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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER
SHOW**

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning again everyone, and it is time as every Friday at this time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Only your questions for the Mayor for this segment, in case some of you we're hanging on from the last segment or calling about other things. Questions for the Mayor welcome here at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0 or you can always tweet a question. Just use the hashtag #AsktheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. How are you doing?

Lehrer: I'm doing all right. First, can I get your reaction to the killing of George Floyd and the protest here in New York as well as elsewhere?

Mayor: Brian, horrifying, horrifying, the video. We, you know, we can ever get numb to this. What we saw in that video, it's just painful, first of all, just horribly painful, humanly. But it was, you know, degrading of a man because of his race. I mean, there's just no question he was killed because he was black. And there's no way in hell that if that had been a white person, he would have been treated the same way. And just the absolute lack of concern by the officer, which goes against everything a law enforcement officer should be doing. It was extraordinarily painful. And look, the anger out there is real and unfortunately very justified. I wish people did not have to keep raising their voices when they see this injustice. But it's become an epidemic in this country and it has to stop. So, you know, all of the changes, everything that we've tried to change in policing, everything that people have tried in other parts of the country, it all matters. All these reforms matter. But there also has to be consequences because no police officers should believe they could do that and get away with it. So we've got to understand that there's lots of anger out there and it's understandable and real anger. It's based on a horrible history.

Lehrer: And you tweeted that these officers need to be charged immediately. But here in the city, you never called for charges against the officers in the death of Eric Garner who said, I can't breathe 11 times as another officer sat on him. George Floyd was saying, I can't breathe. Of course, everybody thinks of the Eric Garner case. And it took your administration five years to fire even one of the officers. So is it easier to speak your truth when it's not in your city? And what's your own legacy going to be in this regard?

Mayor: It is no question, Brian, that I look back on that and I will claim responsibility for the mistake of waiting on the Justice Department and I'll never let that happen again. The – everything that I was hearing in that time was about the need to defer to the Justice Department. And not to comment and let them do their work. And that was just plain, a mistake. And in the future, I'm not going to handle – I hope there is no future, Brian. I'm want to be really, really clear. I hope we never see another thing like this in New York City. But I'm going to be really clear that we will not accept any situation like this in New York City. And God forbid there is one, I want to see charges acted on immediately. And I will be plain about that because it has to stop. It just has to stop. This is unacceptable. It shouldn't happen to anyone. And why does it always happen to a black man? I mean it's just, you know, this is the part that is so – it's like you can't explain it. You can't say, Oh, these are just random acts. And what is more painful is, you know, for six years thinking that all these things could change it. And I'm not just talking about here, every place else, that even with all the changes, there are still officers – and I don't think there are anywhere near a majority. I think the vast majority of officers are trying to do the right thing. But that any officer could exist on any police force who could do something like that is incredibly painful for all of us to see. And it has to be answered with consequences.

Lehrer: Do you have any message for the protesters or things you want to say about enforcement that you will or need to or won't invoke? Because I gathered some police officers were injured in New York City yesterday. Is that accurate?

Mayor: Yes, it is. And that's unacceptable too. I mean, look, I understand the anger of the protestors. And there is no place, literally no place on Earth that respects protest and the right to protest more than New York City. And I had been in a lot of protests in my life. And I really believe the NYPD knows how to handle protests and respect them, whoever's protesting. I want to see a light touch because people are undeniably angry for a reason. But I also think there's a really clear line and it's the same basic moral underpinning. You cannot attack a police officer that, you know, to say the least two wrongs don't make a right. Attacking a police officer is unacceptable. And I don't know why people express their anger at the injustices in the world at an officer in front of them who may for all they know be the best officer in the world and the most righteous. So I don't think it's fair, you know, I think back to Vietnam and the way people were angry at soldiers coming back from Vietnam when they were not the ones who started the war. Be angry at the people who set the policies and hold all of us accountable. But no, I want to just say, anyone who wants to protest, we're going to protect your right to protest. But please also respect that the cop in front of you did not create this problem. And we have to fix this problem on a much more fundamental level.

