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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everyone. We continue to intensely vaccinate, to get out there around neighborhoods all over the city, getting vaccinations done, making sure New Yorkers are protected. As we said yesterday, we're now over two million vaccinations since we began the effort, and the effort is speeding up all the time. So, here's today's number from the beginning, 2,064,479 doses have been given, and we're hearing great news from Washington, obviously, yesterday, we talked about the fact that the federal government worked to make sure that more pharmaceutical companies are getting into the work of creating the vaccine. The thing we need, the most supply, supply, supply, Merck, we heard yesterday going to be working with Johnson & Johnson. We need to see a lot more of that. This is a kind of thing that will help us intensely. President Biden letting us all know that the vaccine supply will be very strong by May. That's going to help us to achieve our goal five million New Yorkers vaccinated by June. So, looking good, but we need to keep pushing on manufacturers, federal government, State government to give us what we need. We still need a lot more local control. We still need a lot more flexibility. We still need more freedom to vaccinate. We still need to make sure that New York City and cities all over the country get their allotments from the federal government directly without state interference and can just go ahead and do the work more quickly. That's what we want to do. We want to make sure we get our fair share because as we've talked about in recent days, we are happy to make sure that people from the entire metropolitan area get vaccinated at our major hospitals, for example, in this city. But then we need a lot more vaccine for the people of New York City if we're going to do that. We're not getting our fair share from the State of New York and that needs to be addressed.

So, making lot progress, more to do but what's happening is clear, people want the vaccine more and more, and we are more and more able to get it to them. 500,000 vaccinations per week. Yes, we can do that. We can do more than that and we can definitely hit our goal of five million people fully vaccinated by June. Now, we keep building this effort and we're getting some great help from CUNY. I want to thank everyone at the City University, working with us, working with Health + Hospitals, a great partnership, a thousand nursing students will now be joining our vaccination effort, great reinforcements, and we're so thankful for their contribution. These students will be assigned to hospitals and clinics all over the city. They'll be supervised by faculty but they're going to be able to help us build what is now by far the biggest vaccination effort in New York City history. It's going to keep growing and this is a great step for that effort. So, thank you CUNY.

Now, let's talk about what I'm going to focus on every day, all year long, our recovery in this city, and it has to be a recovery for all of us and to do that right, have recovery for all of us

means a number of things. It means a strong recovery. It means a recovery that brings back livelihoods, brings back jobs, it means recovery that reaches every part of all five boroughs, it means a recovery full of equity. Now, what we've learned more than ever, we all already knew before the pandemic we were an interconnected society and a society in which technology made such a difference, and we already knew there was immense inequality in terms of who had access to the internet, who didn't. But when it turned out how many people have to work remotely, kids needed to learn remotely, people needed to go online to get their COVID appointments, when all that became more and more of our lives, those inequalities became sharper. The digital divide has been a problem for a long time, but now we see just how urgent it is to close that divide. So, recovery for all means doing something very different when it comes to digital access. In the State of the City, I talked about the fact that we are going to make a series of investments and changes in our approach to close that digital divide. And we must make sure that all New Yorkers can get quality cost – affordable, I should say – quality and affordable broadband. This is crucial. That's what's going to make the difference in people's lives. That's what's going to make the difference in their economic opportunities and their educational opportunities. To do that, there are several things we have to do, but one of the things we have to do is take a really big step into 5G.

So, I've said 2021, it's going to be the year of 5G in New York City. 5G is the future. It's the fastest, best way to get information around. We're going to be doing a lot to help expand the 5G capacity of the city and one of the things that is required is the city land, city buildings, all the places where companies want to expand their capacity, we hold the key to that as the City of New York, and we want to use that power to ensure equity, which is why we're focusing the expansion of 5G into so many of the neighborhoods that were hardest hit by COVID, the 33 neighborhoods that our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity has identified as the areas that have experienced historic disparity and were hardest hit by COVID. We're going to make sure that 5G is focused – everywhere, of course, but on the neighborhoods that were hardest hit and need equity first. So, one of the things we'll be doing is fostering that expansion, 5G and all broadband access, but we're also going to be pushing the companies and monitoring the companies involved to ensure that they utilize the efforts of minority and women owned business, that they hire from local communities, that do the kinds of things that will actually create economic fairness and that they publicly report what they're doing. These are the kinds of efforts that could really change things in this city. We're also investing. We're investing \$157 million in affordable internet access and that's going to allow us to reach 600,000 more New Yorkers, including a lot of folks who have been excluded because of where they live, because of who they are, and that will include – and I'm very proud of this – 200,000 more public housing residents will now have access to affordable internet because of this initiative.

