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Press Release

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NYC Transit

IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg Appears on PIX11 to Discuss The MTA's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Tamsen Fadal: Well, the MTA is now asking the federal government for a \$4 billion-dollar bailout as a result of the coronavirus.

Kori Chambers: The agency saying it could face financial ruin as ridership has just plunged.

Tamsen: Yeah, the MTA is considering schedule changes, but that might not even be enough to keep the transit system going. With us on the phone right now is New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg. Sarah, thank you so much for joining us tonight.

Sarah Feinberg: Thank you all for having me.

Tamsen: So, I wanted to ask you this, we have a lot of questions for you, but we did just get notice about some of the numbers, word from the MTA, 23 workers have tested positive for COVID-19. Can you tell us how you're dealing with that.

Feinberg: Look, like any other community or large company or agency in New York, we're worried about our colleagues and I'm thinking about them and keeping them in our thoughts. We're doing our best to care for them, giving them what they need and also doing the right thing by all of their colleagues. So, making sure we are following the medical and healthcare guidance on finding out who was around those people, quarantining them and getting them care as well.

Kori: Sounds like, as I look at this thing, you are really in the midst of a true and dire crisis because you have fewer people riding the trains and the buses, thankfully, because we don't want non-essential people out there. At the same time, you're broke, you're pulling out a billion dollar line of credit, you're saying four billion dollars is what you need. It seems like it's getting worse and worse and worse.

Feinberg: That's exactly right. That is the reality. Now, to be clear, welcome to being a transit agency in America in the middle of an existential crisis, in the middle of a pandemic. So, look, in New York we are all very familiar with our transit system. Everyone rides the subway, everyone rides buses, and in a lot of other cities it's the same. We happen to be in the middle of ground zero of this fight right now. I think a lot of transit agencies are going to be going through the same thing. We're just on the leading edge. You know, it's New York. It's bigger here. The finances are bigger, the system is bigger. We're the biggest transit agency in North America. Look, you've described it in the right way. Our ridership has fallen off of a cliff, for good reason. You know, the latest numbers are that ridership on subways is down 71 percent. Ridership on buses is down about 59 percent. Call it 60 percent. You know, people are heeding the advice of their doctors, of the governor, of other leaders who have said, "if you can stay home, you should." They absolutely should, but it's really important that the transit system to also continue to be able to move the essential workers that continue to keep this city running. So, the healthcare workers, the grocery store clerks, the sanitation workers, and the transit workers themselves who are keeping this city moving and allowing the people who are caring for those who are sick to get where they need to be.

Tamsen: You know, we're sitting here and we're looking at the video of the transit workers who are out there cleaning those stations everyday, disinfecting, making sure they can be used for the people you just mentioned there. I heard them referred to yesterday as the unsung heroes in all this who keep the city moving. We've been through 9/11, we got through Superstorm Sandy and got through it. The transit system got us through it, though, and kept our city going.

Feinberg: Yeah. And, we're gonna get through this too, right? I've had many conversations with the governor over the last couple of weeks and it's one of those things that he's repeated over and over and he's so right that this is hard, but we are gonna get through it, and we are gonna get through it. But one of the reasons we're gonna get through it is because there are 51 thousand men and women at New York City Transit cleaning stations and cleaning cars and disinfecting railings and touch points and operating safe and efficient subway service for nurses and medical workers and pharmacists and technicians in our hospitals. You know, they deserve our utmost respect and gratitude.

Kori: Alright. Sarah Feinberg, we appreciate you letting us know where things stand. It's not a good place. You're not the only official we've heard from today telling us we're not in the best of all places. But, look, you're keeping it real and we appreciate that.

Feinberg: Thank you.