Lehrer: So on the budget crisis facing New York City right now, a listener asked this question via Twitter, why are NYPD budgets being increased? And you can say whether or not that's a true fact. But why are NYPD budgets being increased while health and education budgets are being cut?

Mayor: Yeah, I really don't understand that question, but I'll give you a quick answer. I mean today I announced something that is absolutely consistent with everything we've been talking about. We're investing in public safety at the grass roots with the Cure Violence movement, community-based people are going to help us address the coronavirus crisis. Hundreds and

hundreds of community people who we're hiring to help us keep people safe, to educate them, to give them face coverings and all that. So the NYPD can step back from that kind of role. So actually we're doubling down on community solutions. That's where we're putting money. There's not any, I don't know where they're getting this increased concept from. And also, if anyone's been watching, we have been pouring, not millions but billions of dollars by the time we get through this year into protecting people's health in this crisis and feeding people on top of that. So, no, I don't follow that question. We're really trying to, really try to protect people in every way.

Lehrer: Henry and Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Henry. Henry, are you there? Henry once -

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, I'm sorry.

Mayor: Wait, we hear him. We hear him.

Question: Hey, can you hear me?

Lehrer: Yeah, we got you Henry, go ahead.

Question: Great. Thank you very much Mr. Mayor and thank you, Brian. Mr. Mayor, thank you for your calm and your leadership in this pandemic and in this George Floyd moment. We should all be proud as New Yorkers, the City's response to COVID-19. My question for you today is, what is your response today that will give restaurant owners across the city confidence that you will enact the plan to allow open air dining in New York City open streets in phase one, once the Governor allows? Many jobs and millions of dollars await your prompt and positive reply. And I ask that you please don't let June restaurant revenue die in our streets.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Henry, thank you. First of all, thank you for what you said in the beginning. You are right about what New Yorkers have done, which everyone should be really proud of. Henry, I want to give you truth, you make a compelling case, but I want to give you the truth. Right now, I do hear you loud and clear about June revenue and I'm talking to a lot of restaurant owners. The answer today is no, restaurants are not scheduled for phase one. But I'm very, very cognizant that the outdoor approach may be the solution or a major solution at least. I want to offer you the hope of knowing that I think we're going to find a way on outdoor dining. We're talking to the State about it right now. We're trying to figure out the right way to configure it. I think there's a real exciting possibility here that could help restaurants back. We have to do it safely. I want to caution that I am concerned about absolutely small businesses, restaurants, bars, all coming back. And I understand that means employment and revenue that people need. But I'm first and foremost concerned about health and safety. Right now in phase one with the industries that are scheduled to come back, we're talking about 200,000 to 400,000 workers coming back to work in the five boroughs. And that is going to be a big change in the city. We have to make sure that goes safely. We have to make sure we do not start to see a resurgence of the disease. But I can't - so I can't guarantee you phase one today, but I can guarantee you that we're right now with the

State trying to sort out the outdoor dining issue. And as soon as we do, we will set a timeline and I'd like it to be as fast a timeline as we believe is safe. So we'll have more to say on that soon.

Lehrer: And I'm seeing more and more tweets asking you to act faster. Here's one, well, let's see. I'll read the one from Ben Max, editor of the Gotham Gazette, who wrote yesterday the Mayor is showing no urgency regarding city reopening. New York City is basically there on both City and State metrics, meaning how little coronavirus there is, except for hiring contact tracers, which the Mayor's operation seems to have been slow on. And he has no plans for transit or restaurants. Wild. So that's a quote. Either he was quoting somebody or he wrote that. I'm not even sure, but that sentiment is out there increasingly right now.

