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Press Release

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NYC Transit

IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: NYC Transit Interim President Feinberg Appears on Good Day New York to Discuss MTA's Ongoing Response to COVID-19

NYC Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg appeared on Fox 5's Good Day New York with Rosanna Scotto to discuss the MTA's ongoing response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Rosanna Scotto:

A new solution for unprecedented times with coronavirus continuing to spread throughout New York City, and faced with calls to disinfect subways daily, the MTA had to do something they have long resisted -- shutting down the system overnight.

Soundbyte of Governor Andrew Cuomo:

Close down every station, close down the trains -- we've never been here before. And I guarantee another 10 things come up when we go to do this, that are also unanticipated consequences.

Soundbyte of Mayor Bill de Blasio:

To make our subway system cleaner than it's probably ever been in its history, honestly, and address this crisis in a whole new way. I agree with that and I commend you for it and yeah it took some disruption to say we're going to do something during this pandemic we've never done before, but it makes sense when it comes to protecting our heroes.

Scotto: Joining us right now to explain the decision and what you can expect, interim president of the New York City transit Sarah Feinberg, nice to have you with us. Tell us whose idea this was.

Sarah Feinberg: Well I think it's an, it's an idea that we all came to together. So, this is, you said, you opened by saying this was unprecedented -- unprecedented is exactly right, it's something I repeat all day every day. We are in a moment where we have to think differently, we have to think creatively about how we can keep people safe. And frankly we're doing things that we never thought that we would do, we never imagined that we would do, or never thought possible months ago. And here we are.

Scotto: So how will it work, how will it work exactly?

Feinberg: So our priority obviously is to make sure that we're cleaning every single possible train, that we're cleaning every station, and that we're caring for the 10 to 11,000 people who need our system and use our system between the hours of 1 and 5am every night. So our priority is to make sure that while we're doing everything we can to keep our system clean, we're also making sure that those people have what they need so it's very, it's a complicated effort to be sure, but we have a lot of people working on it to pull it off.

Scotto: So do you think this is enough to clean the subways from one o'clock to five o'clock in the morning because what happens if somebody who's infected with the virus comes on at six o'clock in the morning? I mean for the next, what, three hours -- how long does that virus stay in the air and stay on poles in the system?

Feinberg: Well to be clear, we're not only cleaning from one to five we'll be cleaning literally 24 hours a day so it's just a closure from one to five gives us the ability to make sure that we're hitting everything and in fact we'll be hitting some things multiple times. For example, let's say you're writing a system during the day, get to the end of the line where you're going, you're going to step off the train and 10 cleaners are going to step onto the train and start cleaning which is not something you would typically see during the day. So let's talk about the essential workers who use the transit system at that time, where should they go, and who's gonna oversee that dance to get them to work on time. So they're gonna have, they're gonna have several, several options -- so first we're looking at running bus service that matches the subway headways, if the subways were open so let's say that you were an essential worker that usually used the subway at, making this up, at 2:20 in the morning -- if you missed that train your next option was 2:40am. We're going to run the subways, or I'm sorry we're going to run the buses at a similar headway so that what you're doing is just taking a bus instead of a subway. That said, we're going to have other options too, so cabs, liveries -- but we hope that the buses are the first option. Look we're a public transit agency and so we always want people to be using public transit.

Scotto: And is there a website people can go to to check or sign in to see how they're getting to work?

Feinberg: Yeah so the best place to go is the MYmta, MTA app. I'm sorry we have a bunch of echo and I'm hearing myself. The best place to go is the MYmta app. It's not updated yet, but in the coming days we'll be able to give you a bunch more information.

Scotto: What's gonna happen with the homeless? There are lots of people who concerned that obviously you're going to take them off the trains and it may not be easy. Who's going to help you take them off the trains to do the cleaning?

Feinberg: So that's the [inaudible] NYPD presence that you've seen over the last couple of days. That's gonna continue but it's going to expand. So part of this effort is an agreement between the state and the city to offer enormous police resources. That's going to be really important. Look, this is a population that desperately needs help. It's very vulnerable, they need housing services, medical services, mental health services, and they should get all of that, but they can't be living in the system and they can't be living on the trains. And the fact that there are thousands of people who are doing that really impedes our ability to clean. And so getting those folks off the trains, getting them into services, giving us the ability to clean is really important here and it's going to be a really significant police effort. If we don't have a police effort, this can't happen.

Scotto: So you need the police to help you do this otherwise

Feinberg: It's literally the first requirement. If we are unable to have a significant police presence, this shutdown literally won't happen.

Scotto: How do it get this bad on the subway with the homeless? I mean, we're hearing from MTA workers who were saying that they're defecating on the subway, besides bringing, you know all their garbage down there.

Feinberg: Well, frankly I think it's a couple of things. First, you heard the governor talking yesterday about when you're in an unprecedented crisis, there's all kinds of consequences that you don't necessarily see coming, and some that you do. This sort of falls in both categories -- I think this was a predictable, one predictable consequence that no one would have predicted that it would have been this serious. Think there's a couple of things happening here. First there's almost no one else in this system -- there's very few folks using this system at the moment because we're only serving essential workers, and those who are on essential errands going to a pharmacy or a grocery store. Second, we're running fewer trains because we're running a reduced service because we've had so many crews out sick, and on quarantine. So, those who are sort of spread out in the system are now in a more condensed space. And then finally, look, the folks who had nowhere to go before this pandemic still have nowhere to go. And I think that there are more people who may have been staying with friends or family prior to this pandemic, and now, don't have that option. Certainly when I was in the system two nights ago with our homeless outreach efforts I spoke to one woman who said that previously she had been spending the night with friends, but that just wasn't an option anymore so she'd been spending the night on the train since the pandemic began. So I think that we've also got some of those folks. And look, those who are struggling with mental illness are really struggling at this moment. They, you know, as much as anyone else understand what's going on and are struggling with how to get through this crisis, and so I think we're seeing consequences of that.

Scotto: Wow, you really have your hands full on every account here.

Feinberg: Full service.

Scotto: And you just stepped into the role in January, it seems like you've been confronted with...

Feinberg: March, it was March.

Scotto: Right, you've had one problem after another, since you stepped into this role in March.

Feinberg: I mean look when I started the role, this was a crisis that was growing, in fact I started a week early because it was clear that I wasn't gonna be able to delay my arrival by even a couple of days, so, but look, this is, this is part of the gig -- public service is about serving the public. And it's not always pretty and it's not always smooth, and I ask for people's patience, because again this is unprecedented and we, you know, the grounds are shifting on us. We are doing everything we can to address every problem as it arises, and I know that it's frustrating for those who, you know of everything else that's going on in their world and in their life, the last thing they need is for their commute to change. But everything is changing right now. And so I appreciate people's patience as we work our way through this.

Scotto: Well good luck, we wish you all the best.

Feinberg: Thank you.

Scotto: New York City Transit Interim President Sarah Feinberg. Alright, it is going to be unprecedented and as the governor said there's probably gonna be 10 more problems that come up with this.