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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears on Fox 5's "Good Day New York" to Discuss MTA Response to COVID-19

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on Fox 5's "Good Day New York" to discuss the MTA's update to agency-wide sanitizing protocols as it redoubles safety precautions in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and ridership numbers and rumors that the subway system will shut down.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Rosanna Scotto: The rumors were rampant yesterday that the MTA was going to shut down the subway system. Listen, they're trying to keep up with sanitizing the subways, so and train, so all of us feel safe.

Lori Stokes: But with the city's state of emergency now in effect, limiting events the big question on everybody's mind will mass transit shutdown. Joining us now MTA Chairman Pat Foye. So Foye, great to have you with us here. Okay. Answer the question is the subway system.

Patrick J. Foye: Short answer is no. Period, full stop.

Lori Stokes: Okay.

Patrick J. Foye: Yesterday ridership was down, actually Wednesday, ridership was down about 18%. Having said that, we carried 4 million people safely. The subway system, the bus system, the commuter rails are safe. We have increased, substantially, the frequency and intensity of disinfecting the stations.

Lori Stokes: Twice a day before, what is it now?

Patrick J. Foye: No, we started with sanitizing the stations all of them: Staten Island Rail, subways, Long Island Railroad Metro North once a day. We're now doing it twice a day.

Lori Stokes: Is it enough?

Patrick J. Foye: I think it's enough that we're also going to be introducing in the days ahead some innovative new innovative cleaning.

Lori Stokes: Such as?

Patrick J. Foye: I'm not going to get into details, when we're ready to announce that we will, but the system is safe. We carried 4 million people on the subways yesterday, that number is down, that number is likely to continue to drift down. But we've got a responsibility which we take unbelievably seriously, to take for instance, teachers and firefighters and police officers and nurses, who are unbelievably important, one of my daughter's is an emergency room nurse, utility workers, building managers, etcera, and transit workers. One of the things I want to mention that's been inspiring is that both at New York City Transit Long Island Rail Road, Metro North MTA bus, transit workers and members of every one of the other MTA unions have shown up for work just as they did after 911. And after Superstorm Sandy and after various acts of God and storms that have occurred over the last 10 or 12 years. That's inspiring. Employee availability is not an issue and transit workers and members of every one of our other unions are responding to the situation.

Lori Stokes: Have you also told them tell them to also stay home, take extra precaution if they're not feeling well? Because they're coming into contact with the public for sure.

Patrick J. Foye: That's the advice to our customers. That's the advice to our employees. We are transportation folks. We're not medical doctors. We're not public health professionals. What we're doing is we're taking advice from the CDC, from Dr. Howard Zucker, who's the state Commissioner of Health who is doing an extraordinary job the New York as his counterpart in New York City, and the cleaning regimen that we put in place to disinfecting the stations and rolling stock in buses and Access-A-Ride vehicles, which are also being disinfected on a daily basis, that's in large part a medically vulnerable population. We're taking advice from public health professionals. But the answer is if you need to take the subways because you're a nurse, a teacher, a doctor and to gets to your to get your job the system is open. We're running normal service today, subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road, Metro North. You may find it a little easier to get a seat than you have in the past. That's a small upside, but the system is safe. It's operating normally, it's on or close to schedule.

Rosanna Scotto: Mr. Chairman, at what point will you change keeping the subway system open? I think a lot of people are concerned because we keep

hearing the numbers and, you know, multiply and quadruple and stuff like that.

Patrick J. Foye: Rosanna that's exactly right. Having said that, the system has to operate to take nurses and doctors and transit workers and first responders, EMS, firefighters, police officers, etc. utility workers

Rosanna Scotto: So you don't foresee it ever shutting down?

Patrick J. Foye: Well look, ever is a strong word. Obviously, we're going to be driven by the advice of the medical and the public health professionals. At the end of the day it's a decision that would be made by Governor Cuomo. But right now, and we've got at the MTA, contingency plans on top of contingency plans.

Lori Stokes: We've seen that before where the system has of course..

Patrick J. Foye: Yeah, after 911, after Superstorm Sandy, extraordinary events like that. Today we're running normal service. There'll be fewer people than there would have been on a normal weekday. We understand that. We're running normal service, that's the plan going forward. We will be considering, as we have it every step of the way, the advice of medical professionals in public health. We're obviously in constant dialogue with the Governor's Office and also with the Mayor who was here a couple minutes ago.

Lori Stokes: What kind of precautions are you taking personally? Because you're out there, you're trying to get the information out there. What are you doing?

Patrick J. Foye: Here's what I'm doing. Can't clean your hands enough. If you've got to cough, don't cough in your hand, cough into your elbow. All the common sense advice that our mothers gave us as children. I think in some ways we've kind of fallen away from that. These are standard precautions. They will help your health, they will help the health of family members and the people that you're in contact with. Obviously the actions that the Governor took yesterday in terms of reducing social density, prohibiting gatherings of 500 people, will help. But there are going to be many people throughout this situation who have to get to work, nurses and first responders, etcetera. The MTA is going to be there, subways, buses, commuter rails, to take them to and from work.

Lori Stokes: You talked about the ridership going down on subways. Buses are down 15% for Metro North 48%, LIRR 31% and tunnels down 6.7%. Do you foresee those numbers even?

Patrick J. Foye: I think those numbers will continue to drift down.

Lori Stokes: Just as the fear element comes up another side that they don't want to take mass transit.

Patrick J. Foye: There comes a fear but the actions that the strong actions that Governor Cuomo has taken over the last several days, limiting events of over 500 people, obviously many or if not all local colleges have closed. Thankfully the public schools are open as the mayor, said that's really important. Google North America is advising or requiring everybody to telecommute, that's going to affect our ridership. That's natural. And that's reflected in the 18% decline on Wednesday that we saw and I suspect the Thursday numbers will be even lower. Having said that, we're still carrying millions of people to and from work. That's an awesome responsibility we take seriously. We're going to continue doing it.

Lori Stokes: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much, Pat Foye, we appreciate you coming on and setting the record straight. So many rumors, so many rumors, but I think you cut through them. So thanks for that.

Patrick J. Foye: Appreciate it.