

MTA boosting service on city buses, subways, LIRR and Metro-North as NYC begins coronavirus reopening



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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | JUN 05, 2020 | 6:16 PM



Subway riders are pictured at the Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street subway station on May 11. (Luiz C. Ribeiro/for New York Daily News)

All aboard? Not quite yet.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority head Pat Foye rolled out a 13-point plan Friday for dramatically increased service on city buses, trains and commuter railroads starting Monday as phase one of the city's COVID-19 reopening begins for 8.3 million daily riders eager for pre-virus service.



Chairman and CEO of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Patrick Foye, speaks during a news conference on Tuesday, May 19, in New York. (Frank Franklin II/AP)

"We hope to return to normalcy in the very short term," said Foye at a news conference inside the largely empty Grand Central Terminal.

Regular weekday New York City subway service will return, although the 1 a.m.-5 a.m. systemwide train sanitation closures will continue. Outside Manhattan, buses will run on weekday schedules used on days schools are closed. In Manhattan, 75% of buses will return to service.

Express bus service will also return, and the MTA asked the city to open an additional 60 miles of express lanes to speed their trips, transit officials said. Rear door boarding and free rides will continue on the buses.



Customers wear personal protective equipment while boarding and departing an MTA bus as it operates without fees, Friday, April 24, in the Bronx borough of New York. (John Minchillo/AP)

All riders will be required to wear masks, although police will be instructed not to hand out summonses to commuters in violation of the mandate. Free masks will be handed out at subway stations for those not in compliance.

"The single most important thing is that all of our employees and all of our customers wear masks every moment they're on public transportation," said Foye. "It will protect them, and their fellow commuters, and our employees."

The MTA is also asking for a \$3.9 billion infusion of federal money to cover the massive financial losses caused by the most precipitous drops ever seen on local mass transit ridership once coronavirus crippled the region in March.

"A drop like we have never seen before," said Foye, who noted the lack of riders helped slow the spread of the virus. "No transit official likes to say this, but the loss of ridership was a good thing."



In this Thursday, April 23 photo, Ruth Caballero, a nurse with The Visiting Nurse Service of New York, right, and Catherine Peralta, her Spanish-language translator, center, ride a bus to a patient's home during their rounds in upper Manhattan in New York. (John Minchillo/AP)

Interim NYC Transit head Sarah Feinberg, responding to calls from Mayor de Blasio for social distancing on the city's transit system, said the reality of operating the buses and trains made that a virtual impossibility.

"I take the mayor's advice very seriously and his guidance very seriously," said Feinberg. "But to suggest that the New York City subway system, as ridership grows, can allow for social distancing, I think suggests an unfamiliarity with the system or a lack of sincerity."



FILE - A passenger wearing a face mask is seen inside a subway car in March. (Luiz C. Ribeiro/for New York Daily News)

Metro-North President Catherine Rinaldi said Monday service will operate at 61% of normal, but at 115% capacity at rush hours to accommodate workers returning to their jobs under Phase One.

And LIRR head Phil Eng expects 90% of normal workday service to run, with the railroad keeping extra trains on standby for use if needed.