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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on PIX 11 Morning News with Dan Mannarino and Betty Nguyen to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on PIX 11 Morning News with Dan Mannarino and Betty Nguyen to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Dan Mannarino: So to explain how this will work, we're joined this morning by interim New York City Transit President Sarah Feinberg to explain what it's going to take to make this all happen. So good morning morning to you, Sarah. Thank you so much for joining us this morning. Let's begin first with the decision to do this, right, a four hour window to clean every single train car, every subway station, how many is that? And is it actually doable?

Sarah Feinberg: Well, to be clear, we're closing between one and five so that we can make sure that we're hitting everything at least once, and probably multiple times. But the cleaning is going to be happening 24 hours a day. So, more riders of the system are not used to seeing real heavy cleaning happening during the day, they're going to start seeing that as well. So you're riding the train you get to the end of the line, you get off at the end of line station, all of a sudden you're going to see 10 or 12 cleaners on the train and doing a quick disinfection and cleaning at the terminal before it takes off again. So we're gonna be cleaning 24 hours today.

Mannarino: Okay, so the big question I saw after the announcement playing out on social media was what took so long, what took so long for this kind of disinfecting to happen on every single car, every single station? I know you said it's been ongoing. But to close it down for a four-hour window overnight? What was the delay in getting that done?

Feinberg: So, look, I mean, this is why we call this an unprecedented crisis, we call it an unprecedented crisis for a reason. Every day we wake up and we think what else can we do to make the system safer. And every day we try to take more steps and do more. I think it was my first day on the job, maybe was my second day on the job, I we said that we were going to start disinfecting stations twice a day instead of once a day. And honestly, that was a huge lift. We all sort of looked at each other and said, "can we even do that?" Well, Matt, I don't think it even occurred to us that we could actually clean every single car in a 24-hour period, and that's what we're going to be doing. And so I think, you know, in a crisis like this, you wake up every day, and you figure out what else we can do, because the goalposts keep moving. And that's where we are.

Mannarino: And timing seems to be everything, right? So this is playing out, and the Governor and you were saying that it was for the essential workers who you want to keep safe, but it also plays out at a time where homeless was a big problem in the subways. You wrote an op-ed in the New York Post, calling out the city for not really taking quick action. So, the homeless plays a factor in this decision to take this measure.

Feinberg: Yeah, look, I think it's a bunch of factors coming together at once. I mean we have, there's no denying that we have, a significant problem with those who are experiencing homelessness, using trains and stations as shelters, and it's become a problem. That is, you know, that has been exacerbated during this crisis, and there's no doubt we cannot clean the trains and the stations the way we want to and the way we need to, while that continues to be an issue. And so you've seen, we've been doing this for months. But certainly over the last couple of weeks, we've seen an uptick, and over the last couple of nights a significant uptick in our efforts to remove people from the train at the end of line stations. So, they're going to do a deep cleaning. So, that's certainly a factor. It's also a factor that we want to do everything we can to protect our essential workers. I mean, these are the folks who are on the frontlines fighting this virus. We have to do everything we possibly can to keep them safe. But let's not lose sight of our own workforce, right? I've got 51,000 men and women in New York City Transit who are showing up to work every day moving trains, operating buses, I want to keep them safe too.

Mannarino: And they're doing a great job, by the way, for those essential workers who do ride the trains in the overnight hours. You're now offering them this ride- share, one-dollar van, a city bus. Will all that be picked up by you? So, who exactly is paying for that? Because you're saying there's a budget shortfall, right? So that's a lot of people who might be using these services here.

Feinberg: So we've got pretty good data on how many people are using our system between these hours that we're going to be closing. So from 1 am, we find about 10 to 11,000 people are using the subway system. And so the good news is that's not a huge number. The bad news is, look, every single one of those people needs to get where they're going. So we need to take care of them. And, so, we're going to be running bus service that attempts to match the headways of the subway service that they would be riding, so, if subway service was about every 20 minutes overnight during those hours. Right now we're going to be trying to run the bus service that matches those headways. We're going to try to do express bus service in the outer

boroughs. We're going to try to make sure that people are hooked up with any way that they need to get to where they're going. So it's going to be a challenge but in this moment everything's a challenge. I thank commuters for their patience. I know the last thing that they need is a significant change in their in their commute right now when the ground is shifting on them in every other way too. But this is really important that we get this right.

Mannarino: So let me ask you the big question, how long will this actually last? And once again, who is paying for those extra services?

Feinberg: Sorry, I didn't mean to not address your question. We're going to be paying for those extra services. And it's important that we do so. That doesn't mean we won't be looking for reimbursement elsewhere. But we've long said, the Congress needs to act. We need a Hero's Compensation Fund. We need stimulus packages that will help the transit system and help other entities that are suffering in this unprecedented crisis. But that's the answer to that question, in terms of how long this will last. The Governor said yesterday that this is going to last for the life of the pandemic. Look, I will tell you that when we change things in the subway system, you know, it's a little rocky at first, we work out the kinks and then we get increased efficiency every single day. And so I think, you know, as we get through this, we will improve and we'll look forward to welcoming people back at all hours.

Mannarino: And, so, when the pandemic is over, and we do see things go back to normal, you say there's a budget shortfall. That's my last question. Can commuters expect to see service cuts or fare increases in the future to help New York City train to get back on track and help with the loss of money here?

Feinberg: I think it's hard to predict that at this point. The last thing that we want to do is make any service cuts at all. The last thing we want to do is increase the fare. But I feel like that's sort of asking me what's going to happen at the end of this crisis. You know, I couldn't have told you two weeks ago that we'd be where we are today. Everything changes every day, so it's too hard to predict what's going to happen down the road.

Mannarino: It's unprecedented measures here. I don't think this has ever happened in New York City subways where you shut it down entirely besides a snowstorm or a major storm. So this is unprecedented. We thank you, Sarah, for joining us this morning. And thank you to all the MTA workers, I say time and time again, who are out there, every day our extreme gratitude to them. They're putting themselves on the line to keep everybody up and running.

Feinberg: Thank you. Thank you so much for saying that.

Mannarino: All right. Take care, Sarah, stay safe to you.