



## MTA Press Releases

[Select Language](#) ▼

Press Release

August 10, 2020

[MTA Headquarters](#)

IMMEDIATE

### TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears Live on Cheddar

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live on Cheddar with Kristen Scholer to discuss the agency's appeal to Apple to improve Face ID so riders do not need to remove masks to unlock their phones while riding mass transit.

*A transcript of the interview appears below.*

**Kristen Scholer:** Welcome back to Cheddar's Opening Bell. The MTA is cracking down on its mask mandate and asking major companies to help. MTA Chair Pat Foye writing a letter, given exclusively to Cheddar, to Apple's Tim Cook about the company's upcoming update meant to make it easier to open iPhones while wearing a mask. Writing in part: "We urge Apple to accelerate the deployment of new technologies and solutions that further protect customers in the era of COVID-19. Upgrades enabling users to unlock their phones while keeping their masks securely covering their nose and mouth would be beneficial in all public spaces, not just on public transportation." Well the MTA Chair is joining me now to discuss. Pat, it is always good to see you. It's great to have you back. What prompted you to write this?

**Pat Foye:** Kristen, thanks for having me this morning on this important issue. Public health officials agree that the single most important thing our customers can do to protect themselves, fellow commuters and our employees is to wear masks. The good news is that on subways and buses, we are monitoring compliance and obviously it's a day-to-to, week-to-week fight. But the latest reviews we've done indicated that mask compliance on subways and buses are at about the 90 percent level. And that's an incredible achievement by our customers and New Yorkers. We reached out to Apple, obviously one of the world's great technology companies that we hold in high regard, for the following help which is that with respect to facial ID, we all need technology that doesn't require our customers or any customer on public transit agencies in the country and the world for that matter, to have to take off their mask to use the Face ID. And we're asking to work with Apple to develop that technology. We're not going to tell Apple what the technology is; we're a transportation company. They're one of the world's greatest technology companies. The second ask we have—

**Scholer:** Do you anticipate— Pat I just want to jump in here. Have you heard back from Apple? When did you send this letter? Have you heard back from them, and do you anticipate you'll hear back from Tim Cook?

**Foye:** I do. First, we gave Apple a heads up that we were sending the letter, sent the letter over the weekend. And we have an existing relationship with Apple on our new OMNY fare payment system, and we believe one of the world's greatest technology companies, and a civic-minded company. The other way that Apple can help, as outlined in the letter Kristen, is to alert its customers that in the event facial ID doesn't work, you can use the existing passcode, and having customers learn that earlier in the process would avoid customers taking masks off. This is all about mask compliance and not requiring customers or incentivizing customers to take their mask off to use the facial ID. It's all about public health and we're looking forward to working with Apple on the issue.

**Scholer:** Well I'm glad that you think Tim Cook will be responsive, that's really good to hear Pat. What do you talk about ridership, how has it changed and why is now the right time to bring this forward to Apple? Is it because we're starting to see an uptick in riders?

**Foye:** Well ridership has increased, we ought to note that it's increased from severely depressed levels at the heights of the pandemic. Right now, on subways and buses, we're carrying about 2.4/2.5 million people a weekday. That makes us the largest mass transit operator in the country frankly both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. But that compares to the 5.5 million customers we would carry on subways on an average weekday pre-pandemic and about 2.1 million on buses for a total of 7.6 million. So, the number is severely depressed and it's obviously had a significant impact on our revenues.

**Scholer:** So, if Apple doesn't make these changes Pat as we get closer to Labor Day, people coming back to the city. Anecdotal, I have heard that people are going to be coming back to the city. New York schools are allowed to reopen. I know that some kids are expected to return to school here in the city. How is this going to make a difference? What's the quantifiable impact that providing this update on the iPhone could provide and protect your riders?

**Foye:** So, Kristen great question. Here's the answer: public health officials all over the United States and all over the world agree that the single most important thing that customers can do on mass transit, any place in the world, is to wear a mask. In New York City and New York State, as a result of Governor Cuomo's executive orders, it is a law to wear a mask on public transit—subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North, any part of our mass transit system. That's important, it's the law. Apple's help on these two issues would help keep mask compliance high, as I mentioned it's at the 90 percent level on subways and buses. We're continuing to monitor it and we're continuing to message to our customers that it's really critical that for their protection and the protection of their fellow commuters and our employees that everybody wear a mask. And we're asking to work with Apple on this important issue.

**Scholer:** And it's interesting Pat, you write in this letter that no coronavirus clusters have been linked to public transportation. I assume you stand by that statement. And what is the risk if we don't get an update from Apple in terms of what sort of outbreak we might potentially see?

**Foye:** Well look, it's not a question of an outbreak. You're right, the letter does say correctly that mass transit has not been the cause of any surge in the virus any place in the world, including in parts of the world that went into the pandemic before the United States and came out of the pandemic. That is good news. The 90 percent mask compliance that we're seeing on subways and buses is really good news. And what we want to do, and we're asking for Apple's help, what we want to do is keep mask compliance high at the 90 percent level. Frankly we'd like to raise it even higher. And by making it easier for our customers who are using facial ID to be identified with a mask on, and again we're going to leave the technological solution to Apple. That's something that they're world-class on, it's not what we do at the MTA. We're a transportation agency. But also alerting customers that in the event facial ID doesn't work first, that there's an easier and quicker way to get to the passcode. That would help mask compliance, and that's all about public safety.

**Scholer:** So, for riders who are returning Pat, and are going to start using the subway again, how can they expect to be monitored to make sure they are regularly wearing a mask?

**Foye:** Well we have officials from New York City Transit, from the NYPD, from other parts of the MTA. We've also got a mask force— not a task force— but a mask force which has distributed millions of masks to customers who don't have them. Let me tell you, I rode the subways in Queens into Manhattan and a couple of bus lines two weeks ago with a bunch of my colleagues. We saw only four people out of the thousands of people that we saw that Thursday morning without a mask. We gave them masks. We also gave additional masks, which have been contributed by the City of New York and the State of New York, to riders who already had masks on so they could put it in their purse or wallet in the event that they needed it. We're also distributing them in stations. Masks are so important that we're also communicating robustly on subways, on buses. Messaging on electronic signs and paper signs and in stations, commuter rail, buses, et cetera. Masks are really the order of the day and also the law in New York City and New York State, and the single most important thing our customers can do to protect themselves, their fellow commuters and our employees is to wear a mask.

**Scholer:** Okay Pat, quickly before I have to let you go here, the overnight cleaning. How long is that going to stick around?

**Foye:** The cleaning, disinfecting actually, is going to continue as long as the pandemic or public health officials think it's important that we do it. I believe it's been a really important part of controlling the spread of the virus but also reassuring our customers that we're doing everything we can to minimize public health risk to them and to our employees.

**Scholer:** Okay, MTA Chair Pat Foye. Pat, always good to see you. Thank you.

**Foye:** Thanks Kristen.