Mayor: It can be out there, Brian, but I mean, I don't know if Ben wrote that or someone else. Whoever wrote it is so wrong, there are no words for it. I mean that's just patently wrong. The contact tracer program will have 1,700 people in a matter of a few days. And we are absolutely going to get to 2,500 people, which is the State goal in the first two weeks of June. I mean we've been over this so many times. I don't know what -- I don't think people understand what it means to go from zero to 60, creating the biggest contact tracing operation that's ever been done in this city by far, far, far. I mean we had a hundred contact tracers at the beginning of this. Give me a break. So that's just wrong.

And then going slow – we've explained exactly what it's going to take to get to phase one. There's been total unity between the City and the State on what those standards are. And we're not going to jump the standards and risk people's health. In fact, what we're trying to do is keep driving back to the disease so that when we open and we've told people repeatedly it's going to be in a matter of days, that you can reopen without seeing a resurgence of the disease because we pushed it back and then we brought the Test and Trace programming to push it back further so that then we can sustain. Because the goal is to open phase one and then move to phase two in real time as quickly as we know it's safe. So no there's been tons of urgency, tons of communication. Some people just want to open whether it's safe or not or if it's the rules or not, they're wrong. It's not the smart way to do things. If we do this wrong, then we'll close back down again. And then everyone will say, why did you rush?

Lehrer: Other than the contact tracing ramp up to enough staff, are the other metrics there now in terms of new cases, hospitalizations, hospital capacity?

Mayor: Brian, I take it you're seeing the figures every day and you obviously know the answer is no. I mean they're not there on the State or the City indicators, but I'm confident they will be there in the first half of June.

Lehrer: Beth in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Beth.

Question: Hello. How are you?

Lehrer: Okay.

Mayor: I'm good. How are you doing?

Question: I'm good. I know you are committed to reopening the city. And I know you are committed to doing it safely. And my question goes right in with that. Last year you made a commitment to add 15 or 20 miles of bus lanes every year and to speed up buses by 25 percent. Right now buses are at least perceived to be and I believe they are, safer way to travel for many New Yorkers. 75 percent of whom are people of color and essential workers. So my question is, can you please put that \$7.9 million for the better buses and the dedicated bus lanes back into your budget? It will be good for the city, it will be good for the economy, it will help emergency vehicles get on their way. And this is a tiny amount of money in the grand scheme of your budget.

Lehrer: Thank you. Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Beth that's a great question. Yeah, Thank you Beth. And you, you know your stuff and I appreciate that question. When we had to do the budget last month in April, it was against the backdrop of, you know, a shocking loss of revenue, which at that point we believe was \$7.4 billion. Now it's \$9 billion. So honestly, Beth, we were looking for things that we thought if we didn't think the money was going to be used effectively because of everything going on in the crisis, that was some of the money we pulled back. I think your point though is very, very well taken. And we're moving now to the final budget, you know, by the end of June. I'm going to go back and look at this again because I think you're right. And again, I want to -- Brian, when anyone calls in and raises either a point that I hadn't thought of or says it better than I'm saying it or helps me think about something in a new way. I always want to give them credit. So I want to give Beth some credit here for sure.

That the initial actions taken were an atmosphere of just pure crisis. Now we're better off now than we were even a month ago. But I think the point that Beth made that buses are certainly perceived to be safer. And I think in some ways truly are safer for folks, that that's a place we can and should be doubling down. So, I'm not going to make a commitment in the middle of a phone call, I want to really think about it carefully. And obviously it's going to be part of a thoughtful process around the budget. But I think what Beth is saying is ringing a real bell with me that if buses are where people are going to feel more comfortable, then we should lean into buses more and work with the MTA to figure out what's going to help us maximize usage of buses.

Lehrer: And there was a letter released yesterday by four borough presidents calling for 40 miles of new bus lanes. We've seen from the stats that I've read, bus ridership doubling recently from a low of 400,000 to more than 700,000 people a day. So, that's on your plate. You met with MTA Chairman Foye yesterday, I believe, because --

Mayor: No, my team -- my team met with them. I'm going to be speaking to him today.

