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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears on NY1's "Mornings on 1" to Discuss MTA Response to COVID-19

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared live by phone on NY1's "Mornings on 1" with Pat Kiernan to discuss the MTA's update to agency-wide sanitizing protocols as it redoubles safety precautions in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), ridership numbers, and assurance of continued safe service in the MTA system.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Pat Kiernan: Ridership on the subways, down 18%. That's about a million fewer people taking the subways. Bus ridership down 15% compared to comparable year ago numbers, commuter rails showing an even bigger drop, Metro-North ridership cut nearly in half, Long Island Rail Road ridership down about 31%. For more on those numbers, MTA chair Pat Foye is with me, thank you for being with me this morning. It is the time when we're trying to make sense of all of these things, and what I want to start with is this rumor that circulated yesterday that there might be a shutdown of public transit. You and the governor have both denied that.

Patrick J. Foye: Morning, Pat, thanks for having me. The answer to the rumor that circulated yesterday that the MTA would shut down transit is no, period, full stop. Not happening. The Governor addressed it directly yesterday clearly. You're right, subway ridership was down 18% on Wednesday. Having said that we moved, safely, four million customers. So there were millions of people taking subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road in totality. We are operating regular service today. Our plan is to operate the regular weekend service at every one of our agencies over the weekend. I think it's important to emphasize that the system is safe. We are taking advice from CDC, State Department of Health Commissioner Howard Zucker and his team, the City Health Commissioner and our in-house doctors and public health people. System is safe. We have substantially increased the frequency and intensity of not cleaning but disinfecting our stations. Every station, Staten Island Railway, subways, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North is being disinfected twice daily. The rolling stock, the subway cars, cars on Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road, and buses are being disinfected on a regular basis. We are working on some short-term deployment of a new innovative disinfecting technology that we'll be talking about in the days to come. But this morning, we're operating a normal service, we will carry millions of people. And I spoke with Sarah Feinberg just a couple of minutes ago, subway and bus service are close to schedule with no significant disruptions this morning.

Pat Kiernan: If we got to a stage where you considered a more complete shutdown, or restrictions on who could ride the subway, I think the concern that we all have is that essential services couldn't happen. How do you get people to hospitals? How do you get people to pick up the trash? There's a lot that relies on the subway. That isn't just me going out for dinner.

Patrick J. Foye: Well there's no question. Look, many companies have prudently advised their employees to telecommute. Governor Cuomo has been very focused on reducing crowding and social density which is a new phrase that all of us are now using. But there are nurses, police officers, firefighters, first responders, EMS, transit workers and workers on the Long Island Rail Road and buses and Metro-North as well, utility workers, building managers, etcetera. People who run supermarkets and grocery stores and pharmacies and doctors, all of whom are going to have to get to and from work. The transit system is carrying those folks and others going to their jobs today. We'll take them home tonight safely. We plan to continue running service. We expect to decline in ridership at subways, buses, and each of the agencies will continue to decline, that's natural, for instance, given the directive the Governor issued yesterday against meetings of more than 500 people. The Governor has been proactive on this situation from the beginning and the ridership decline is a result of the directives and the action that the Governor and his team have taken and we expect that ridership that continues to decline. But for key first responders, nurses, doctors, etcetera, the list that I just went through including transit workers, we are going to continue to serve them.

Pat Kiernan: Final question and it's okay, if you tell me that you haven't spent a lot of time on this topic, but can you afford this? What's this going to cost in the end?

Patrick J. Foye: Well, it's a good, good question. This is going to be an expensive undertaking. The ridership decline obviously reduces revenue, the substantial increase in frequency and intensity in cleaning costs money. I think the answer is the Governor indicated yesterday, the federal government is going to have to step up for New York State, for New York City and for the MTA in terms of reimbursing us, as the federal government did after 9/11 and it did, after Superstorm Sandy and for other storms and acts of God around the country. The states and cities, but especially New York State and New York City and the MTA are going to need substantial federal help going forward.

Pat Kiernan: Pat Foye, Chair of the MTA, my guest this morning. Thank you for updating us.

Patrick J. Foye: Thank you Pat, take care.

