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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears on WCBS 880

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick Foye appeared on WCBS 880 with Michael Wallace to discuss operational developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Michael Wallace: The MTA says it'll stop providing overnight cab rides to essential workers at the end of the month. MTA Chairman and CEO Pat Foye is joining us on our Newsline. Pat, good evening. Why end those free rides?

Patrick J. Foye: Really two reasons, Michael. One is service and operational, the other is financial. The MTA, when we put this essential employee service in place, we significantly enhanced bus service in May on 61 bus lines during this overnight subway shutdown, which included 11 interborough express routes affecting all boroughs. Second is, we just added three new interborough express options, which were designed based on data that riders from the program voluntarily provided to us. Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road are going to be cross honoring subway on their stations in the city. There's plenty of additional bus service to deal with a small number of about 1,500 people a night, and it was costing us about \$49 a ride. The second reason ties into that, which is the MTA is broke. We are desperately in need of \$12 billion of additional federal funding, and this program since May 6 has cost the MTA \$6 million. It's no longer necessary because of the bus enhancements that I mentioned that we put in place, and the three additional express routes that we've just added, and frankly its just not affordable.

Wallace: We heard from the Riders Alliance today Pat, they suggest subways should start running during those overnight hours again, and they claim that the MTA would make money if that happened. Are they right?

Foye: Well the Riders Alliance is wrong on the making money. Look, while the pandemic continues, and this is something that Governor Cuomo has also said, while the pandemic continues, and it's important to realize that we're not out of the pandemic, we're going to continue the closures from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. The reason that we closed beginning in May, closed from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m., was to allow our crews to disinfect every subway station and every car. Fortunately there's a limited number of passengers riding in the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. period, because our overall ridership on subways and buses is depressed, and we are looking forward to bringing that service back, but that's not going to happen until the pandemic is over and until the need to disinfect every station multiple times a day and every subway car multiple times a day no longer exists.

Wallace: You mentioned the dire need for more federal aid. Are the prospects for that looking any better?

Foye: Well look, we were hopeful and cautiously optimistic that something would happen in July and August, that obviously didn't happen. There was also no aid for the state of New York or the city of New York, which is discouraging. We're continuing to work on it, we're going to be taking a significant amount of cost out of the MTA in 2020. I would expect that that number will be certainly well over a billion dollars of additional cost reductions and we'll be talking to our board and the public in the weeks and months ahead. But the decline in revenues are so great, we can't cut our way out of it, it's just impossible.

Wallace: You say cost reductions, what can we be looking at? I know Mayor de Blasio with the city's budget mess is looking at thousands of layoffs. Is that a possibility for the MTA?

Foye: We're not starting with that. What we're starting with is reducing the amount of overtime. We are terminating or modifying consultant contracts and we're taking every dollar of non-service, and non-payroll costs out of the system. However, as I mentioned, the deficit that we're facing, the decline in revenues is so great that if we don't get the federal aid that I just described, we will have to take more drastic steps related to service, related to headcount reduction, related to wage freezes, delaying and deferring the Capital Plan which would be terrible, because the Capital Plan would improve every MTA agency and frankly every piece of it. More ADA stations, electric buses, re-signalling five additional subway lines, Second Avenue Subway's Phase Two, Penn Station Access, and that would be terrible and none of us want to see the declines in service that occurred in the 70s and 80s on the subways.

Wallace: MTA Chairman and CEO Pat Foye, always good to hear from you. Hopefully one of these days we'll get to talk to you about some good news. It's gonna happen eventually, right?

Foye: I am positive that will be the case. Good weekend Michael, take care.

Wallace: You too, thanks.

