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July 7, 2020

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TRANSCRIPT: NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on NY1

NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on NY1's "Mornings on 1" with Pat Kiernan this morning 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.

Pat Kiernan: Phase 3 is underway. That means more New Yorkers are at work and that means getting to work becomes as critical an issue as ever. Sarah Feinberg, Interim President of the Transit Authority is with me to bring us up to date on how things went yesterday and how we expect things to go for the rest of the week. Sarah thank you for being here. Tell me about the first day of Phase 3 yesterday as far as the MTA is concerned.

Sarah Feinberg: Morning, great to be with you. Look, it's good to be in Phase 3. It's good to welcome people back to the system. You know some folks have been with us the whole time, essential workers, who have been using the system for the last couple of months, but with every new phase we welcome people back who haven't been in the system since maybe March, and that's exciting for us. We've got a long way to go in order to get ridership back, but it's good to start a new phase.

Kiernan: One of the headlines I'm looking at is this front page of Newsday with the Long Island Rail Road Riders Council saying could you please enforce the mask rule on commuter trains. It's tough. If you're on a train and you see somebody who's clearly violating the rule, you don't want to start a confrontation by asking them to do it themselves. What's your position on that? It's not like there's conductors roaming the trains like there are on the commuter rails?

Feinberg: You're right. And it's awkward and we do not recommend riders to take on those conversations on their own. I mean look, the good news is, is that we see mask compliance well into the nineties. We've seen it at ninety, ninety-two, ninety-five percent. We really need to keep those numbers up because that's the best insurance against you know the spread of the virus and the spread of germs. But look, we are asking MTA Police, NYPD, our own MTA personnel, you know, remind people to be wearing a mask. But in terms of enforcement, that's with the police and I'll leave it to them. We don't want you know MTA personnel or certainly riders taking enforcement into their own hand.

Kiernan: When I was on the  train yesterday there were seven people in my car and all seven had that mask on, so I agree with you that compliance is very high. One thing that we've seen, and you're taking steps now to protect the drivers on local buses so that you can start using the fare boxes again. Do you have any, are you able to quantify the substitution from subway to bus as a result of the fact that buses are essentially free right now?

Feinberg: You know, I think it's probably less about that and more just about that people are entering the system where they feel most comfortable. And so, if you start your commute with a bus as many people do, maybe you just stick with the bus, or you substitute a walk for the subway for the second half. Look, we've also got windows that are open on buses so there's a lot of fresh air circulating. I think right now it's kind of personal preference. I personally take the subway system, others prefer the bus. I think things will even out over time, but you know the pandemic was completely unpredictable in terms of ridership and the recovery from the pandemic has been unpredictable. I thought the subway would come back faster than buses, and I think it eventually will but right now buses is the head.

Kiernan: When you get those shields up for the bus drivers, will you reopen the fare boxes all on one specific day or will that be phased in?

Feinberg: Well we've said that we are going to start collecting fares again in August. I don't know which day yet. We're still looking at it. But, look, we have to open up the fare box again. Our financial situation is dire, and so we can't continue to not be collecting fares on buses. And look, I mean right now there is a lot of space between the operator and the riders. As more riders come back, we got to make sure that we're opening up the bus so that people could continue to put as much distance between themselves and their fellow riders as much as possible, all of course doing everything we can to protect the operator, but we got to start collecting fares again.

Kiernan: Yeah. Sarah, when I talked to Pat Foye last week he was talking about the financial situation. Has there been any progress on getting funding from outside New York City so you don't have to make it up through service cuts or through fare increases?

Feinberg: Look I wish I had better news. We don't. There's no good progress to report on right now. But we're staying in close touch with our delegation in Washington. No one could be better served than New Yorker's by their New York delegation Senator Schumer and Miss Lowey. You know, they're sought of the best in the business and have a huge amount of sway in the Congress. Look the reality is that we are doing everything we can to make sure that we're also looking internally about what we can do. I mean I can tell you that I've spent the last couple of weeks having my staff and myself look at every single thing that we're spending a dollar on and figuring out where we could make internal cuts and just cuts on our own so that you know, we are doing everything we can to make sure that service is the absolute last thing that gets cut.

Kiernan: Sarah Feinberg, the Interim President of the New York City Transit Authority. Sarah thank you for joining us this morning.

Feinberg: Great to be with you. Good to see you.

Kiernan: Thanks.