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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Foye Appears on MSNBC to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on MSNBC with Katy Tur and Chuck Todd to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Katy Tur: Before dawn today, the subway system went still in its first planned shutdown in 115 years. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is closing the system overnight to disinfect cars and stations. Concerns have been growing about safety of the subway as thousands of the city's homeless have sought shelter on the cars during the pandemic. The subway shut down as part of an historic undertaking to ensure safety of the trains for passengers. Joining us now, is the Chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Pat Foye. Pat, it's really great to have you on. This disinfecting that's going on in the overnight hours, how many people will it be affecting and their abilities to get to work.

Pat Foye: So, Katie, thanks for having me. You're right. It's the first time in the 115-year history of the subways that we had a planned shut down, that New York is a 24-7 town, the subways are a 24-7 operation. Governor Cuomo on Thursday announced this shutdown and basically we shut down this morning from 1am to 5am. We will do this during the pendency of the pandemic which we're all hoping and praying for, it will be sooner rather than later. We did it for a couple of reasons. One, is we want to disinfect every subway car, every bus and every station in a deep clean, daily. Shutting down allowed us to do some of that cleaning overnight in these terminal stations, one. Two, it makes it easier and safer and more productive for our transit workers, who have performed heroically during this entire pandemic, for them to work without passengers around. Frankly, without the homeless around. And then thirdly, as part of the closure from 1am to 5am, everybody who was not in an NYPD or MTA police department or New York City transit uniform, everybody had to leave the system to allow this disinfecting, deep cleaning to continue on stations and subway cars that made it more efficient. But it also allowed the NYPD, which was out in force, more than 1000 police officers, we had 700 cleaners who weren't involved in the interactions with the homeless, but 700 cleaners doing the work in stations. And a couple of hundred homeless happily accepted services and shelter from the city of New York. So those are the three reasons. The first, the closure and the reopening at 5am was successful. We had a robust, we have about 10 to 11,000 customers in the 1am to 5am period during the pandemic. We carried about 6200 of those customers on robust bus service. We added Express buses, we had about 76% more bus trips, and we doubled the number of buses on the New York City streets, during the 1am to 5am period. Sixty-two hundred of that 10 to 11,000 group took us up. We provided a relatively small handful of for-hire-vehicles for whom bus was not workable because their commute on a bus would have been longer than an hour and 20 minutes or would involve more than two transfers, but after one day we've learned a lot. But the first day was a successful closing and a successful reopening.

Tur: I want to bring in Chuck Todd. He's got a question.

Chuck Todd: Have you had any kind of innovative luck, coming up with ways to minimize the number of people you've needed in these cleaning crews, whether it's robotics or something like that? In general, I mean, how are you trying to minimize the number of people that are needed to basically put themselves at risk being the cleaning crews?

Foye: So, Chuck, excellent question. In mid-March we began piloting a number of things. One is the use of ultraviolet, which has a proven experience in hospital and emergency room settings to disinfect. We're looking closely at UV. We're also looking at the application of anti-microbials. There are four or five companies with four or five different products that we have been testing. Governor Cuomo was actually out at the Corona Yard where some of this piloting and testing occurs, he was there on Saturday. That work began, again, in mid-March. We are getting to the end of some of these pilots, Chuck, and I think that what will result will be a greater assurance for our employees working on trains and buses, as well as our customers a greater assurance that the cars have been disinfected every day. Some of these products may have an efficacy beyond the time of application, and whether it's the anti-microbials, or the UVs, and some in some cases UVs, ultraviolet devices, have been deployed as robots. We're looking at all of those things. Our goal is to fast track.

Tur: And, Pat, we're up against the clock, but I'm curious what's it going to look like on the New York City subway, once people are going to start riding in bigger numbers to get to work, once New York City is opened up?

Foye: I think, Katie, one thing that is going to be mandatory for everybody, employees and customers is masks. I think that is a given. Social density that Governor Cuomo noted yesterday is going to be, six feet of social distance, is going to be difficult on transit, not only in New York but around the country, and around the world. We've been talking with our counterparts in Asia and Europe, obviously where the pandemic started earlier and ended earlier, as well as our counterparts in the United States. We're working with our public health experts including Dr. Zucker, the State Department of Health Commissioner, and we will be coming out with a proposal together with PATH and New Jersey Transit, our sister agencies in this part of the country. The Governor's adopted a regional approach, and we'll be speaking to that issue as well as the disinfecting issue going forward.

Tur: From the subway system to the office building system in New York, it's going to be quite a hurdle to try and figure out how you social distance here in New York City. Pat Foye, MTA Chairman and CEO, thank you so much for your time, Sir, we appreciate it.