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TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman Foye Appears Live on FOX 5's Good Day New York

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live on FOX 5's *Good Day New York* with Rosanna Scotto to discuss the agency's dire financial situation and potential paths forward.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Rosanna Scotto: Joining us now, MTA Chairman Pat Foye. Nice to have you with us. How bad will it get?

Patrick J. Foye: Rosanna, we're in a terrible situation. Just to give your viewers a sense: from a ridership and a revenue point of view on the subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North, this is worse than the Great Depression. Subway ridership right now as a result of the pandemic is down 75%, at the bottom it was down 95%. In the worst year of the Great Depression for subway ridership in 1933, ridership was down 12% from the high in 1930 of about 2 million riders. The same result is on buses, Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North, worse than the Great Depression. What that has caused is a situation -- unless the MTA gets \$12 billion in funding from the federal government for the remainder of 2020 or 2021, we're going to be forced to take action that no one at the MTA wants to take, which is significant service reductions of 40% on subways, buses and Staten Island Railway, up to 50% on Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North and layoffs of approximately 8,400 of our colleagues. No one wants to do that and it's only the federal government that can come to the rescue. The State of New York and the City of New York are themselves seeking aid from the federal government, like every other state and city in the country, and it's incumbent upon the federal government because of the importance of the MTA to the New York City economy, and in turn the importance of the New York City economy to the national economy.

Scotto: So what kind of fares are we looking at? What kind of fare increase?

Foye: So Rosanna, we have scheduled 2% increases per year and in 2021, and 2023, we may have to raise both tolls and fares above that level. We've not set on a percentage increase and we're acutely aware that a lot of our riders and our customers are in difficult financial situation. Unemployment is outrageously high and many people are suffering. But if the federal government fails to fund the MTA to the extent of \$12 billion for the remainder of 2020 and 2021 we may have no choice but to take those actions.

Scotto: So you talked about subway ridership is down, it's still down, and what's the story with the homeless on the subway right now?

Foye: We are closing since May 6 the subway from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. We did that primarily to put our crews in a position to disinfect every subway station and every car multiple times a day; 70% of our customers in a survey say they have never seen the subways cleaner -- that's a terrific thing. And obviously given the pandemic concerns about the virus we want to have the subways disinfected as frequently and thoroughly as possible. That has also allowed us to allow New York City and the NYPD, which is responsible, the Department of Homeless Services and the City of New York to be able to provide services and shelter for the unsheltered.

Scotto: So is that working Mr. Foye? Is that working? Do you see less homeless on the subway? Or do they come back after you finish cleaning?

Foye: Rosanna, we do. The number of homeless that have accepted services and shelter is up significantly. And that is in part due to the work of the Department of Homeless Services for the City of New York and the fact that everybody's got to leave the system at 1 a.m.

Scotto: Okay. What about those windows on the trains right now? That is a big problem. You have video of this guy. How is it possible that this continues day in day out?

Foye: Well look, the NYPD just put out a video in the last hour. I met with Chief Delatorre on Monday -- he's the head of the Transit Bureau of the NYPD -- and with his team, they are all out on this. They do have video a couple of times -- this sociopath has done about \$400,000 of damage, there have been scores of broken windows. It's outrageous and unacceptable. The other thing we've had to do is to take trains out of service and delay service on the 7 line. So I grew up in Jackson Heights, I know the 7 line well, so hard-working people in Jackson Heights and Corona and Elmhurst and Flushing and Sunnyside and Woodside and all parts of Queens have been inconvenienced by the work of this sociopath. The NYPD is on it, it's frustrating that we haven't gotten them yet, but I know they're all in.

Scotto: All right, let's talk about bus fares. For a while everybody was getting a free ride on the buses. But that's just about over?

Foye: That is just about over. We put rear-door boarding in effect about March 20 near the beginning of the pandemic to minimize contact between our bus operators and customers for their mutual health. We have now installed partitions that allow the driver to be separated from customers who will be boarding again in the front and paying their fare.

Scotto: And can we talk about, you were talking a little bit about some of the bridges and tunnels? Do you see more people taking their car right now?

Foye: Rosanna, no question. As occurred in other parts of the world in Asia and China, vehicle traffic increased first. So right now, we're serving about 90% of the passenger in truck vehicles on MTA Bridges and Tunnels, we're only 10% off. And that is good news because it's bringing people to New York who are employed, spending money, paying taxes, etcetera. The first thing to recover at the MTA, as it occurred in parts of Asia and Europe, was an increase in vehicles.

Scotto: But is that a sign that they are afraid to take the subway?

Foye: I think it's a sign of many things. If you want social distance, you can get it in your own vehicle. Obviously lots of people because of schedule or construction workers carrying tools or people with off-hours and you know, they drove before the pandemic, they're driving now. Look, I think the important thing is whether people are coming on cars, subways, buses, commuter rails, it's important to get people into New York, to get them back to their offices, back the restaurants, back to pay taxes to the City and the State. And whether it's on cars, subways, buses, or commuter rail, it doesn't matter we serve them all.

Scotto: Remember when we talked about congestion pricing Mr. Foye? Is that off the table now? What's going on with that?

Foye: It is not off the table. Part of our \$12 billion ask to the federal government is \$1 billion of congestion pricing funding that we would have obtained in 2021 had the feds not sat on the congestion pricing proposal. Congestion pricing was passed as a matter of state law in April of 2019. About a week or 10 days later, we had our first meeting with Department of Transportation in Washington, Commissioner Polly Trottenberg from New York City DOT, and I and our teams. It's been frustrating that the federal government hasn't taken action and it also strikes me as cynical. Central Business District Tolling, congestion pricing, whatever term you want to use, is a huge environmental positive. It funds mass transit, it reduces congestion, it improves air quality, but it's being held up by some arcane environmental issue in Washington. And it's really time for the federal government to tell us what the environmental process is; we've got the papers largely drafted and we're ready to go.

Scotto: All right, for those of us that would be driving in New York City we're not so unhappy about the congestion pricing. Just thought I'd share that with you, Mr. Chairman. All right MTA Chairman Pat Foye, thank you so much for being with us.

Foye: Thank you Rosanna.