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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears Live on WCBS 880

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live on WCBS 880 with Steve Scott to discuss the MTA's voluntary COVID-19 screening program for frontline employees.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Steve Scott: The MTA is rolling out a new COVID-19 testing program for its frontline workers. On our Newline this morning, MTA Chairman Pat Foye. Mr. Foye, good morning. Your staff was hit hard by the first wave of Coronavirus. Tell us about this new testing program.

Patrick J. Foye: Steve, thanks. This is a first of the nation program for transit workers. It is a three-pronged approach Steve. First, on-site testing at bus depots. Subway facilities will be provided on a rotating schedule as determined by MTA Occupational Health Services based on data they get from the New York State Department of Health. So, we will go to where the frontline workers are. Second, is testing will also be offered to employees scheduled to visit one of the three New York City Transit medical assessment centers, or one of the two Occupational Health Services facilities which serve Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North workers. And third, free diagnostic rapid testing for our employees remains available through our existing partnership with Northwell Health-GoHealth. We are planning to screen up to 2,000 employees a week. This program started yesterday. And we're going to start at 2,000 employees a week and ramping up to 15% of our frontline workforce. The Chief Safety Officer of the MTA, Pat Warren and his team have developed this and as I mentioned, this is first in the nation. The goal here is to minimize public health risk to our employees and to our customers.

Scott: Is it mandatory for employees, is the union on board with this?

Foye: Well the union was at an announcement we made at the Grand Avenue Bus Depot in Queens. Tony Utano, President of Local 100 and other union officials were there. So, the union is very much supportive. But it is a voluntary program. But we're going to the workers. As a matter of fact, when the press conference was over, Tony Utano and I, and others were swabbed by staff from BioReference. So, the union is supportive. The union and the MTA is on the same page. We want to do everything we can to minimize health risk to our first frontline employees who were heroes and continue to be heroes throughout the pandemic and reduce health risks to our customers as well.

Scott: While we have you, you've no doubt seen that the Riders Alliance is predicting hour long waits for a train or a bus if the MTA doesn't get \$12 billion dollars from the feds. An hour? I mean, even in your worst-case scenario is one hour in any way realistic?

Foye: Well, one hour is horrific. The Riders Alliance I think did a real public service by that, by the study they released yesterday. And I think the message of the study is the damage to New York commuting on both subways, buses and the commuter rails would be absolutely horrific. It would have a horrible impact on our customers from the quality of life point of view. Remember, that while we're approaching, carrying 3 million customers a day on subways and buses, ridership is down dramatically, that still remains to be the case. And the people that we are carrying are for the most part, first responders and essential employees. The other horrific consequence would be the impact on the New York City regional economy if we had to make these cuts, which no one at the MTA wants to, wants to put in place.

Scott: But if you close your eyes and envision a worst-case scenario, I mean, can you even imagine an hour long wait between trains?

Foye: I can't. It's unimaginable. It would be, horrific in terms of the impact on transportation, social equity, the economy, we can't let that happen. And the only way we can avoid that is for the federal government and specifically, the Republican led us Senate to provide funding. Obviously they have left Washington, but there is time after the election before the end of the year for funding for New York State, New York City and the MTA funding for all three is desperately needed.

Scott: MTA Chairman Pat Foye, as always, thank you for joining us.

Foye: Thank you Scott.