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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears on PIX 11 Evening News with Kori Chambers to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on PIX 11 Evening News with Kori Chambers to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Kori Chambers: Well, there's no question that the MTA has been hit hard by coronavirus. 79 workers have died of COVID-19, nearly 3,000 have tested positive and more than 4,000 employees are currently out on quarantine. About 5,000 though, are back at work. Joining us via Skype to talk about all of this and more, MTA Chairman Pat Foye. And Pat, I'll just start by saying I'm very happy to hear about those thousands of workers who have recovered.

Pat Foye: The 5,000 transit workers who have returned, subways, buses, Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road, it's extraordinary public service. They are all, every one of them, acting heroically. They're frankly heroes moving heroes. Our ridership, Kori, is down 95% from pre-pandemic levels. And the customers that we're taking on subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road, are first responders and essential employees, firefighters, police officers, healthcare professionals, utility workers, fellow transit workers, as well as people doing incredibly important jobs in grocery stores, food stores, and pharmacy, and this is a case of heroes moving heroes. The 79 members of the MTA family that we've lost, those who succumbed to the virus, it is an incredibly tragic loss of life. We grieve and mourn for those who have fallen and for their families, every one of our colleagues who succumbed to the virus had a past, a present, a future, a family, a story, and it is tragic that those folks have passed and been separated from their families. The good news is that 5,000 of our colleagues have returned to work. At one point the number of employees under home quarantine was over 6,000, it's now down about 2,000. We are doing tests, so we made a partnership with Northwell Health last week to get the same treatment as firefighters and NYPD gets in the innovative Northwell testing program using its 52 urgent care centers around the around the MTA region. Beyond that we have a temperature brigade which at this point has tested temperatures of 30,000 employees, they do an additional thousand or more per day. We hope to expand it, both the number of locations and the number of medically trained professionals who are doing these temperature checks. Interestingly enough, per 1,000 employees who are tested for a fever, only one has a fever. In those cases the employee is directed to go to go home, talk to their medical provider or family physician for treatment. We do not want anybody, customer, employee on the subways, buses, Metro-North, or Long Island Rail Road, who is not healthy.

Chambers: Obviously not, obviously not. So I want to ask you this, because people have heard these calls, a couple members of the City Council saying look, if you want to keep this thing from spreading, you got to shut down the subways. What is your answer to those folks?

Foye: I think that suggestion may be well intentioned, but it is a bad idea. Look, we're providing MTA essential service on subways and buses, 75% of normal, pre-pandemic service. And we're providing that for 5% of our customers. But those 5% of our customers are the first responders and essential employees that I mentioned before. We're carrying those customers safely. It's a safe environment for our customers and our employees. Stations are being disinfected, your viewers are seeing images of this right now. Stations are being disinfected twice a day, rolling stock, subway cars, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road cars are being disinfected on a regular basis as well. And that creates an environment where customers and employees can feel safe. The consequence of shutting the subways down would frankly disrupt the ability of healthcare workers, firefighters, that list that I went through before, including transit workers, to get to and from their jobs, and frankly, would make the consequences of this terrible pandemic even worse.

Chambers: Alright. Pat, I guess I have one more question for you if we have time for it. I just want to ask you, because you talked about the fact that the system has 5% of what you normally would have, yet robberies are going up. So how can people feel safe when they see numbers like that and realize that there's fewer people in the train?

Foye: Well first, the number of robberies is rising slightly from a very low level. The subways were safe prior the pandemic, they're safe now. We're working closely with the NYPD, which has primary responsibility for policing the subways, the MTA Police is also on the scene. And we have hired private security guards to supplement the work of the NYPD and the MTA Police at this time of stress on our customers and our employees and on the transit system. The system is safe to ride and we will do everything we can both in terms of disinfecting stations, rolling stock, buses, etc. and in policing, MTA Police, NYPD and these private security guards that we've also brought into the equation.

Chambers: You know, Pat, we're talking earlier about those 5,000 workers who are back that have recovered, and they're back to the job. Among the folks who have had COVID and recovered and back at work and probably was working through the whole thing, you're among that list. So we're happy that you're back at work, and how you feeling?

Foye: I'm feeling fine, I'm very fortunate and blessed. I had a mild case. I've been symptom free for 10 or 11 days now. I didn't miss a day at work, thankfully. And obviously, compared to many people at the MTA, and many people in the city of New York and the region, I've been unbelievably fortunate.

Chambers: Well, we are thankful that you are working, not back at work, but just still working and we wish you the best. Of course, we'll be in touch as this crisis continues. I know that there's even more that you're trying to do so Pat Foye, thanks so much for the time.

Foye: Thank you Kori. Thanks for having me.