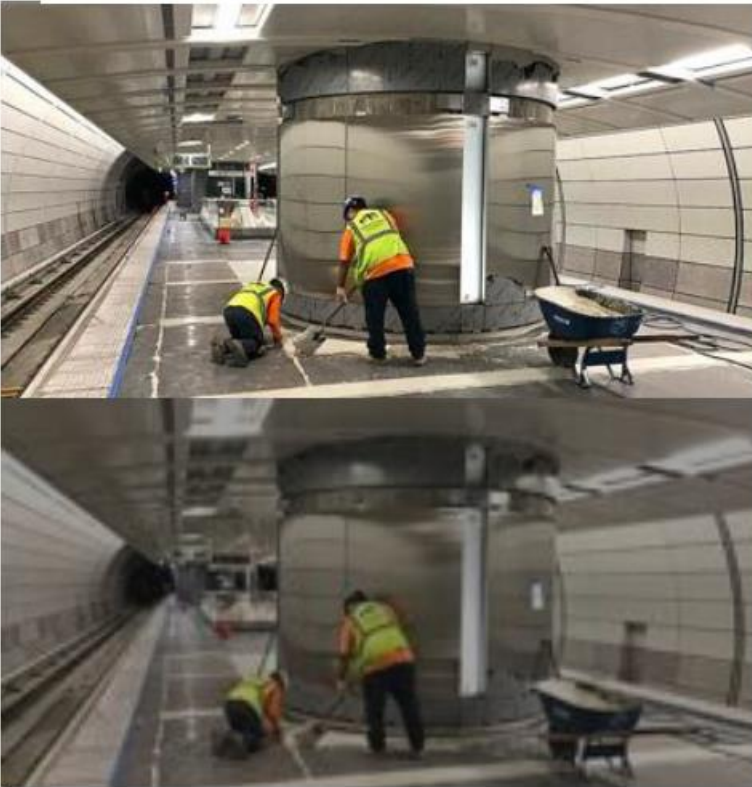


THE CHIEF LEADER

Mayor's Call for MTA Vaccine Mandate Gets Icy Response From Its Unions

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CHOOSING TO COLLABORATE: Although one transit-union leader previously criticized the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for tepid enforcement of its coronavirus-testing requirement for employees who refuse to be vaccinated, MTA Chief Executive Officer Janno Lieber brushed off Mayor de Blasio's call for Governor Hochul to impose a vaccine mandate at the agency, saying he had no interest in becoming embroiled in 'mano-a-mano disputes with labor.'

Photo courtesy of MTA

Mayor de Blasio, who is eyeing a run for Governor, used his Nov. 23 press briefing to suggest that Governor Hochul follow his lead and impose a coronavirus-vaccine mandate on Metropolitan Transportation Authority workers.

"It's time to do it. MTA—listen, we depend on all the good men and women who worked for the MTA," he told reporters. "They've been heroes during the COVID crisis, but we've got to get out of the COVID era. We need them to be vaccinated for the safety of each other and their families, their

communities, for the safety of the passengers. It worked with the New York City workforce. It can work with the MTA as well."

Praises TSA Move

He added that the U.S. Transportation Security Administration recently implemented a vaccine mandate, saying, "Good for keeping the employees safe, good for protecting holiday travelers. This was the right thing to do."

Ms. Hochul two days after succeeding Andrew Cuomo Aug. 24 implemented a vaccine mandate for health-care workers statewide, which applied to employees of the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and NYC Health+Hospitals.

Mr. de Blasio touted the inroads his approach had made with uniformed agencies where many employees have been resistant, including the Police and Fire departments, saying both agencies experienced sizable jumps in the percentage of vaccinated members after he imposed the mandate that required all city workers to get vaccinated or be suspended without pay.

That move continues to face opposition in court from the police and fire unions, which have declined to agree to a leave policy for holdouts that City Hall reached with 23 other unions, most of which represent civilian employees. More than 2,000 city employees are on 30-day unpaid suspensions, including 500 Firefighters.

MTA, Unions Not Buying

Acting MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber told 1010 WINS that the agency wasn't interested in the "mano-mano dispute with labor that the Mayor has gotten into," preferring to collaborate "with our union partners."

"We've got four out of five MTA employees vaxxed, and when we do testing, and we do a lot of it, we have a low positivity rate," he said. "We're at .6 percent positivity rate. So, we've got a safe workforce, our customers are comfortable, and we know that because during discretionary travel hours, on the off hours and on the weekends, they're coming back at about 70 percent of pre-COVID [traffic]."

He continued, "We're not interested in ideological debates about vax or not. What we're interested in is that when you walk into a subway and you expect certain service, that the train is going to come on time, that we're succeeding in doing that. We want to make sure all of our workforce is there."

The Mayor's foray into state affairs was blasted by the transit unions, which persuaded the MTA to maintain its testing option for those who didn't want to be inoculated.

'Glad to See Him Go'

"The MTA's unionized workforce, and millions of transit riders, are grateful this Thanksgiving that Mayor de Blasio does not run the subway and bus system—and is finally heading out the door," said Transport Workers Union Local 100 President Tony Utano. "The current system in which transit workers have a choice to be vaccinated or be tested regularly is working, while we continue to educate and urge members to get the shot."

His opponent in the ongoing Local 100 election, Paulie Navarro, said, "I find it amusing that Mayor de Blasio wants to lead the charge on transit workers being mandated to get the vaccine," said Paulie Navarro, who is running against Mr. Utano for president of Local 100. "Why hasn't he [de Blasio] made the effort to stop the numerous assaults we encounter on a daily basis? The Mayor needs to stop using transit workers as pawns in his political chess match to further his career in politics."

"It's ironic that during the height of the pandemic, as our members risked everything to keep New York moving, we never heard a single word from Mayor de Blasio, expressing his support or appreciation for our sacrifices," said Mike Carrube, president of the Subway/Surface Supervisors Association. "Yet now, as he gears up for a run for Governor, he wants to start dictating that the MTA impose a vaccine mandate on us. The mayor should spend his remaining days in office focusing on the crime wave that's soaring in our subways and our streets as a result of his gross mismanagement."

Mr. Carrube, however, has previously critical of what he claimed was haphazard enforcement of the MTA testing option.

The agency's policy is consistent with the approach taken by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration's standard for private-sector employers of 100 or more, which has temporarily been put on hold by the Federal courts.