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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye Appears on WCBS 880 with Lynda Lopez to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

MTA Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on WCBS 880 with Lynda Lopez to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Lynda Lopez: The MTA announcing a partnership with Northwell Health to give priority testing to COVID-19 to transit workers with symptoms. MTA Chairman Pat Foye joins us now on the Newsline. Can you give us details of this partnership? How will the frontline transit workers get better access to testing?

Pat Foye: Lynda, here's how it'll work. Northwell Health is the largest healthcare provider and actually the largest private employer in the state of New York with about 750 outpatient facilities and almost 14,000 physicians. The MTA has made a deal for our frontline employees who are symptomatic, they can go to any one of 52 urgent care centers across New York City, Long Island and Westchester during the pandemic and will get priority access to evaluation, care and testing. Testing being quite important obviously, this is a program very similar to one that Northwell was operating for the NYPD and for the New York City Fire Department. And we think our transit workers are first responders, which they are essential employees, and being able to give them priority access to evaluation, care and testing at these 52 centers, which really cover the entire MTA service region is extraordinarily important. There'll be no charge to any of our employees. Our employees will also have the opportunity to go to their own physician or, you know, to be tested by a medical professional elsewhere, but the Northwell program gives them an option to go into one of the 52 urgent care centers in the Northwell service area.

Lopez: How difficult has it been, so far, to your knowledge, for transit workers with symptoms to get tested?

Foye: Well look, here's the reality. The President talks about the nationwide shortage of testing. Governor Cuomo has done extraordinary things in terms of increasing the number of people tested in New York every day. So this is an issue, and Northwell, which is an extraordinarily important healthcare operation has stepped into the breach and is providing this service for MTA symptomatic transit workers, transportation workers, subways, buses, Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road, Bridges and Tunnels, as it is doing for the NYPD and the fire department.

Lopez: Now Governor Cuomo issued an executive order today, all New Yorkers must wear masks or face coverings in public, especially when they can't social distance and he specifically mentioned mass transit. Do you think this is something that should have [been] done for mass transit riders sooner?

Foye: Well, the MTA has been urging our customers to wear a mask, bandanas, scarves. We completely support the Governor's executive order and obviously from the point of view of our employees, we have distributed about 2.8 million pairs of gloves and about 750,000 masks to our employees since the pandemic started on March 1, and we completely support the Governor's initiative.

Lopez: How has social distancing been working on the subways and the buses for the riders and for the workers?

Foye: Well, we monitor it closely. The NYPD has got primary responsibility for policing it. There have been no reported incidents of overcrowding this week. There were some problems in the Bronx about a week or so ago at 149th Street and Grand Concourse and 149th and 3rd. We added service on the 2 line. We also added about 100 buses, most of them in the Bronx, some of them in Brooklyn to deal with overcrowding issues. And we believe that's been effective. The ridership on the subways, Lynda, is down about 93, 94% and we're providing 75% of the service that we did before. So we believe that overcrowding, which is a problem we take seriously, with the NYPD, has been episodic and we've got it under control.

Lopez: And even though you have to worry about the overcrowding with the ridership down that much, 93 or so percent, are you revisiting the idea of reducing service, changing service or shutting down any parts of it at all?

Foye: We are not. Our employees are returning from home quarantine. That's good news. The 75% MTA essential service, which is what we're providing on the subways and buses is working. Our workforces, subways, buses, commuter rails and bridges and tunnels are acting heroically, they're heroes moving heroes. Our passengers are primarily first responders, essential employees, those working in grocery stores, pharmacies, etc. Those who are critical to New York's fight against the pandemic and recovery, and transit workers across the MTA have responded heroically.

Lopez: That's MTA Chairman Pat Foye, thanks so much for joining us.

Foye: Thank you.