So, recovery for all means everyone having the same opportunity to participate. It means everyone having affordable broadband, it means more and more people getting access to the latest, which is 5G, it also means more jobs. As we intensify the presence of 5G in New York City, it is part of our economic comeback, making us competitive in the world. We have to have the latest technology to be competitive, to bring back our economy strong. So, today is about recovery and equity and the way they go together. I want you to hear from some folks who have really led the way fighting for a fair recovery, fighting to close the digital divide. First, I'm going to talk about the great work of Afua Atta-Mensah, who is the Executive Director of Community

Voices Heard. I want to thank Afua and everyone at Community Voices, they helped us immensely during the census effort reaching deeply into communities. That's why our census was just as strong in 2020 as it was in 2010. Even though we were in the middle of a pandemic, it was community partners like Afua and she's working with us right now to pass community hiring legislation, Albany, so that when there's development in New York City, as part of our comeback, the jobs in that development go to neighborhood residents who have so often been excluded. So, that's so important, we're really appreciative, but she's also with Community Voices helping us to make sure that 5G and broadband access is to everyone. So, my pleasure to introduce Afua Atta-Mensah. Afua can you hear us? You may be on mute. Yeah, here you go. Can you hear us? Afua, can you hear me now? We're not – we're having a little problem. Should we move on and come back to a Afua? Okay.

This happens in our media Q-and-A too. So, we'll come back. We'll come back in just a moment. I want to hear from someone else because another key in terms of broadband access, 5G capacity is the impact that has on small businesses and we want to make this vivid today, a huge difference for small businesses if they have the best access to the internet, versus if they don't, it means a real difference in terms of their ability to survive and thrive and hire more people and that's what it's all about, helping to build people's livelihoods. So, someone who's going to speak from his own experience, president of a great company that helps to feed New York City and a great New York City company that I certainly am impressed by Down East Seafood. Great, great work they do and part of the incredible food scene restaurant, scene of the city, to my president – my pleasure to introduce the President of Down East, Edward Taylor.

[...]

Thank you. Thank you very much, Edward. I liked – I liked you put in the plug there for good nutrition. That was really good. And listen, I want to thank you. I really appreciate what you've done, building up a business in Hunts Point, giving people opportunity. I love the fact that you're honest about the tough year you had, but that you're bouncing back, you're finding new ways to build the business. And I love that you're talking about when you're going to be able to start employing even more people. So, yeah, it is about internet access and reliability, but it's also about your spirit and your company's spirit to make sure that we keep bringing this city back. I think this is how we do it. We do it company by company. We do it block by block. We do it person by person, job by job. And I just want to thank you for being a part of that recovery.

Okay. We're going to Senator Parker now. Okay. We're going to go ahead. I guess we still don't have Afua, but I want to talk about someone who has been leading the way as the Chairman of the State Senate – the State Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee. He is really focused on digital equity. He's really focused on using the power of State government to close the digital divide and he understands, representing a community in Central Brooklyn, how big a difference it makes, what it means humanly for a family to have internet access, and have it be reliable, and have it be fast, versus not have any at all, which is still the truth and the painful truth for too many families in this city. So, my pleasure to introduce State Senator Kevin Parker.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much. Senator, I really want to thank you. I think you made a great point, we've got to get into our minds that this is as essential as all the things we consider utilities, that we've got to hold that same standard. You would not – I really love the way you said it. We wouldn't say, oh, sorry, your home doesn't have electricity, but, you know, down the block they have electricity, that's okay. You know, we would never say that. But, in fact, that's what the digital divide is when it comes to internet access. And, you know, this is where I think both local government, State government, federal government also need to be more aggressive. Private sector needs to do its share, but we have to push them to do the right thing. So, thank you for being a leader in that effort, look forward to working with you on it.

**State Senator Kevin Parker:** Absolutely. Let's get this done.

**Mayor:** Amen. Okay. Now, our first guest is now our third guest, and I hope I said her last name, Atta-Mensah, right, but I did not say her first name right. It's Afua, and I apologize. Afua Atta-Mensah, of Committee Voices Heard, are you with us?

