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Press Release

April 8, 2020

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Issues Letter to The New York Times

To the Editor:

The MTA during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has been grieving over the tragic deaths of many of our colleagues. The one-sided New York Times story “41 Transit Workers Dead: Crisis Takes Staggering Toll on Subways” that ran April 8 only adds to that anguish by ignoring the facts.

Since March 1, when the first case of COVID-19 was identified in New York, the MTA has taken aggressive action to protect the health and safety of our heroic workforce on the frontlines of this crisis.

The only ‘sluggish’ response has been on the part of the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, whose guidelines against widespread use of masks the MTA (a transportation organization, not a medical provider) initially followed but has since disregarded. To date, we have provided 460,000 N95 and surgical masks to all of our operating employees in addition to thousands of face shields and 2.5 million pairs of gloves. Only last week – after the MTA acted and we recommended our customers wear face coverings – did the CDC change course and recommend Americans wear masks. The WHO has still not acted.

Additionally, here’s what the MTA, which took many of these steps before any transportation agency nationwide, has done. On March 3, the MTA implemented new disinfecting procedures – sanitizing our stations and full fleet of thousands of rolling stock daily and fully every 72 hours. On March 11, we stepped those efforts up to disinfect stations twice daily. We have implemented rear-door boarding to ensure social distancing for bus operators and eliminated cash transactions systemwide to limit person-to-person contact.

After the state implemented the ‘NY on Pause’ order on March 20, the MTA put into place the Essential Service Plan on March 24 to preserve service for healthcare workers, first responders and other essential workers – allowing flexible scheduling to maximize social distancing and limit the number of people needed to come to work. We also implemented unprecedented back office procedures to promote social distancing in and around crew rooms and bus depots.

The MTA’s pandemic plan is a blueprint that we have followed and improved on since day one. Unfortunately, what the plan, like others nationwide, did not contemplate was that medical guidance during this specific period would be not to use certain stockpiled items for all employees. Moreover, to set the record straight on supplies provided, the MTA has given employees: 12,500 gallons and over 50,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, 500,000 sanitizing wipes and 53,000 gallons of cleaning solution. We will continue to distribute these materials.

The MTA’s singular focus is on protecting our heroic employees and customers. Any suggestion otherwise is baseless. We have implemented our plan and made necessary changes in real time as we deal with this unprecedented public health crisis.

Sincerely,
Patrick J. Foye
MTA Chairman and CEO