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NYC Transit

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TRANSCRIPT: New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on WABC-7's Up Close with Bill Ritter

New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on WABC-7's Up Close with Bill Ritter to discuss NYC Transit's plan for subways and buses to return to full service Monday as New York City enters Phase 1 reopening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Bill Ritter: Welcome back to Up Close. Big day tomorrow in New York City, really big. We enter what's called Phase 1. Non-essential workers allowed back on the job after months off the job. We're talking stores with curbside pickup, construction and manufacturing workers, they got to get to work, and the subway is the way. So are we ready? The woman who knows, the woman in charge, Sarah Feinberg, President of New York City Transit is our guest this morning. Sarah thanks for joining us again, are we ready for Monday?

Sarah Feinberg: Thanks for having me, great to be with you. So look, here's the deal. We're about as ready as we could be. We have spent the last many, many weeks planning for and thinking about the best way to reopen, the smartest way, the safest way to reopen, so when the Governor and the city and the Mayor decided that they were ready to start Phase 1, we would be ready too. So we've been cleaning the system, we've been cleaning every car that's in service, disinfecting multiple times a day. We've got new signs in the stations, floor decals, hand sanitizer, we're trying to be ready for everyone to rejoin us.

Ritter: So if you go to the subway on Monday, how are you going to get hand sanitizer? Do you have it posted on someplace, you just put your hand underneath it and squirts out?

Feinberg: Well it depends on where you are. In some places we have the sanitizer mounted on the wall and you'll put your hand underneath and get your hand sanitizer. We're actually going to have volunteers throughout the system handing out sanitizer and masks if you happen to forget your mask. We'll have some extra sanitizer in booths too, so you can go see a station booth for something like that, so there will be a bunch of different places to go.

Ritter: Sarah, in terms of sheer numbers, millions of people use the subways. You have 400,000 estimated workers coming on Monday. This is not a huge deal that all sudden it just opened up, but it is a big deal. What about distancing when you're on the subways, you know, some people, it's going to be rush hour, there's going to be rush hours to work and rush hour back. How do you guarantee that people aren't going to be too close to each other?

Feinberg: Well the reality is, I can't guarantee that at all. You know Bill, even in the absolute height of the pandemic when ridership was at its absolute bottom at about 8% of what we normally see. To be honest, there were still some cars that were crowded. When you're in the middle of rush hour and everyone decides they're going to a similar place at the same time and you don't pay a whole lot of attention to which car you're getting on, we would end up with crowded cars. So look, what's important to remember is New York City on its slowest day moves, many, many, many hundreds of thousands more people than almost any other city that you can think of. So the population that we are just serving, the customers that we're serving is just so much larger than everyone else's. So the reality is, is social distancing is tough on the subway, it's tough on a bus. What we're saying is the most important thing you can do is be absolutely vigilant about your mask usage. So if you're in our system at all, every station, every car, every bus, you have to wear your mask.

Ritter: Okay, that's the rule. What about shutting down the subway system, one to five, to clean and sanitize every car. Is that still happening?

Feinberg: Still happening. So every single night, the subway system shuts down at one, reopens at five. We've got cleaners that are cleaning the stations and the cars 24 hours a day seven days a week. You know the stations are getting cleaned twice a day, the cars are getting cleaned five, six, seven times a day. Bill I don't know if you've

been in the system lately, I've been in it, it is sparkling clean, it is immaculate. I don't know how long it's going to stay like that, but for those who have not been in the system for the last few months that are about to rejoin us on Monday, I think they're going to see a very clean system.

Ritter: Let's talk briefly about buses because this week you called for more bus lanes in time for Monday. You want to 60 miles of bus lanes and busways across the five boroughs. Are you to get that, and what's that going to mean?

Feinberg: 60 more miles of bus lanes. So look, we've got to prioritize these buses, they move a ton of people, and I just don't want them sitting in traffic, I don't want them in congested streets, I want them to be able to move as seamlessly through the city as they can and so this is overdue. Look, this isn't just related to the pandemic. This is something we should have done a long time ago. So let's just get it moving. Now's a perfect opportunity, let's not let this crisis go to waste, let's just execute.

Ritter: This is a big challenge, I mean you're coming back after being shut down basically for 95% of the subway, something like that. But this is not just about Monday. This also seems to be a planning stage for what happens in the next stages, Phases 2 and 3 and 4.

Feinberg: That's exactly right. So even prior to Phase 1, just in the last several weeks, our ridership has grown every day. I just looked at the numbers for today, we're at 1.51 million riders today, and that's before we even reopen, right? And so we know that we'll have hundreds of thousands more riders this coming week, for the next two weeks. Phase 2 will be much bigger, Phase 3, Phase 4. Look, it's going to take a while for all of ridership to come back, to see the numbers that we saw a pre-pandemic. But in New York, it's not an option, right? People don't just get in their cars instead. You get in your car on Monday and you try to go to work, you're going to be sitting in traffic for a long time.

Ritter: There's no question we depend on the subways and it's your job to make sure it's working, so we depend on you. Sarah Feinberg, good luck. We are really counting on you and the whole system.

Feinberg: Thank you.

Ritter: Alright, good luck and thank you for joining us Sarah.