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Afua. And thank you for being gracious about my mispronunciation. Thank you for everything you are doing and Community Voices Heard is doing. I hope you could hear earlier when we were having a little technical difficulty, I praised with appreciation everything you and your colleagues did for the Census, which was fantastic, and everything you're doing right now to help us also in Albany to pass the local hiring legislation, which is crucial to community empowerment and development. We all have frustrations about development in New York City. We need development to actually benefit local communities and ensure that local people are hired. And I know you're helping to get that done in Albany. So, I just wanted to say, thank you for all these different elements you're working on, but especially, as we say today, getting broadband access to everyone is how you build an equitable society. So, thank you very much, Afua. Everyone, again, here's another example. I'm going to keep saying, a recovery for all of us – that's what it looks like, when everyone has access to the internet in a way that can allow them to move forward and can help rebuild our economy. That's what a recovery for all of us looks like.

Okay, let's go to our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 276 patients. Confirmed positivity, 63.6. And the hospitalization rate, 4.21 per 100,000. New reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,395 cases. And number three, percentage of the people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report, on a seven-day rolling average, 6.3 percent.

Let me say a few words in Spanish about 5G and broadband access.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

**Moderator:** Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is DoITT Commissioner Jesse Tisch, Chief Technology Officer John Paul Farmer, Health + Hospital CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Juan from NY1.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** I'm doing good. How are you doing, Juan-Manuel?

**Question:** Very good. Thank you. President Biden said yesterday that he expects to have a vaccine for every adult in the U.S. by May. But you are saying now that in the city that you are on track to hit 5 million vaccines by June. Is it then that you think that it will take until the end of the summer or early fall to vaccinate all New York City adults?

**Mayor:** It's a great question. I spoke to the White House COVID coordinator yesterday, and I want to be clear, they're very hopeful about their ability to meet the goals that you just described. But that is a difference between it being produced and getting everywhere it needs to be. There's still, you know, a certain amount of time it takes to distribute, etcetera. I am certain we can hit 5 million vaccinated by June. If we get more supply quicker, we can go farther than that. There's no question we can do 500,000 vaccinations in a week. I think it's increasingly clear we can surpass that substantially in a week. So, I am very confident about 5 million. If it's here, we're going to keep expanding capacity. I mean, that's the bottom line. If there's more and more vaccine here, we will keep building out capacity. And I think demand will keep increasing as people get more and more comfortable. So, the I'm saying, 5 million, definite. If we have more supply available, we will use it. I don't have a doubt in my mind. Go ahead, Juan-Manuel.

**Question:** The Governor has not given a news conference for a week. We are still in the middle of a pandemic, a massive vital, complicated vaccination effort, the budget negotiations, recovering for New York State and New York City – I know that you've said you want to see a full investigation into the claims the Governor sexually harassed women, but do you think that while this investigation is happening, the Governor can be effective? And, if not, should he step aside temporarily and let Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul take the helm?

**Mayor:** Look, we need a full investigation into the allegations of sexual harassment. We need a full investigation into the nursing home scandal. We need the full truth and we need it quickly. In the meantime, if the Governor is to remain in office, he has to govern. He has to answer questions every day and address the issues. There's so much going on with this pandemic. We have to continue to do this work to protect people's lives. And, obviously, part of that is responding to the concerns of the public, expressed through the media. That's the bottom line right now. If he can't do that, if he can't govern, [inaudible] that be true of any leader. If you're not in a position to govern for whatever reason, if you're incapacitated or whatever it is, of course, step aside and let someone else do it. But right now, what we need is clear answers, clear progress in terms of this pandemic. And we need local control because especially when we see the dysfunction in Albany, it's the time to restore local control fully. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next is David from the Queens Daily Eagle.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

**Mayor:** Doing well, David, how are you?

**Question:** Good. Thanks. So, yesterday we reported on a proposal from a State Health Department consultant that would slash capacity at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, and that includes a plan to convert the medical center into what the consultant's calling a 15-bed "micro-hospital." So, I'm wondering what your response to that plan is. And if you are opposed, what will the City do to stop it and ensure funding for the hospital?

**Mayor:** David, I am 110 percent opposed to that State plan to take away health care services from the people of the Rockaways. It's absolutely unacceptable. I've spent time in the Rockaways working on this issue, going back to when I was public advocate. The people of the Rockaways need more health care, not less. And in the middle of a pandemic, talk about taking away the one hospital they have, that's ridiculous. I don't know how the State could be more out of touch with reality. So, no, that plan needs to be shelved immediately. We need to strengthen health care for the people of the Rockaways right now. They have – the Rockaways has taken on the chin for generations. We need to strengthen the health care in the Rockaways, not deprive the people of the Rockaways have what they need. Go ahead, David.

