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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on NY1 with Errol Louis

MTA New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared live on "Inside City Hall" with Errol Louis on NY1 this evening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. We are keeping our eye now on the growing number of coronavirus cases here in New York. One of the many precautions that Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo have been talking about is to avoid crowded subways when possible. The MTA says they are taking necessary steps to keep riders safe, including increased cleaning and disinfecting of the subway system and the buses. This coronavirus crisis comes on the first official week on the job of the new Interim President of New York City Transit, Sarah Feinberg. She has stepped into the role after the tumultuous departure of Andy Byford. She joins us now to talk about this and much more. Very good to see you, some week on the job. All right. Great to see you.

Sarah Feinberg: Great to see you, thanks for having me back.

Errol Louis: Your timing is impeccable.

Sarah Feinberg: Stepped right in there.

Errol Louis: Let me start with the big question. In the wake of Andy Byford's departure in the interview he just gave to WCBS. Are you really running what the transit president is supposed to run? Or are you, you know, getting micromanaged from Albany?

Sarah Feinberg: Oh, my gosh, well, I think the transit president is running 51,000 men and women who come and make the system work and come to work, work hard and make the system run every single day, and are responsible for the safe and efficient transportation of 8 million people a day. And so I'm definitely doing that. And that's the gig. And it's a pretty good one.

Errol Louis: You don't think that there's any interference from non-professionals about operational matters? That was I thought the most explosive thing about what Andy Byford said.

Sarah Feinberg: I certainly do not feel that way. I've had many government jobs over the years and my boss has always known what I was doing and in my experience when the boss is involved in what you're doing, that's a good thing.

Errol Louis: Okay. Well, let's start with the emergency at hand and then we'll get into some of what else you hope to do with the job. In responding to the coronavirus outbreak, we've heard some things that are not quite contradictory, but people have to try and really sort out what advice they're being given and when we're told to avoid crowded trains, which is probably good advice on any given day. My personal strategy for that is just to leave a little earlier. I have found that if you're in the subway by about 7:30 in the morning, you're gonna probably miss the worst part of rush hour. But right there, there's got to be a better way.

Sarah Feinberg: Well, that's not possible for everyone, right? So people have different schedules. This is what we're doing. So every single night we clean and disinfect the stations all of the touch points that the passengers and riders are likely to touch. Starting tomorrow, we're going to do that twice. Actually, we're going to do it at night, we're going to do it again during the day. We're also doing a disinfecting of all of the cars every 72 hours. So we're working really hard to make sure that we're doing our best to keep the system as safe as clean and as safe for riders as possible. The second thing to know is, I think you said to avoid crowded trains when possible, when possible is the key, right? So if you can telecommute, fantastic. If you can walk to work great. Now is a great time to do that. But most people can't most people depend on the subways and the buses. We're here to provide safe and efficient transportation for them. Certainly if you can avoid big crowds now's the time to do that. The medical experts have said that's the right thing to do. But a lot of people can't and so we're going to be here to transport them.

Errol Louis: Is there a sense? I mean, I get a sense just looking at, you know the headlines. Apparently, car traffic is down. I've noticed just downstairs which is normally a very crowded tourist area right here in Chelsea Market. It's pretty much empty for a lot of the day. You can actually get to that uncrowded train just by taking any train at this point. A lot of people really are already are either in quarantine on vacation on spring break or telecommuting?

Sarah Feinberg: You know, it just depends exactly. I was in Grand Central today and it seemed a little quiet. But then I was on a five train and it was absolutely packed. So I think it just depends on the moment and it depends on where you are. We have seen a slight downturn in ridership over the last

couple of days. And anecdotally, it feels a little bit quiet. But we're not seeing anything particularly dramatic. And right now it feels like people are heeding the advice of those experts and to the extent that employers are allowing folks to telecommute that's a good thing.

Errol Louis: I talked about this with the Mayor. He says that some of their planning suggests that we're going to see increases up through, say, Labor Day up till September. Are you making similar kind of assumptions?

Sarah Feinberg: We're definitely not making assumptions. We're listening to the medical experts and the healthcare experts, but we're hearing similar things.

Errol Louis: And so if this lasts for months, are you able to put in the level that you just described with this kind of intensive cleaning on a regular basis? Do you have the personnel, the overtime budget and so forth?

Sarah Feinberg: Well, we certainly have the personnel I mean, and when it comes to budgeting into overtime, that's always a challenge, right, the more folks we've got out there cleaning, you know, the more the budget is impacted. But that's the priority right now, the priority is always going to be to keep people as safe as possible. And so we'll do it for as long as it as we need to.

Errol Louis: Is this going to have any impact on sort of the big ticket items that we're getting, you know, launching the capital plan, making more of the stations accessible and continuing the ongoing effort to try and keep the trains on time.

Sarah Feinberg: Look, this is a dynamic situation. It changes, you know, at least hour by hour, sometimes moment by moment. I haven't seen any impacts like that yet. I wouldn't rule them out. But, you know, we're sort of at the beginning of this. We've got a long way to go, but I'm not seeing it right now.

Errol Louis: Your employees come in contact with a very wide range of New Yorkers all the time. With a limited ability to avoid them contact them to certain extent. I'm thinking of bus drivers in particular, motor men and conductors and so forth. What are your standing instructions internally about what people should do in order to keep themselves safe, and make sure that they're not transmitting diseases?

Sarah Feinberg: Well, first of all, they have done an unbelievable job. So they're coming to work every single day, you know, certainly before my time, but as they did after 9/11 as they did during Superstorm Sandy. So this is a workforce that shows up and that delivers for the city day in and day out. In terms of how they should be caring for themselves and others. Again, it's that common sense medical advice, you know, treat this like flu season. Wash your hands vigorously, often. Cough into your you know, into your elbow, not into your hands. And, you know, those common sense measures that we should all be taking?

Errol Louis: Well, do you have any personnel concerns? In other words, with 51,000, there's probably a bunch of people sick on any given day.

Sarah Feinberg: On any given day exactly, it's the size of a midsize city.

Errol Louis: So are you are you seeing any trends that would give you concern about that?

Sarah Feinberg: Not yet, which is incredible. And I applaud the workforce day in and day out because it is truly a testament to them that we have not seen any of those issues. They just continue to show up.

Errol Louis: To the extent that you have buses and trains going through places like New Rochelle, places that are, we know are sort of hotspots for the coronavirus. Do they have any special instructions, special training special equipment?

Sarah Feinberg: We're still operating service to the New Rochelle station that's actually not within the containment area. Look, we have contingency plans for contingency plans. We have contingency plans for storms for pandemics for terror attacks for everything. And so we've got all kinds of plans in place. We can sort of turn to them whenever we need to. And so we're executing on those plans right now.

Errol Louis: Your title is interim. Is it conceivable that you will be here for a while?

Sarah Feinberg: Certainly conceivable. My experience is that jobs like this are 24/7 jobs. I have had a couple of those in my time. The difference now is I have a young family and so in my experience, these jobs are not tenable for young families. If it turns out that it is I certainly throw my hat in the ring, but for now, this is an interim gig.

Errol Louis: Got it, okay. We will wish you the best of luck in dealing both with the immediate issues and the broader issues that any Transit President is going to have to face. Thanks so much for coming by.

Sarah Feinberg: Thank you.