Lehrer: Okay, because one big issue, obviously, is how, when the city starts to reopen, people will get to work when, when hundreds of thousands are expected to start going back in phase one. And I'm curious how confident you are that the MTA even has a plan. They've yet to release a reopening plan of any kind. They're still telling people who aren't essential workers to avoid subways and buses. Are they nowhere on this as it seems to a lot of people?

Mayor: Look, we're working with the MTA, Brian. We need clarity. We're not getting enough clarity from them. We need clarity on what it's going to take. Look, I want to give the good example – the MTA, you know, we worked with them, we worked with the State on the cleaning plan. That really has worked. That's given people a lot more confidence. That's helped make people healthier, obviously allowed us to do more to support the homeless as well. So, I'm sure we can all work together, but no, we do not have the answers we need yet. The answer to me is straightforward in this sense. People have to know that there is a plan to limit the number of people on a subway car or a bus. What that looks like, what that number should be, how it's going to be enforced, how we're going to educate people – and we're ready to partner with the MTA on it. But there's no question in the world that a lot of people, their only practical choice to get around is going to be a bus or subway and they need to have confidence in it. We also know, honestly, a lot of people are just going to refuse to take the bus and subway in the short term and they're going to try and find other alternatives. We got to navigate all of this. This is so unlike anything we're used to in New York City but it begins with finding a way to make clear to people this is how many people are on that subway car. If it's more than that, we don't allow it to happen. This is how we're going to keep you safe. This is how we're going to enforce social distancing.

Lehrer: And you've been getting pushback for something you said this week regarding phase one reopening and transportation that people commuting to work would engage in a natural sorting out, that quote, natural sorting out, which includes more people taking cars and Ubers and not necessarily getting back on mass transit. And a lot of people can't do that, of course. So, it's your job, as Mayor, I understand the State runs the MTA, but to help guide the MTA back to where people don't have to think, how am I going to take a car to get to work?

Mayor: Well, Brian, absolutely, I see it as my job to work with the MTA to get things to be as safe as possible. And we have evidence of that working because that was the cleaning plan. And I'm sure we can come up with something here that will work. But I also want to be clear, I talk to people all the time, I know a lot of people, we could do everything right with the subways and buses, there's still going to be a certain number of people that are going to make the personal choice that that's not what they want to do right now. And the more things get – you know, it's the safer we get, the better the health care situation gets, the farther we get into the restart, the more I think you will see people then decide it's okay to come back. That's just natural. Some people will be very comfortable in the short term, others will take more time. But our job, absolutely, is to find a way to give people the most confidence we can in the subways and buses while also being realistic that it's not going to be for everyone in the beginning.

Lehrer: I want to take two calls in a row here and then get your response. I think they are going to be contrasting calls on the Open Streets program which has begun anyway in the city, opening more streets to pedestrians and cyclists to help with social distancing outside. Rita in Jackson Heights first. Rita, you're on WNYC, hi –

Question: Hey, good morning. Yeah, I'm calling from Jackson Heights. We absolutely love this. It's been so good for our neighborhood and to see people – it's helped with the social distance

and kids are using it, our seniors are using it to go strolling. We're working – it's just working so well. We're hoping that it will continue throughout the summer.

Lehrer: Okay. Rita, thank you. I'm going to leave that thought there for the moment. And Susan, in Park Slope, you're on WNYC, you're also calling about Open Streets, right?

Question: Hello? I applaud the Open Streets. However, there is one stretch that has really become inappropriate and that is in Park Slope along Prospect Park West between Garfield and Third. First of all, it's hardly ever used because the park is there for people to go into. And at least on two occasions within the last few days, ambulances that would be going down Prospect Park West towards Methodist Hospital have been deterred and had to go down Garfield Place. They were backed up, they couldn't get through because the traffic was backed up having come off of Prospect Park West all the way to Seventh Avenue. And that's dangerous. So, it's just an inappropriate block to have been included in what is a wonderful program. And if it is – if those streets were being used, then I could understand it. But given the danger that has resulted from the enormous amount of traffic that comes off of Prospect Park West, it really is inappropriate.