**Question:** Thank you. Another story here. So, payroll in the Mayor's Office of Resiliency is fully funded by a federal block grant, but that money expires next year. Salaries for several other resiliency positions in other City agencies are also funded by that federal grant. Two Council members, Justin Brannan and Costa Constantinides, are calling on you to make a permanent City funding stream for MLR and for those resiliency positions. So, will you do that?

**Mayor:** David, I want to get all the facts from our Office of Management and Budget. Obviously, resiliency efforts are absolutely crucial for this city. They're going to be going on a long, long time. When we talked about resiliency before, one of the things, I want to express to my fellow New Yorkers is this is not just a 2021 thing or a 2022 thing. This will be the whole decade and into the next decade. So, this effort has to continue to be strong. Of course, we're going to try and see if we can get federal funding on an ongoing basis, but if we can't, we have to find a way to sustain these efforts. And we'll talk about that as part of the executive budget coming up next month.

**Moderator:** Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

**Question:** Oh, Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Katie. How you been?

**Question:** Good, thanks. I just have a question, you know, I know you said yesterday when asked about working with the Governor and what that is like, you said that, you know, your office still kind of communicates, but when was the last time you've spoken to someone from the Governor's office? I don't know if you've spoken about business stuff or about what he's been going through, to put it lightly.

**Mayor:** Yeah, couple of weeks for sure. But our teams still, of course, talk regularly, both in terms of City Hall and Governor's office, and in terms of Health Department to Health Department, et cetera. Everyone knows there's so much work to be done to fight this pandemic. Go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** That's it actually. Go ahead to maybe call on someone else. I'm sorry. I just have one –

**Mayor:** No worries. Thanks a lot.

**Moderator:** Next is Matt from Newsday.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. For you and Dr. Chokshi, yesterday regarding the Johnson & Johnson door-to-door distribution, the doctor said that the City plans to, “keep equity at the center of where we were bringing the vaccine, as well as our vaccination sites.” So, for the first round, what percentage of the door knockers are going to those 33 neighborhoods that you've identified out of how many neighborhoods total in the city?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Let me speak to that as we have it this moment. And Dr. Katz and Dr. Varma can add. First of all, what we're focused on – when you say the door-to-door, I want to make sure it's clear. It's the home-bound seniors, Matt, that we're focused on. Because clearly the best way to distribute vaccine is in vaccine centers. Except if someone literally can't get to one. So, that's where we have a plan we're developing now that we'll be announcing in more detail for home-bound seniors using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, because it's much more portable. And, obviously, if you're a home-bound senior, if you can get it done in one shot, that makes a lot more sense. You do not have the option of going out and getting your second shot. The focus, first and foremost, will be on neighborhoods, a greatest need, those 33 neighborhoods. So, that's the basic outline, but we will be filling in more details in the coming days. Dr. Katz or Dr. Varma, anything you want to add?

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals:** I think you covered it, sir.

**Mayor:** Okay, good. Go ahead, Matt.

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Nothing from me.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Question:** Sure. So, I got to follow up with a yes or a no. So, overall, under the plan that Dr. Chokshi described yesterday, will the senior of color be more likely to get a door knock from a vaccinator than a senior who is white?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Matt, I really do respect your yes and no format, but I – again, I want to say to you, one, we're going to present a more detailed plan. Two, we're going to home-bound seniors of all backgrounds. The goal is to reach every home-bound senior who wants to be vaccinated,

and is ready to be vaccinated, of every different background in the city. All of our efforts try to make sure that we focus on the places where the danger is greatest, and that is those 33 communities, but we're going to be getting home-bound seniors across all communities with this effort. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** As a programming note, we're also joined by Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson. Next is Sydney from Gothamist.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey, Sydney, how are you doing?

**Question:** Good. Good. So, I want to ask about a couple of things. I'll start with vaccines. The State is starting to administer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine at the Javits Center and where, by the way, there were people waiting hours and hours on line to get vaccinated, two things. I'm wondering, what do you think of the decision to administer Johnson & Johnson vaccines at the Javits Center and where will the City use its Johnson & Johnson vaccines? Then when will that – when will those start to be administered? I know they're supposed to arrive today. And I'm also wondering if you saw the long lines and had any thoughts on that happening at the State site.

