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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Issues Letter to Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Peter T. Gaynor

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today issued a letter to Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Peter T. Gaynor regarding a recent policy change that jeopardizes the MTA's future eligibility for reimbursement of pandemic-required costs, such as personal protective and other equipment.

The full text of the letter is available below.

Dear Administrator Gaynor,

I am writing to express my outrage at the reckless decision by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to change the rules for critical emergency support for applicants, including the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, resulting in a significant loss of funding for essential pandemic-related public safety spending.

According to your baffling change in policy, costs related to our industry-leading Covid19 response—including our aggressive disinfecting program, efforts to stockpile personal protective equipment and provide temperature and other health screening for employees— are no longer considered emergency protective measures eligible for reimbursement, with the purported reason being that these measures are not “immediate actions necessary to protect public health and safety.”

That is absurd. Abruptly shifting this guidance now, during an ongoing, federally-declared public health emergency and worldwide pandemic, is completely irresponsible and will only increase the heavy burden on states and the MTA at a time when local resources are already historically strained to the bone, as you well know.

The MTA's overall Covid-related expense estimate is approximately \$500 million for 2020 alone, with similarly substantial totals projected for the next four years. These are required to minimize health risk to our customers and employees and not “regular” costs in any sense of the word. They are inextricably linked to the pandemic and efforts to minimize public health risk during this critical time, and would not be necessary otherwise. Denying that public health reality smacks of not only ignorance but incompetence.

This change also flies in the face of FEMA's mission and record of helping communities in need. Since FEMA's inception more than 40 years ago, the agency has issued approximately 4,770 disaster declarations covering all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico for natural and manmade disasters in an effort to protect human life, provide safety and protect property.

This includes New York in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd, 9/11, Hurricane Irene, Superstorm Sandy and so many other emergencies and disasters. I want to recognize the hard work and dedicated support FEMA staff have continuously provided. We are thankful for their efforts.

But by slashing aid to New York and other states now, you are sending a clear message that you are prioritizing politics over public safety. The MTA's heroic workforce assumed personal risk every day throughout this pandemic to keep the New York metropolitan region— and its vital economy— moving forward. More than 130 members of the MTA family have tragically lost their lives since March; by cutting off one of our most critical avenues of support to provide adequate PPE, FEMA is sending a message that their heroic work throughout the pandemic is unimportant.

The FEMA action also comes at the same time Washington has ignored our pleas for \$12 billion in emergency relief to help us get through 2021 without having to make devastating service and job cuts or gutting our historic capital program. It makes no sense that the federal government seems intent on starving the economic lifeblood of not just New York, but the nation at a time when the MTA is simply trying to keep people safe during the worst pandemic in a century.

We insist that FEMA deliver the \$125 million in aid already requested by the MTA, and strongly urge you to reverse the new policy so that the MTA may continue receiving assistance. Additionally, we are seeking a 100 percent federal cost share for all FEMA assistance under the President's Emergency Declaration and any subsequent Major Disaster Declaration. After months of inaction, this should be done through whatever means necessary, including Congressional action as occurred following past disasters and included in the House-passed HEROES Act.

We look forward to working with you on this vitally important matter.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Foye

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer