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Press Release

March 30, 2020

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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on NY1 with Lewis Dodley to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared live today by phone on NY1 with Lewis Dodley to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Lewis Dodley: The MTA announced today that five of its workers died from coronavirus complications. This though as the agency has seen a drastic drop in ridership because of the crisis. We're joined on the phone now by Sarah Feinberg, the interim president of New York City Transit. Thanks for joining us, Sarah.

Sarah Feinberg: Thanks for having me.

Lewis Dodley: I know this is a tough time for you, tell us about the workers who have passed away.

Sarah Feinberg: Well it's just been a terrible for us. You know, today we had to announce that some additional colleagues of ours had passed away from COVID related issues. And as you know, a couple additional colleagues of ours passed away last week. And on Friday a train operator, our colleague, Garrett Goble was killed as a result of a fire. So I'm not sure New York City Transit's ever had such a tough week so we're really struggling. But you know, it's great, great credit to my colleagues who show up day in and day out to move the essential workers who are getting New York through this crisis. It is unbelievably hard and they've continued to show up every single day. So my hat is off to them.

Lewis Dodley: What's being done to protect workers during this crisis?

Sarah Feinberg: Well, we're taking a lot of steps. So first of all, we continue to disinfect the cars, the buses, the stations themselves, all the touch points. We've also distributed a huge number of masks. You know, I struggled with this a little bit because the CDC medical guidance still says that only folks who are who are ill should wear masks, that masks can be detrimental to everyone else's health. But at this point, what we really want to do is make sure that our workforce is comfortable and masks clearly set our workers at ease and so we want to be able to provide those for them as much as possible.

Lewis Dodley: The MTA drastically reduced workforce on site meaning fewer trips. How's that keeping workers safe? And what about essential workers forced to ride on crowded trains and buses now?

Sarah Feinberg: Yeah, so one of the reasons we had to reduce services because we're having crew shortages. So these are new numbers today, actually across MTA we now have 333 positives. Most of those positives are in transit and transit at 294 confirmed positive cases, and then quarantined in transit we've got about 1,700 people who are on quarantine and across MTA it's almost 2,700 people, 2,690 people on quarantine. So you see the quarantine numbers because we're trying to make sure that anyone with any possible exposure is home and is quarantined and is taking care of themselves. You know, in terms of crowded trains, you know, we're between a rock and a hard place. The best way to describe it, you know, we can't run additional service at this time because we just don't have the crews. We just have so many people who are out, we've got thousands who have called in sick, thousands who are on quarantine and hundreds who have tested positive. So we're running all the service we can possibly run with the crews that we have. What's really important is if you don't need to be out, please stay home, don't be in our transit system. You know, exposing yourself to risk, exposing your family to risk, exposing our workers to risk, our workers' families to risk, unless you absolutely have to be out, unless you're an essential worker or unless you are running an essential errand, picking up a prescription, something like that, because otherwise you're just adding risk to the system. And it's only getting worse and so we need to take some drastic measures.

Lewis Dodley: Can you give me a thumbnail sketch of what kind of service is available now and whether or not just shutting

down the system entirely has ever been considered?

Sarah Feinberg: So the service that we're running right now is called an essential service. It's a service plan that we built specifically for this a couple of weeks ago, probably a month ago now when we knew that the virus was gaining steam and that we might end up in a place where ridership was down significantly, and also that we would be having crew shortages. And so we built this service with that in mind, where we can move the essential workers, move the people who need to be moved, but also protect our workforce to the greatest degree possible. You know, we have got some sporadic crowding issues, we'll see some cars here and there that have been crowded. The NYPD and the MTA Police have been great partners to us. They've been out in the system in full force today, on bullhorns moving people down platform, moving people to less crowded cars. That's really helpful. I think that's helping us tremendously, but I'll be honest, you know, we're still seeing too many people using the transit system. The numbers are too big to just be essential workers and folks running essential errands or going to medical appointments. So what we really need to do is for people to really get the message that they've got to stay home.

Lewis Dodley: And no complete shutdown is imminent?

Sarah Feinberg: Not imminent. Now, of course, we've shut down the system before for various reasons, big snowstorms, weather events, things like that. So we certainly know how to do it and we can do it, it is not imminent.

Lewis Dodley: Sarah, thank you so much for joining us.

Sarah Feinberg: Thank you so much.