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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears Live on WCBS 880

MTA Chairman Pat Foye: "Those who do not have masks are frankly not welcome on public transit, just plain and simple. The good news is that more than 90% of our customers on subways and buses--we've done physical counts--are wearing masks. We want to drive those numbers higher because public health experts agree universally that wearing a mask is the single best thing that we can all do to limit the spread of the virus... If you're not wearing a mask, we ask that you stay off the subway, buses and avoid the railroads."

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live on WCBS 880 with Kevin Rincon to discuss mask enforcement, MTA finances, and preparation across the transportation network for Hurricane Isaias.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Kevin Rincon: Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise throughout the country. Here in the city though cases have stayed relatively flat and then that's created the need for a balanced approach to reopening, whether it be schools, business or any other aspects of life. And key to all of that, public transportation. We're joined on the Newsline by MTA Chairman Pat Foye, thank you for joining us.

Patrick J. Foye: Kevin, thanks for having me.

Rincon: Well last week you had over 2 million people per day use city buses and subways. How do you make sure they're kept safe and that your employees are kept safe as well?

Foye: Well the single most important answer is masks, masks, masks. Those who do not have masks are frankly not welcome on public transit, just plain and simple. The good news is that more than 90% of our customers on subways and buses--we've done physical counts--are wearing masks. We want to drive those numbers higher because public health experts agree universally that wearing a mask is the single best thing that we can all do to limit the spread of the virus. It protects the wearer, it protects co-commuters and also our employees. If you're not wearing a mask, we ask that you stay off the subway, buses and avoid the railroads. Masks are mandatory on transit, no exception, as a result of Governor Cuomo's executive order. It's the law of the State of New York, and you may be asked to leave the system if you if you refuse to wear a mask.

Rincon: We've seen the issue of masks become political across the country and some of your own MTA employees have gotten attacked for asking people to put it on. So how do you work on enforcement?

Foye: Well look, New Yorkers are smart. And as I mentioned Kevin, the mask compliance on subways and buses is over 90%, we want to drive it higher. Attacks on transit workers are abhorrent. They're also a felony with a penalty of years and imprisonment. We're going to do everything we can to protect our employees, whether it's on subways, buses, Metro-North, or Long Island Rail Road. And any attack on a transit worker, Long Island Rail Road or Metro-North employee is illegal, long imprisonment and it's abhorrent. But what we're trying to do here is to raise the 90% mask compliance level to an even higher level. As part of that we've distributed-- or are distributing, 4 million masks donated by the State and the City at all subway stations for riders who left who may have left their home. We've also begun installing mask dispensers on some buses and personal protective equipment vending machines in certain stations. We've got hundreds of mask force volunteers going out into the system to hand out face coverings personally. I joined them a week ago, Thursday, and rode the 7 train to Flushing, the 7 train back to 74th Street and Roosevelt Avenue. We got on the E, the 4 5 6, and a couple of bus lines and the experience that we had was mask compliance was almost universal by our customers. That's a terrific thing, but we want to drive it higher.

Rincon: That's the health crisis side of it. The pandemic also creating a financial crisis. The agency was in need of money before all of this, can we expect any drastic changes at the MTA if Congress doesn't help out?

Foye: Well, we are fighting hard. Senator Schumer has been an incredible advocate in the United States Senate. The Republicans in the United States Senate seem to be in disarray, but it is critical that the MTA receive \$3.9 billion of funding in this latest round of COVID-19 federal funding. Senator Schumer is committed to getting that. We do not want to take any of the steps that we'll have to take if we don't receive that funding and we're laser focused on getting that funding.

Rincon: And before we let you go, we've been talking a lot this morning about Isaias. How are you guys preparing for that storm as it's making its way here?

Foye: Well, the rail is, the subway control center and the bus control center are closely monitoring the storm's progress. We had a dry run a couple of weeks ago on Tropical Storm Fay, that went well. On subways we've got crews staged to monitor and respond to flood-prone activities, we've inspected track pump locations. On buses, depots and flood-prone areas we're paying special attention to flash flooding. On Long Island Rail Road and Metro-

North there will be around-the-clock staffing for maintenance, operations, and customer service departments. We're working closely with the Governor and the State and we're ready for the storm.

Rincon: That's MTA Chairman Pat Foye on the Newsline. Thank you for joining us.

Foye: Thank you, Kevin. Take care.