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Press Release

October 28, 2020

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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears on NY1

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on NY1 *Mornings on 1* with Annika Pergament to discuss the MTA's voluntary COVID-19 screening program for frontline employees.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Annika Pergament: With the Senate adjourned until after the election any stimulus talks are off the table for now. For months, the MTA has been holding out for billions of dollars in federal funding to address its massive budget shortfall and avoid service cuts and layoffs. MTA Chairman Pat Foye joins me now to talk about this, as well as some other topics. Good morning, chairman.

Patrick J. Foye: Good morning Annika. Thanks for having me.

Pergament: Let's start with the funding piece because at the end of November the MTA has to present a budget, likely without that federal aid that you've been holding out for. You said that we're facing a potential 40% proposed cut to the service. When do you have to pull the trigger on that? Is there anywhere else that you can get funding from in the meantime?

Foye: Well Annika only the federal government has the resources to fund the deficits that for instance, the State of New York, the City of New York and the MTA are facing. Our urgent request to the Republican leadership of this of the United States Senate is for \$12 billion, which will take us through 2020, July through the end of the year, and 2021. That money is desperately needed. If we don't receive it, our hand may be forced in terms of draconian service reductions, up to 40% on subways, and buses, up to 50% on the commuter rails, on top of laying having to lay off--another thing we don't want to do--thousands of our colleagues, plus toll and fare increases above those that are budgeted. This is an apocalyptic scenario. This is obviously the worst financial crisis that the MTA has faced, and we're hoping that after the election reason will prevail, and there'll be a COVID, another COVID, stimulus bill passed. We've been advocating and fighting hard to make the MTA's case and we're going to continue to do that. The timing is that at our November board meeting, the board will consider a financial plan, a budget for 2021 and beyond, and the board would take action at the December board meeting. So we're talking about the short term.

Pergament: So if the federal government doesn't come through, you've got the November board meeting, but these cuts would then take effect in December, if nothing happens between now and then?

Foye: No, no, sorry, the board would vote on the budget and the financial plan at the December meeting after discussion, perhaps making changes and the service cuts would go into effect in the first quarter. The service cuts in the other draconian actions that we may be forced to take. So that would be in the first quarter of 2021.

Pergament: Got it. Okay, so early in the new year. I want to move on to some of the crime from the data that we've gotten from the NYPD, comparing incidents involving the MTA from January to September of this year. As we can see on the screen there, murder, rape, robbery, burglary, are all up even grand larceny and felony assault that are down year to year, but the total number of major felonies are down. But keep in mind ridership has also plummeted during that time, so I'm just wondering if you've been having conversations with NYPD brass about whether the MTA is under policed these days.

Foye: We have, we're in constant dialogue with the leadership of the NYPD and the Transit Bureau. Obviously, there have been a couple of horrific incidents in the subways, including the woman for instance, who recently was pushed on the tracks at Time Square. Fortunately, she was uninjured, and the alleged perpetrator was taken into custody. The NYPD, the data shows that the number of arrests and summonses issued in 2020 is down dramatically. What we need is more effective and significant NYPD presence in the subways. We're not a policing agency, the NYPD has primary responsibility for policing the subways, and we've called upon the NYPD to step up its enforcement. The subways continue to be safe, but you're quite right the crime data that you showed your viewers a minute ago is in a system where ridership is down dramatically from you know what it was pre-pandemic. We're, you know, carrying 1.8 million customers on a weekday on the subways. You know, that compares to well over 5 million on a typical weekday pre-pandemic. So those crime data have to be adjusted for the dramatic decline in ridership that's occurred as a result of a virus.

Pergament: And what do the NYPD brass tell you when you have those conversations telling them that you need extra officers?

Foye: Well look, the reality is that the number of arrests and summonses is down. That's counter to the data that you just showed your viewers and we need a more aggressive and significant and effective police presence in the subways. Part of providing transit is a safe and secure environment and it's the NYPD's responsibility to provide that. Obviously, the officers on the job have been doing the right thing but the from a leadership point of view, we need more aggressive enforcement, more arrests, more summonses, etcetera and we continue to work with the NYPD on that critical issue.

Pergament: Let's move on to this new program Governor Cuomo announced yesterday. The MTA is now launching his first transit worker screening initiative. It's the first of its kind in the country, free COVID-19 testing being offered to frontline, NYC Transit, LIRR, Metro-North, Bridge and Tunnel employees. This is a big rollout.

Foye: This is a big, this is a big rollout as you as you say it's first in the nation. There are three prongs to it. First, we're going to take testing to our employees at bus depots and subway facilities and Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North, Bridges and Tunnels as well. We're going to do that on a rotating schedule at facilities. Those facilities are going to be chosen by our occupational health experts based on data they get from the State Department of Health. That's the first piece. The second piece is we have medical assessment centers we have three for New York City Transit, and occupational health services facilities for Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road. Employees, frontline employees, who go to those facilities will have the ability to be tested. And third, our partnership with Northwell Health Urgent Care centers for rapid free diagnostic testing remains in place. Our goal is to screen up to 2,000 employees a week and ramp it up from there. This is a voluntary program for our frontline employees, but it has the full-throated support of Local 100 of the Transit Workers Union and the other unions. And as a matter of fact at the press conference yesterday, Tony Utano, the president of Local 100 and I were both swabbed in front of your reporting colleagues, so it has the union support. The goal of the program is to minimize public health risk to our employees and to our customers. And from the outset of the virus, we have led, frankly, the nation in terms of innovative approaches and this first in the nation program that Governor Cuomo announced yesterday takes that to another level.

Pergament: Yeah, and you can understand the union support on that front considering your employees were some of the hardest hit as they were frontline workers during the height of this pandemic and continue to work in that role. Chairman Pat Foye, thank you so much for joining us this morning we appreciate it.

Foye: Thank you.