reduced the number of people working, we've sent basically half our folks home so that we have a bench, so we've reduced the number of crews. We've eliminated taking cash on the subways, buses, Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road, we put rear door boarding in, where we're not collecting fares to minimize the human contact between bus operators, so customers will board from the back and we've cordoned off the area around our bus drivers. We're taking additional steps to make sure that we do everything we can to minimize the health risk during this pandemic, to both our customers and our employees, and the distribution of masks is part of that and we're no longer taking the advice of the CDC and the World Health Organization.

Ayman Mohyeldin: Okay, so really quickly I know that that Senator Chuck Schumer's office says that the MTA will be getting nearly \$4 billion from the 2 trillion relief bill that was signed into law last week. Walk us through your plan on how you intend to use that money.

Patrick J. Foye: Well look, here's what's happened when the pandemic, since the pandemic started, one is ridership has declined. I just described on the subways, it's down 90%. We get a significant amount, about \$6 billion a year in a normal year from the farebox. That has declined to near zero. We also get about \$6 billion in state subsidies, this is part of our annual operating statement in a normal year. Those subsidies are economic and transaction based and they have declined significantly. And I described the disinfecting we're doing and workplaces, subway cars, stations, etcetera, on an annualized basis, and these are all annualized numbers. So the \$4 billion that the federal government has allocated, and thank you to Senator Schumer in the New York State delegation, much more will be needed as we go forward. But this is an important down payment in terms of recognizing the reduction in ridership, and therefore, farebox revenue, the decline in these state economically sensitive transactions and the increase in operating costs as a result of the pandemic.

Ayman Mohyeldin: All right, Chairman and CEO of the MTA Pat Foye, thank you very much. We wish you a speedy recovery and to all of your workers are well, on behalf of a grateful city for keeping the essential workers and the frontline workers getting to work. We certainly appreciate it. We thank you

very much.

Patrick J. Foye: Ayman thanks very much, take care.