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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears Live on 1010 WINS

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on 1010 WINS with Lori Madden to discuss the agency's request for business leaders to stagger work hours, and take other steps as New York City prepares to enter Phase 1 of reopening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Lori Madden: Earlier today, Governor Cuomo announced that New York City was on track to begin its Phase 1 reopening on June 8. The Governor says some 400,000 people could be returning to work, and that means commuters on mass transit, which has been for essential workers only during the pandemic, and which has had the subway shut down in the overnight hours for cleaning. Joining us now live on 1010 WINS is MTA Chairman Pat Foye. Pat Foye, thank you for being with us this afternoon.

Pat Foye: Lori, thanks for having me.

Madden: We have a lot to unravel here as far as commuters getting back on the trains and buses. How is this going to work, first of all is the subway shutdown over on June 7 maybe, or June 8?

Foye: No, the shutdown from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. will continue while the pandemic continues. It's been fundamentally important to our ability to disinfect every subway car every night. Not clean it, disinfect every subway car every night. And it's also been important to allow the New York City Department of Homeless Services and the NYPD to get shelter for the unsheltered and medical and mental health services for the unsheltered. So, two major advantages and the outages which was it was a tough call to make, the first time in the 116 year history of the subways, has enabled both the disinfecting of all the cars as well as getting services and shelter for the unsheltered.

Madden: I understand you're asking key employers to stagger hours for employees.

Foye: We are. And just to be clear, this is a request for help and cooperation and not a mandate, point one. Point two, I recognize that many businesses in New York City are already staggering their hours or plan to stagger their hours and stagger their days of work. Third point is interesting, in the 1918-1919 flu pandemic which affected New York City and New York State and the rest of the country, the state of New York did this staggering on a mandatory basis with respect to employers, what we're asking for is help. We reached out to businesses all over the city, Chamber of Commerce, REBNY, ABNY, the Partnership for New York City, we've been talking with labor unions as well and we're asking for help in terms of staggering hours and days of work. The reason for that is to spread the business, spread the number of customers on the subways, avoid crowding during the rush hour morning and in the evening, and just to smooth it out, which I think will help everybody as the first phase is lifted in New York City on June 8 as the Governor announced today.

Madden: Well to your point of crowding, how will commuters navigate that? You know it's probably going to happen, and if people wait for the next train to come, then the platform's get crowded. How will the MTA deal with that?

Foye: Well, a couple of things. First of all ridership on the subways is down dramatically. It's in the 90% area, 88 to 90% decline in ridership, So there's plenty of space on the subways and buses. We're looking forward to more customers coming back. We do have the ability to add additional subway service and bus service and that's in large part due to the great news that 9,000 of our colleagues at the MTA have returned from home quarantine. That's a great thing for their physical health, but it also gives us the ability to add more subway and bus service as more customers come back to New York City Transit. It's also obviously an incredible statement of the commitment and dedication to public service of the transit workers. Subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road, just extraordinary.

Madden: What do commuters need to know about getting on the subway or a bus for the first time for many, in two and a half months.

Foye: So here's the first thing they need to know. The solution in terms of minimizing health risks to our customers and our employees, is that there's no silver bullet, there's no single piece that accounts for that. The first piece is masks, masks, masks. The Governor has made the wearing of masks mandatory by our customers, our employees are wearing masks. I ride the Long Island Rail Road and the subways and I can tell you, as far as I can tell when as reported by the agency presidents, there's 100% compliance by our employees in terms of wearing masks. The anecdotal experience, mine on the railroad and in the subways, but also those of riders in New York City Transit, managers and workers who are working on the system, there's a very, very high degree of compliance by our customers already. The Governor's directive mandate that everybody on transit wear a mask is going to help. So the first thing is masks, masks, masks. We are continuing what the Governor called the Herculean effort, which is disinfecting every subway car, every bus, every Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North car, and every station every night. And that work is going to continue, and that's one of the reasons that the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. subway closing was put in place. We're also going to be obviously asking for employers to stagger hours, stagger start and stop times. We'll be checking the temperature of every employee every shift. If a car is crowded or a bus is crowded, we're going to encourage commuters to wait for the next bus, wait for the next train, go down the platform. We all tend to be creatures of habit, come down the subways, come down the same

stairway and get on the same subway car, and you may have to mix it up a little bit. But right now, we're running basically on the subways, for instance, 80% of service for about 10% of our ridership. That ridership is incredibly important. It's first responders and essential employees, but we have the ability because of the return of those 9,000 workers that I mentioned, to increase service on subways and buses, and we will be doing that. We're also looking at innovative ways of disinfecting the cars, including ultraviolet light, ultraviolet C light. We reported last week that a Columbia professor, Dr. David Brenner of the Medical Center at Columbia University, has confirmed that for the first time that the COVID-19 virus is killed by ultraviolet C light, that we're piloting this week, the ultraviolet on subways and buses. We're looking at anti-microbials and customers and our employees can be assured that we're looking at every possibility. And I've been in contact with our counterpart transit agencies in Asia, Europe, North America and the trade associations as well to make sure that we're on top of every innovation. Actually the MTA led the way on the announcement that the ultraviolet C light eradicates the COVID-19 virus. We were really proud of that and happy to share that news with our customers, our employees, and frankly transit agencies around the country around the world.

Madden: Will there also be extra service, or service added on the LIRR and Metro-North?

Foye: Yes, and we'll be announcing the same thing with respect to subways, yes. When Long Island and the Hudson Valley went into Phase 1, we increased enhanced service on both Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North. And again, that was made possible in large part that by the fact that so many of our workers have safely returned from home quarantine and are back on the job. We will be making similar announcements about increases in service on subways and buses in the days ahead.

Madden: Okay, thank you very much Pat Foye, Chairman of the MTA with an update for us today.