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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears on WCBS 880AM

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared today on WCBS 880AM to discuss ongoing efforts to address COVID-19 and post-pandemic operational strategy.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Wayne Cabot: One of the toughest jobs in New York City is the MTA Chairman Pat Foye who has to manage all these people in all these trains and buses. And he's now live on the newswire, chairman. Good morning.

Patrick J. Foye: Wayne, good morning. Thanks for having me.

Cabot: Good to have you with us. Yeah, there's a lot to get to because we know you were mentioning the possibility, and I know it's only one of many options, about having some kind of reservation system for the subways and buses. You've obviously given this some thought, you mentioned Ticketmaster. So how would that work? In theory, would we reserve a seat kind of like a seat at the Madison Square Garden or something like that?

Foye: So Wayne, let's step back for a second. Since the pandemic started, we've been looking at what transit agencies around the world starting in Asia and Europe following the course of the pandemic and now North America have been doing. We've been talking to trade associations. We've also been talking and working with technology companies both in terms of new disinfecting solutions and products etcetera. As Governor Cuomo lifts the limits on the downstate economy in New York on Pause, it's incumbent upon us and it's going to be critical for the MTA. The MTA is going to be as critical an agency in the recovery of the New York City and New York City regional economy, which is about 10% of the national economy. So everything is on the table. In that connection, we are putting together a multi-layered multi-dimensional plan which is going to start with masks for all our customers and employees. We're going to temperature check every one of our employees every day to make sure he or she is fit for duty. We're taking disinfecting to a new level and there are some promising developments and long-lasting anti-virus eradication solutions and applicators, looking at ultraviolet technology as well which works well in hospital and emergency room settings. In that connection, we're looking at ways to limit the number of people on a platform in the subway station and on a train and everything is on, everything is on the table. The six feet of social distance that we will come to accept over the last month doesn't work, I think everybody recognizes in a public transit setting. So the question is together with mass and daily disinfecting and new technologies, what can we do to limit crowding and to control that? And in that context, the things that you've mentioned are part of the mix, are being considered and are on the table. Everything's on the table. Our goal is to protect the health of the public, our customers and our employees.

Cabot: And you mentioned looking elsewhere to European models and how they are reopening and I see that in the UK subway, the Underground there, they have reopened, mandating masks but I've seen pictures and a lot of people are not wearing them. What would happen in New York City if someone comes in without a mask?

Foye: Well, Governor Cuomo, I think has eloquently said, what the mask is about —the mask is about respect for your friends, your family, your neighbors, your co-commuters, whether you're on a subway bus or commuter rail. I believe that the compliance, the mask wearing compliance among our employees is 100%. And I think it's very high, in the 90s for our customers, but it's not universal. We've got to make it universal. The thing that is going to drive that, frankly, is public opinion and the public's acceptance of the mask, which I think they've readily adopted. But also the friendly New York City peer pressure that's going to be exerted on those who don't wear masks. There'll be an enforcement element to it, but we have to be realistic. We can't have a police officer or a transit worker on every subway car or every bus. And we're going to have to depend on the goodwill of New Yorkers to wear masks and to comply with the new normal.

Cabot: If people don't have masks, will there be a way of maybe handing them out as they're doing in parks now?

Foye: That is, that is a possibility. Certainly since the endemic started, we've provided masks to all MTA employees, I think for the most part, except for New Yorkers in financial need, that New Yorkers are going to have to figure out a way to get their own mask. I don't think the MTA can take that and take that burden on either logistically or financially, but masks at this point are readily available where that wasn't the case, for instance, the first two or three or four weeks in March, but it's going to be incumbent on New Yorkers to wear masks and to comply with the other steps that will be put in place to protect their health and the health of our employees.

Cabot: Some of the key benchmark numbers for reopening the subways, I would assume, have been dropping with infections and hospitalizations and all that. So, what is the vision for full subway service?

Foye: Well, that decision is going to be made by Governor Cuomo who imposed the state of emergency in New York and put New York, downstate New York, under New York on Pause, and the governor has done extraordinary work in flattening the curve, in stopping the spread of the virus. He will make that decision when various limitations downstate, New York City, Long Island, Westchester etc. are lifted and we'll be in a position to add service next week if we if we needed to do that. We're as you know, ridership on the subways is down more than 90%, similar declines on Metro-North and Long

Island Rail Road. As ridership, and we're watching it daily, as ridership increases, we're in a position to increase it. And our goal right now is to carry first responders and essential employees to and from work. And those are nurses and doctors and utility workers and grocery store workers and transit workers of course and all the other people who are keeping New York running right now. And then when the, when the time for the lifting of the limitations of New York on Pause comes, we will be in a position to add additional service but we want to be able to do that by delivering a—being able to assure customers that we've done everything possible in conjunction and collaboration with public health officials and nationally, internationally, New York State, New York City, of course, to minimize the risk to every one of our customers and every one of our employees.

Cabot: Yeah, the rest of your employees. That's a good point. How are they doing? I know you've been hit pretty hard.

Foye: We have been hit hard, and there's been a tragic loss of life. And those transit workers and MTA employees who have succumbed to the virus have been acting heroically. The positive news is that well over 8,000 of our employees who are under quarantine have returned to the job, which is a sign of their dedication and commitment to public service and to caring first responders and essential workers back and forth. And that's, that's an extraordinary number and extraordinary sign of their dedication to public service and one of the reasons why when the time is right, we will be in a position to add additional service on subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island, and Long Island Rail Road.

Cabot: Chairman Pat Foye, last question before I let you go, and that is as manager, you need to watch the money. And, boy, it's really a daunting thought that a lot of people may not be riding the subways or our buses going forward when this whole thing winds down. It's hard to see what that will look like. But how would you manage a system with far fewer customers and, and the need for fares?

Foye: Well, look the precipitous decline in ridership has hurt us financially. We get about 50% of our revenue from fare and toll revenue, and that's just fallen off a cliff. The good news is that CARES One was passed by the federal government and we thank the president for signing it and expediting it, and extraordinary work done by Senator Schumer and Chair Lowey and that provided \$3.9 billion for the MTA. We've got another ask in for an additional \$3.9 billion. Speaker Pelosi released the House bill on Tuesday, it gets very close to that number and we thank the speaker, Senator Schumer and Chair Lowey, Congressman Jeffries, Congressman Espaillat, and the entire New York delegation on a bipartisan basis. If we were to get that second round to \$3.9 billion, that will take us through 2020. Obviously, there'll be additional amounts that we will need in 2021 because ridership is not going to go back to pre-pandemic levels immediately. But right now, we're focused on the second \$3.9 billion dollars, and we're working with the business community and labor. I have to say that organized labor, the TWU, are led by John Samuelson on an international basis, and Tony Utano on a local basis, Anthony Simon, at the Long Island Rail Road, Bill DeCarlo and others at Metro-North have been extraordinarily helpful in getting the first round of funding they are supporting on a, on a state basis, and on a national basis, from a labor point of view, the \$3.9 billion, as is the business and real estate communities that were very focused on getting that amount is it's really critical to maintaining the MTA's operations.

Cabot: Looks like all hands on deck. MTA Chairman Pat Foye, just make us one promise, if we do have a Ticketmaster seat system, there won't be a \$10 convenience fee.

Foye: Done. Amen.

Cabot: Okay. Thank you. Pat Foye, Chairman of the MTA.