Lehrer: Susan, thank you. Respond to Rita in Jackson Heights and Susan in Park Slope.

Mayor: Yeah, I appreciate both of them. And, Brian, this is sort of a great example of why, you know, your show does such an important service because it is very helpful to me to hear directly from people what they're experiencing. So, I'm very happy for Rita that she's having that experience and, look, that's what we've heard mostly from community leaders and elected officials and everyday New Yorkers that, generally speaking, the Open Streets have been really good and well used. We're absolutely – Rita to your question, yes, we're continuing throughout this crisis. I certainly think that includes through the summer. And we will keep expanding as we've agreed to with the City Council.

To Susan's point, and obviously, you know, Susan lives very close to where I live in Brooklyn. I understand that point. My children by the way were born in Methodist Hospital, so I certainly know a lot about Methodist Hospital and if the ambulances are having a problem that worries me. Susan, I will follow up on that personally and I want you to please give your information to WNYC so we can follow up with you. You're raising two points. One, how with any of them, the streets, do we keep safety first and the ambulance being able to flow through, I need to get an answer from our team from NYPD, from Transportation, how we're making sure that can happen better going forward because that should not have been a case where an ambulance couldn't have gotten through from everything I know.

And then second, if an Open Street is not being used over a period of time, what do you do? And something we've seen already working with the City Council, working with the NYPD and Transportation Department is that some Open Streets, either they weren't as good as planned or they weren't that well used or they created unintended consequences. In some cases, we've made a modification or we've chosen another location. So, we're going to look at that and see what it means for Prospect Park West. But the most important issue immediately is, of course, safety and making sure that ambulances can get through

Lehrer: On the mass transit, people have said you could mandate that anyone driving into the city have at least two people in a car, which is what happened after 9/11 in Lower Manhattan during rush hour, if you recall, to, you know, prevent overcrowding in any quote, natural inclination, to repollute the city with more cars. Another idea that I've seen mentioned for potentially addressing crowding problems is a reservation system for riders. I don't know if that's workable at all in the New York City subways. I'm curious your opinion. Another that I've seen is using existing cameras to monitor how many people are entering a station. So, are any of these things, things that you're considering, at least recommending to the MTA or the ones that you could implement for the city?

Mayor: Okay, great question. Let's again, your listeners are smart and they're paying attention, but let me again say the MTA is run by the State, so they have to decide on the ultimate approach to the subways and buses. When I talk to Pat Foye today, I'm going to talk to him about whatever he thinks will work. But I think – I work almost, you know, reverse engineer the question to say if we know we cannot have a subway car with too many people in it, we got to define what that number is and just tell the world that, whatever the number of people who should be maximum in a subway car or a bus. Starting with that knowledge, I think would help everyone and then being really clear about the methodology for making sure that it's not going to surpass that, and whether that is, you know, personnel in the stations or personnel on the trains that will monitor it and act on that [inaudible] –

Lehrer: Is there a number? What could that metric be? Before you go onto the other parts of my question, I realize I asked you a multipart question –

Mayor: Yes, you did.

[Laughter]

Lehrer: But the – you know, once you're not able to maintain six feet on a subway car, which would obviously be a very sparsely populated subway car, once all the seats are taken and a few people are standing, aren't you already beyond safety? So, what's the number?

Mayor: I think the six feet measure is a very important one. And it's also based on the common sense that everyone understands. The goal is to keep everyone at six feet all the time. Sometimes physically people are going to get a little bit closer, but the goal is to constantly keep that mindset of, try to be six feet and wear that face covering. So, when you combine both of those, it really does a lot to protect everyone. And I don't have the magic number, I want the MTA to define it for all of us. But, Brian, I think you're still talking about a good number of people on a subway or a bus. You can still get a lot of people around that way. And the important thing is not to allow crowding, you know, if it's some cases a little less than six feet, that's, I could live with that. But what I want to make sure is we never have anything like crowding,

Lehrer: But you can't define crowding yet, can you?

