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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears on CNN's Quest Means Business

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on CNN International's Quest Means Business with Richard Quest to discuss the future of transit amid a global pandemic, and other issues facing the transportation industry.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Richard Quest: The New York City MTA, the Metropolitan Transit Authority has paid a severe price during the pandemic. Look at the numbers and you'll see what I mean. Subway ridership is down more than 82% from this time last year, the authority is projected to lose seven to eight and a half billion in the course of the year and will need federal help, but this is the most telling of all. More than 100 employees, 123 employees have lost their lives. Now getting on track, getting everything going again is not easy. It's one of the world's biggest public transport systems, they have to sanitize roughly 8,800 subway cars and buses every day, and they're doing so of course. They've got to keep 472 subway stations open and safe, and roughly two and a half billion journeys being made. So putting this into perspective, the MTA is now seeking nearly \$4 billion more in federal support to help breach those numbers. Pat Foye, who is the agency's Chairman and Chief Executive, joins me now. Pat, thank you. First of all, before we even talk about anything, let me, I suppose condolences and thought, the number of people that have been directly related and who've lost their lives, the subway and the bus drivers and those who work in the stations, who lost their lives helping to keep essential workers on the move. It is a terrible toll.

Pat Foye: Richard, it is a terrible toll and you're quite right, they were heroes moving heroes. During the pandemic and continuing, our employees on subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North are moving doctors, nurses, firefighters, police officers, utility workers, their colleagues as transit workers, those working in pharmacies and groceries, extraordinarily important work. Good news is that nearly 10,000 of them have returned to work after having been on home quarantine. Some of those infected by the virus, most of them quarantined because they had contact with someone who was, and that's good news.

Quest: Pat, if you don't get this money from the federal government, what would it mean?

Foye: Well look, just to be clear what we're talking about. We got \$3.8 billion early in the year from the so called CARES Act. The HEROES Act, which Speaker Pelosi passed with support from the New York congressional delegation and Senator Schumer, is an additional \$3.9 billion that will close our operating gap for 2020. One of the reasons that the gap is so high is that first, New York is the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States, point one. Point two, our ridership is so high, when Governor Cuomo put New York on PAUSE, our customers, like all New Yorkers, listened and stayed home unless they were first responders or essential employees. And the other reason why the gap is so high is because New York's fare box recovery, the amount that our customers pay, is so, as a percentage, greater than other transit agencies around the country. So the financial toll has been significant.

Quest: But it all comes down to, at the end of the day, at some point, either the worry of a cut in services, or a hike in fares. Do you see either of those possibilities, maybe even both of them, becoming necessary in the next 12 months?

Foye: Well Richard, getting the second chunk of federal money is absolutely essential. If we're able to do that, the \$3.9 billion, provided in the HEROES Act, we'll be able to deal with our operations during the course of 2020, and then of course we'll have to deal with 2021. Happily ridership is, we've increased service a week ago. Our ridership today is 380,000 riders higher on subways and buses than it was the Monday before we increased service. So New Yorkers are returning, 380,000 customers is actually the size of a small, respectable transit agency. By MTA measures those are low numbers, but riders are coming back and riders returning to the system is going to be fundamental to the economic recovery of the New York City region and the MTA.

Quest: Right, but as they're discovering as London Transport, of whom you will be very familiar, is discovering with the tube, which, you know, the trains aren't as big so it crowds more easily, but they're seeing crowding, some crowding on the tube which raises issues of safety. Now you're some way off that at the moment, but if you do get large numbers coming back, then you do have that same problem, don't you?

Foye: Well, I suggest it's a different problem Richard. One is, we've been candid with our customers throughout. Before the pandemic, during, and after. Second is, the most important thing that our customers and employees can do is masks, masks, masks. Governor Cuomo has made the wearing of masks on transit a state law requirement. 100% of our employees are wearing masks, we did a physical study about 10 days ago and that reported 92% mask compliance by customers. We did it again this week, we're now up to 95 is the latest data point. So a combination of increased service, masks on all customers and employees and we had way finders and platform controllers and others that are monitoring that. Last week we distributed about two million masks to returning riders who didn't have them, and we're distributing hand sanitizer. The research clearly indicates and we've been candid with our customers about social distance. Social distance of six feet is not possible on mass transit, hence the name mass. And our colleagues at TFL in London are experiencing the same thing. So what we are telling our customers is the truth. You've got to wear a mask, your co-commuters have to wear a mask, employees have to wear a mask. We're going to disinfect every subway car, every bus, every Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North car multiple times a day. In the case of the subways, the stations we're disinfecting twice a day. If customers wear masks, we will continue the disinfecting regime of course, we're also piloting two innovative disinfecting programs, which should give customers additional assurance. One, ultraviolet C light project, we were the first, working with a Columbia professor, Dr. David Brenner to indicate that the COVID-19 virus is killed by ultraviolet C light. And

we're also piloting anti-microbials, which we've applied a number of times for subway cars and buses, which we believe and we're waiting for independent labs to verify, this will kill the COVID-19 virus and do it for weeks and months after application.

Quest: It is good to have you, thank you. You're an extremely busy man, I'm grateful you gave us time. Let's talk more as the summer moves on and we can work out exactly where we stand at the moment. Thank you sir.

Foye: I'll look forward to that, Richard. Thanks for having me.