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LIRR

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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Long Island Rail Road President Phil Eng Appears on PIX 11 Morning News

MTA Long Island Rail Road President Phil Eng appeared on PIX 11 Morning News with Dan Mannarino on Wednesday, May 27, to discuss the Phase 1 of Long Island reopening and LIRR's Essential Service Plan enhancements.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Dan Mannarino: Commuters who use the LIRR will have to really rethink their rush hour commute now that Nassau and Suffolk Counties are reopening today. Joining us this morning is LIRR President Phillip Eng to explain the changes to train service. So good morning to you sir, thank you for joining us this morning. Appreciate your time. So let's get into it. Pre-coronavirus, more than 350,000 people took the LIRR. What are you looking at today?

Phil Eng: Good morning Dan. Thanks for having me. Well, today we're continuing to run the essential service plan. That's roughly 70% of our normal peak ridership trains that we run. And what we're doing is we've added cars, on strategic branches, strategic trains to lengthen the cars. So in some cases we've gone from 8 to 10 cars, some 10 to 12 cars. And what we wanted to do is to let riders know, the essential workers that we're serving, that if they want to ride the railroad, if they need to ride the railroad, that we're giving a little extra capacity. And this is important I think as new people come back. As commercial retail, construction begins, these folks perhaps have not been riding and we want them to know just on some of their initial days, we want them to know we have that capacity in advance of them.

Mannarino: All right, so you get on a train, right? You're required to wear a face mask. But what does it look like on board that train? Because usually they get crowded. So I know you're increasing the capacity there, but you're eliminating the amounts of people actually allowed on an individual car?

Eng: So, what we've been doing, you're right absolutely. Face covering is essential and required in our system both on the trains and on the platforms. But what we're also doing is that we are messaging very strongly so folks know that they can actually walk through the car. If they see one car that they think is a little bit more crowded than they'd like, they can move to another one. We're seeing that every day. In Jamaica here behind me, I see the folks walking down platforms to get to a car that they know have a little more capacity. And the other key part is that by adding these extra cars in advance and continuing to have protect trains, we're giving people the flexibility to spread out a little bit more in their early days of coming back.

Mannarino: Good.

Eng: As well as knowing that there is another train available for them.

Mannarino: So, disinfecting, right? We saw that was a big task for the MTA here at the subway system. How often are the LIRR trains being disinfected?

Eng: Well I'm proud of the workforce because they found new ways to do disinfecting even more efficiently than when we started. I can see on the screen that you have the images of the progress. We are disinfecting every train car daily. We're also disinfecting our stations and every touchpoint twice a day. So we want our riders to know that if they come back to the system, when they come back to the system, we're doing everything possible. And we're looking at new technologies as well to improve on what we've done to date.

Mannarino: So, looking at a post COVID-19 world, right? I have a few questions. There have been this idea of reserving seats, right?, so you can limit the amount of people on a train. Is that something you're possibly still considering and if not, what about a fare increase. Its always in the back of everybody's mind: Am I going to have to pay more?

Eng: Well, I'll get to the fare increase first. I know Chairman Foye has said there are no fare increases as a result of COVID-19, and we want our riders to know that. The part with regards to the ability for riders to rethink what the future will be, it's the ability to know that they have the information in front of them, the real time information. They can plan their trips ahead, they can take a train and get to their destination safely.

Mannarino: Right. But reserving a seat? Sorry, not to belabor that point, but was that something you're still considering?

Eng: We're looking at a lot of things. Reserving a seat operationally is a challenge with regards to the way our system is set up. But we also know that there is an opportunity for perhaps something reservation-like, where perhaps our riders tell us what trains they plan to take and we can use that information to better plan how we provide train service, and also maybe also share that information back to the rider so they can plan their day knowing what their potential riders are taking as well.

Mannarino: And lastly, I spent a lot of time talking about the ridership. But I also want to talk about the employees. They are on the front-line right there, keeping the system up and running, right? So what safety precautions are you keeping in place for them or moving forward. Is it that temperature is being taken maybe at the start of the shifts?

Eng: Dan you're absolutely right. The safety of our workforce is vital to the essential service. It's vital to them being able to come in every day and do what they're doing. They're heroes moving heroes and what we've done is that we've not only provided them the appropriate proper PPE, they're wearing face coverings to protect themselves to protect their colleagues. But we're providing them all of the necessary hand sanitizations. We've reinvented some of our work policies and we've reinvented how they are going about their daily activities. All of our train crews, as the riders come back will see they're wearing face coverings, hand sanitization, and again giving them the ability to get their job done because Long Island Rail Road is vital to not only the getting out of the pandemic, but as we restart the economy.

Mannarino: Absolutely. It's a lifeline for so many people. Hey, thank you for your time sir, Phillip. I appreciate it, and thank you to all the front-line employees that you have there keeping everything up and running. A big, big appreciation to them.

Eng: Thank you very much and we look forward to more opportunities to share information with the riders.

Mannarino: You're welcome back anytime, sir.