



Findings, Week 3 with Patrick Foye

Introduction

The COVID-19 Regional Recovery Task Force (RRTF) was established to address the needs of states in the Northeast as they prepare to relax their orders to shelter-in-place and reopen the region's economy. Working with leading experts in key fields, this task force will support new federal legislation tailored to get Americans back to work safely and to address critical questions facing the United States in the coming weeks and months, particularly in the Northeast.

Briefing the RRTF this week was Patrick "Pat" Foye, Chairman and CEO of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). Mr. Foye was previously President of the MTA and between 2011 and 2017, served as the Executive Director for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Mr. Foye also served as Deputy Secretary for Economic Development for Governor Cuomo, the Downstate Chairman of the Empire State Development Corporation, and Vice Chair of the Long Island Power Authority.

Key Findings from Week 3

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority is the largest transit agency in the United States, running New York City's subway and buses, two commuter rails, and several bridges and tunnels in downstate New York. Though it has seen ridership decrease by up to 95% during the COVID-19 pandemic, the MTA continues to operate at 70% capacity to ensure that essential workers are able to reach their places of work.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can establish guidelines for the amount of social distancing required on mass transit. Congress can also support research and development of new technologies specifically for mass transit systems that aid social distancing and infection control.

The MTA is now the international standard bearer for implementing safety measures in buses, trains, and stations. Buses now have rear-door boarding to protect drivers; London implemented the same measure four to five weeks later. Buses and commuter rails are already going cashless, while the MTA is working with One Metro New York (OMNY) to roll out a contactless fare payment system. "Temperature Brigades" check employees for fevers, and markers are going up in stations and on trains/buses to direct people's movement and encourage social distancing. There are currently no evidence-based guidelines, however, from the CDC that specify the required distance between masked passengers on any mode of transportation. This

guidance would help MTA determine where/how to place markers and close off certain seats or sections.

For the first time in the subway's 116-year history, it is now closed between 1:00am and 5:00am every night to allow teams to disinfect trains, equipment, and stations. The MTA is also using this time to test disinfecting technologies, including ultraviolet lights and antimicrobial compounds sprayed on surfaces by an electrostatic sprayer, which may prove to kill microbes (including the SARS-CoV-2) for up to 90 days. Congress can support additional research and development initiatives specifically geared towards mass transit, including those that support social distancing and/or infection control. For example, one initiative out of [Columbia University's Center for Radiological Research](#) is looking at using lamps that continuously emit low doses of a particular wavelength of ultraviolet light that kills microbes but does not harm human skin, eyes, and other tissues. These may be used in stations and on buses/trains to disinfect large surface areas.

Congress can provide additional aid for mass transit.

Applying these additional safety measures is an expensive operation -- McKinsey & Company estimates operating costs have gone up by \$800 million, while revenue from tolls and fares has dropped by \$4.7-\$5.9 billion, and revenue from state and local taxes has dropped by \$1.6-\$1.8 billion. McKinsey projects the total cost of the full impact of the pandemic to reach \$8.5 billion in 2020. On April 16th, Foye and the MTA wrote a letter to the New York Congressional Delegation, [requesting an additional \\$3.9 billion in federal aid](#). The MTA has already secured nearly \$4 billion in federal funding through last month's CARES Act.

Conclusion

Congress acknowledges the essential service of the MTA and other mass transit authorities in keeping this country running. Although ridership and revenue have decreased across the board, mass transit is one sector that is leading the way in implementing safety measures to protect essential workers who continue to rely on it. The sector is also looking ahead, exploring new technologies to improve safety and ensure that riders and employees feel comfortable. To that end, Congress can support mass transit authorities through direct funding as well as support for research and development on technologies that will protect all on board.