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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: MTA Chairman and CEO Foye Appears on FOX 5's "Good Day New York"

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) Chairman and CEO Patrick J. Foye appeared on Fox 5's "Good Day New York" with Rosanna Scotto to discuss the agency's ongoing response to COVID-19 as New York City enters Phase 3 reopening.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Rosanna Scotto: So, as the city pushes into Phase 3 of reopening the MTA is adding some new services to help keep you safe from the spread of COVID-19. Ridership data will now be updated each day so you can understand how many people are using subways and buses in and around the city. In addition, the MTA is installing new PPE vending machines in several of its stations. Joining us right now from MTA Headquarters in Lower Manhattan, MTA Chairman and CEO Pat Foye. Nice to have you with us. How are you feeling?

Patrick J. Foye: I feel fine, Rosanna, thanks for having me.

Scotto: All right so what do we know about ridership today? Do you see any kind of increase?

Foye: Yeah, ridership has been gradually increasing. Right now, we're at over 1.1 million customers on the subways, weekday, and over 1 million on buses. Interestingly enough buses have been outpacing subways on ridership, that's typically not the case. Those lines crossed last week and we've got more customers on, on subways than on buses-- a total of 2.1 million daily-- but that compares to a pre-pandemic regular weekday of about 5.5 million on subways, and 2.1 on buses. So, we've come a long way from the depths of the pandemic, but we've got a long way to go in terms of building ridership. The Mayor has estimated that we'll have an additional 50,000 customers on subways and buses today, and in the days following Phase 3. We're prepared for those customers, we've increased bus service in Manhattan to 100%, we've added a new nighttime express bus service, the B99 which goes from in Midwood, Brooklyn to the West Side of Manhattan. We are syncing up our Staten Island Railroad service with the increased service on the Staten Island Ferry. So, when the ferries running every 15 minutes the Staten Island Railroad will be too. For the first time during the pandemic on the Staten Island Railroad we're going to be Running express service. So, ridership has come a long way from the depths of the pandemic, you know, 2.1 million ridership on average weekday in the last, in the last week or so. We expect it to continue to grow.

Scotto: So right now, if somebody logs on to the MTA they'll be able to find out just how crowded the subways are? So they know what you know what station to go to, whether...

Foye: We're providing substantially more data to our customers, so that they can make, they can make decisions. We're doing everything we can to manage crowding. We've been clear and candid from the beginning that we can't provide social distance on subways or buses as ridership continues to grow. The most important thing our customers can do is to wear masks, masks, masks. Masks are mandatory on public transit as a result of Governor Cuomo's executive order which has got the force of, which has the force of state law.

Scotto: Meanwhile, if they forget, and if they forget a mask you can actually buy them now like, like a token or subway card or you have PPE vending machines in some subway stations?

Foye: That's correct. Although before customers buy them they can go to the old token booths, you know where the station agents are, and the station agents have masks for those who don't have them.

Scotto: They're selling them, right?

Foye: In 12 stations we've got PPE machines on a pilot basis where a customer can buy an N95 mask or a pack of 10 masks for \$12. That's a pilot program, but no one has to buy a mask because station agents have them available, we've distributed well over 2 million masks. Importantly, mask compliance on the subways, based on a physical count we've done, is at about 95%---that's certainly the anecdotal experience that each of us hear. When I ride the subways, I typically take the ② and the ③ from Penn Station, to and from Penn Station, subway customers are wearing masks and I think that mask compliance among our employees on subways, buses, Long Island Railroad, Metro-North, Staten Island Railroad, is 100%.

Scotto: All right, let's talk about 24/7 subway service, because right now you're still shutting it down for several hours while you clean. How long will that go on for?

Foye: We're continuing to close down from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. The purpose of that is to allow our heroic workforce to continue to sanitize and disinfect every subway car multiple times a day at every station. That closure will continue as long as the pandemic continues, and it has played an important role in us being able to disinfect the station, subway stations and subway cars-- 70% of our customers who've been surveyed say they've never seen subway stations and subway cars as clean as they are today and that is in part due to the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. closure.

Scotto: Yeah, I've actually heard that the subway system is very, very clean but the homeless is still there and making themselves very comfortable. What are you hearing about that?

Foye: The other reason Rosanna, for the 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. closure was to allow the City Department of Homeless Services, working with the NYPD, to provide medical and mental health services to homeless individuals and to get them shelter. That program has been a success. It's really important that the City, the Department of Homeless Services and the NYPD, continue that, continue that service. That's played an important role and substantial number of homeless have been placed in shelter, in city shelter as a result of that program.

Scotto: In the meantime, the MTA is kind of bleeding money, right? I mean, not enough coming in and I guess congestion pricing, is it on hold for the foreseeable future?

Foye: Well, you're right. We've got severe financial situation; our financial situation is dire. We're waiting for the United States Senate to pass a second round of COVID-19 funding. The House provided \$3.9 billion for the MTA. McKinsey estimated that the midpoint of our financial losses in 2020, this year would be \$7.7 billion. We've received roughly half of that, that will the first half \$3.8 billion will take us through the middle of July, the month we're in right now. We'll get the last installment of that in August and it's really critical that the federal government provide additional funding to the MTA to get us through 2020. The financial situation we're in is a result of the precipitous decline in ridership that occurred during the pandemic. Ridership hit unprecedented lows as you know, it's returned but is dramatically short of the 7.6 million people that we would carry out on a normal weekday pre-pandemic. Federal aid to the MTA is absolutely critical. I characterized it at our board meeting a week or so ago as a four-alarm financial fire and that's exactly what it is.

Scotto: And if you don't get funding, what will happen? Will you have to do massive layoffs? Are you expecting to cut down on subway service?

Foye: Well look, everything has to be on the table. What we're going to do first is reduce overtime. We are also looking at every consulting contract that non-personnel expense that we've got. We want to do, we want to take every one of those steps and take every dollar that's not necessary in the new reality out of the system before we affect service reductions.

Scotto: MTA Chairman Pat Foye, we appreciate that update this morning, good luck the city needs you.

Foye: Thank you Rosanna.