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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Foye Appears on 1010 WINS

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on 1010 WINS with Kathleen Marple Kalb to discuss the agency's ongoing response to COVID-19 as New York City enters Phase 3 reopening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Kathleen Marple Kalb: Well if you've been wanting a manicure or a massage, this might be the day for you. There's some of the personal care businesses reopening as the city moves into Phase 3, tattoo and tanning salons and spas allowed to be reopening too. And there are also some major changes to coming into parks with dog runs in many outdoor recreation areas like basketball, tennis and volleyball courts. Indoor dining is not on the list, although it was for Phase 3 in some other spots and workers are still slowly filtering back into the city. That is why we're talking to the MTA this morning. They are expecting an increase in ridership, MTA head Pat Foye is with us live on the Newslive. Good morning sir.

Patrick J. Foye: Morning Kathleen, how are you?

Kalb: Good, how are you?

Foye: Good, thanks.

Kalb: How's it going so far?

Foye: Say it again, I'm sorry I just didn't hear.

Kalb: I'm sorry, how is it going so far in Phase 3?

Foye: Oh, it's going fine. We are, we've added additional bus service, we're at 100% of bus service in Manhattan. We've added a new overnight express bus route, the B99, which goes from Midwood to Upper West Side of Manhattan. And Mayor de Blasio has estimated that the beginning of Phase 3 will add 50,000 commuters, we're prepared, we're running 100% service on subways. We're also adding service on the Staten Island Railway to when the Staten Island Ferry is running 15 minutes service we will be doing the same. We've also, for the first time on the Staten Island Railroad during the pandemic, have added express service. So, we've seen a gradual increase in ridership from the depths of the pandemic. Last week we carried 1.1 million customers on a weekday, last week was obviously an unusual week because of the July 4 holiday and bus ridership is, is at 1 million customers on a weekday and we expect that to continue to grow.

Kalb: What about the subway? A lot of folks are wondering about the overnight cleaning, when's that going to stop, when will overnight service maybe start resuming in some areas?

Foye: Well, the reason we did the closure from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. was to allow our work crews, who have done a fantastic and heroic job during this entire pandemic, to be able to disinfect every station and every subway car. We've surveyed our customers and over 70% of our customers say they've never seen the subways or subway stations as clean as they are now. And the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. closure has made that possible as well as putting the City and the Department of Homeless Services and the NYPD in a position to give service, services--medical and mental health services--and shelter to the homeless. The 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. closure will continue as long as the pandemic continues.

Kalb: Okay. What about the, there are a fair number of people who are still not real sure about the whole concept of social distancing on the subway. How does that work for people who may not have tried it yet?

Foye: Well look a couple of things. One is in other big transit systems around the world which entered the--Asia, Europe--which entered the pandemic before the United States and New York City and New York State did, they've seen significant returns, significant increases in ridership with no spike in the COVID-19 cases. The most important thing that our customers can do while they're riding mass transit is masks, masks, masks. Masks are mandatory under state law as a result of an executive order that Governor Cuomo issued. We've done physical counts of our customers on the subways, for instance, and 95% of our customers are wearing masks-- 100% of our employees doing that, so that's the most important thing. We've got hand sanitizer in every one of our stations and every subway car is being disinfected, and bus, is being disinfected multiple times a day and subway stations twice a day being disinfected. Same regime is in effect on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North in terms of extraordinary levels of disinfecting. We've done everything we can to minimize the public health risks to our customers and employees. We're taking advice on a constant basis from public health officials, and Dr. Zucker, the New York State Department of Health, the CDC, and talking to experts around the country and around the world, and we believe we've done everything we can to minimize public health risk.

Kalb: Thank you very much for that. Now, tell me a little bit about the financial crunch that the MTA is running into, because everywhere--I mean, things are tough all over because of the pandemic but I understand that the MTA is looking at the end of some federal funding very soon?

Foye: Yes, that's correct. The pandemic has had a significant adverse effect on our finances in three ways. One is ridership is down, so toll and fare revenue down dramatically. We receive a package of taxes and subsidies as about half our revenue. Those are economic, economically sensitive or transaction-related and they're down substantially, and obviously we have additional expenses as a result of the disinfecting program that I just described. We received \$3.8 billion-plus from the federal government in the first round of CARES funding, that funding will be exhausted in the next 10 days, and we'll receive the last installment of that funding next month. I've described the situation we're in as a financial four-alarm fire, and I think that's exactly right. The House of Representatives has allocated \$3.9 billion to the MTA to get the MTA through the rest of 2020, and it's really critical that that funding come through. It's in the Court of the United States Senate, Senator Schumer has been unbelievable on this, and has publicly stated that it's critical that the MTA receive this \$3.9 billion.

Kalb: Just real quick, while we're talking finances. There are reports this morning that it's becoming really hard to slow the overtime cost because of the pandemic. The original plan is now off the table. What are you doing about that?

Foye: Well actually overtime is down by about \$100 million. The IG's report is an important report. There were recommendations by a law firm, Morrison Forrester, we've implemented nine of those. Some of them are affected by the pandemic but we're very focused on overtime and the number is down \$100 million. There's more progress to be made and more savings to be realized and we're laser focused on overtime as well as every dollar of non-personnel expense.

Kalb: Thank you very much for joining us this morning to talk about all of this. I appreciate it.

Foye: Thank you Kathleen.