Mayor: No. That's what I really think we need to do publicly. We need to say this is the limit. We do not want more than this number of people on a subway or bus –

Lehrer: How about reserve –

Mayor: And to figure out –

Lehrer: Go ahead –

Mayor: I'm sorry, I was just going to say, and figure out how you follow through. And I want to say I use the word enforcement, but I want to emphasize all by – I want to see the enforcement done obviously in a non-punitive nature and primarily by civilians. But the point is we've got to figure out – people can make sense of a number, they can make sense of a goal, they can make sense of a deadline, give people a number and say, when there's this many people, that's where we want to stop. And I believe people will work with it. But in terms of other ideas like reservations, you know, it's interesting, or the cameras, it's interesting. I don't know how workable it is, honestly. I think we should look at any and all possibilities, but I believe it starts with – New Yorkers, Brian, here's the big story here. Once told here's what's going to work, New Yorkers have been following it in a way that I think was unimaginable. People have really been trying to make the six feet work. They really been trying to make the face coverings work. If you say X number of people on a subway, not more than that, I think people are going to make their own judgment. They don't want to be on that subway with more than that number of people, if you can go to the next car, for example, or some cases wait for the next train, whatever it may be, especially with more frequent service, which is the other X factor here. MTA is being able to provide a lot more service now because their workers are back. So, that's important.

On the car issues. Look, we're going to look at everything, but, again, I'm in a real world place, Brian. I think we're nowhere near the number of people on the road or the number of people in the subways that we normally would have. Remember phase one, even though it is 200,000 to 400,000 people who could come back, that's compared to what was originally a workforce of 4.5 million back in February. Back in February, we were at an all-time highest employment in the history of New York City, 4.5 million. Now, we've lost – over a million people have lost their jobs and tons of people who have jobs are staying home and working remotely. Even if everyone uses their car, it's not in the next few months going to create the kind of congestion we're used to by any stretch. So, I want people to feel comfortable with mass transit, but I know a certain number of people are going to use their car. For the next few months, we're going to get by with that. Going forward though, the future is mass transit. In fact, the future has to be a doubling down on mass transit once we get out of this crisis.

Lehrer: Let me ask you one more question from a listener via Twitter. User, Mark, asks, 'Mr. Mayor, I have a friend recently released from prison on parole who is now homeless and forced to sleep on Wards Island, which is full of violence and drugs and an environment likely to have him end up back in prison. Halfway houses aren't accepting new people. There are no rooms.' That's the policy question – halfway houses aren't accepting new people and he writes, 'Where can he go and how can you get help?'

Mayor: Okay, well, look, I appreciate the question from Mark and, Brian, if your folks can help us connect with Mark, my team will follow up because we'd like to help his friend. The bottom

line is we have really been trying to change the reality of our shelters in part by creating a lot of smaller shelters and things like Safe Havens, in part by changing the security reality, which used to be unquestionably unacceptable and there's still work to do. But now security in shelters is supervised by the NYPD for the first time in history. And the folks who do the security are trained by the NYPD. There's been a lot of improvement in safety in shelter. So, I want to know what's going on in that shelter that we need to fix and if this individual needs to be in a different setting, we definitely have options. The halfway house piece, I'm not sure I understand how it's being asked in this case, but what we do have for folks is different kinds of shelter options. And most importantly, you know, a huge number of people have been moved out of shelter and into affordable housing, well over a hundred thousand, and that's the ultimate goal. Not to be in anything temporary but in permanent affordable housing. And we continue with that effort.

Lehrer: We'll see if we can connect you and that tweet-er. Thanks, Mr. Mayor, in tough times – talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Brian. Take care.

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