**Mayor:** Yeah. I don't know about the specifics of those long lines. I'll see if Dr. Katz or Dr. Varma want to add anything on that, but on the bigger point, the amount of Johnson & Johnson vaccine we're getting in the short term is going to be very small, but we expect a lot more later in the month. We're going to be, as we build up the home-bound senior effort, that's going to be a priority for that use of that vaccine because you literally can't use the other vaccines for that. Again, we talked about this yesterday. I'm very confident in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I will be getting it myself in a very public way to help show people that I have full confidence in it. I know our health care team has full confidence. But I'd say, Sydney, what we want to do is as we build up the effort to reach home-bound, seniors, devote whatever it takes to that, they're very vulnerable, but it's also a very labor-intensive process. It's slower by definition. You've got to literally send someone to each and every apartment or home, we'll reserve as much as we can for that. The rest of it we'll be using as part of our general effort. Dr. Katz, Dr. Varma, do you want to add?

**President Katz:** Just that I – I can't speak to the line at Javits, but I know at both the Health + Hospital sites and the DOHMH sites who work very hard to try to keep the lines to a manageable amount, to make sure people have seats if they have to wait, they're waiting socially distance so that there's no risk of people exposing one another to COVID while waiting for a vaccine. And I look forward – we believe that we're going to receive our Johnson & Johnson supply on tomorrow, Thursday. And we will look for using it for those patients, especially as you described, sir, who are home-bound, people who want it done will make a huge difference. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma, do you want to add?



**Senior Advisor Varma:** I guess the only point I would just try to keep reemphasizing is that you know, we really want to steer away from this notion that getting one brand of vaccine is going to be demonstrably different than getting another brand of vaccine. You know, I would really hope that the story would be about, you know, 24-hour access at Javits Center, as opposed to, if you come at this time, you're getting this brand versus another time you're getting another. And the reason to really emphasize that is that as we keep saying, when you look at the outcomes that we care about the most, severe illness and death, all three vaccines that are authorized by the FDA have the exact same impact on those.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. And look, again, Sydney, thank you for the question about the Javits Center. I mean, we often have questions about State-run facilities, and we don't get a lot of answers from the State. And this is another example of why we need local control, because if vaccinations are being given in New York City, we want full visibility into what's happening. We want full ability to make sure that New Yorkers benefit the most. The fair share point, again, I'm happy to see anyone vaccinated from anywhere, everyone in the metropolitan area, we're all interconnected, but if New York City is going to be asked to vaccinate a lot of folks from suburbs, New Jersey, Connecticut, then give us a hell of a lot more vaccine. That has to be reflected in the federal allotment, which needs to grow for New York City, and in the way the State manages it. And the best way to do that is to restore local control. Go ahead, Sydney.

**Question:** Okay. Thanks for that. I guess I'm going to turn to internet access now. When is your goal for all residents in New York City to have access to high-speed broadband internet, and can that happen before your term ends?

**Mayor:** Thank you. Very important question. I really appreciate you asking it because this is one of these topics that has a huge impact on people's daily lives, but actually doesn't get a very big place in the public discourse. I'm going to start and turn to Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson and turn to our Chief Technology Officer, John Paul Farmer. Sydney, I know this year, 2021, we're going to make some major physical steps forward, like tangible steps forward for access. And I know the plans we're putting in place will have a very big impact in the immediate term after this administration ends in 2022. We're still fighting for absolute total full internet access. And honestly, I think you will appreciate this. This is where the imperfections of the relationship between government and the free enterprise system are really very vivid. A contract was entered into, a franchise contract with Verizon, a long time ago in the Bloomberg administration, I likened it to a Swiss cheese. It was a contract that was very friendly to Verizon and they theoretically made commitments to fuller access, and then didn't do it. We had to fight very hard to get that substantially fixed, but it's not what it should have been a long time ago. And I think this is a story of, unfortunately, companies not doing the right thing for working people and for people of color and for outer-borough neighborhoods and getting away with it. We're trying to fix that now with the tools of government, but I sure as hell wish the federal and state laws were tougher on these companies and did a lot more to ensure full access. What Senator Parker said, you know, again, if I said to you Sydney, "Oh, you have electricity, but someone down the block is not given the right to electricity," you'd be, of course, outraged. How is it okay that our society is structured based on wealth in such a way that some people have access and others don't? So, I'll let Phil Thompson speak to that. And John Paul Farmer, then go to a little more detail about what the timelines will look like as well. Go ahead, Phil.

**Deputy Mayor J. Phillip Thompson, Strategic Initiatives:** Thank you, I would just reinforce what the Mayor just said, and that is that we need the ability to put more pressure on the big companies to provide access to all New Yorkers, and Senator Parker's bill in Albany will help us do that. But our own Internet Master Plan actually creates a space for M/WBEs, for nonprofits, for everybody who can help build out infrastructure for broadband access to get to work and have an opportunity to get to work. And we think that is the fastest way to reach New Yorkers across this city in real time. And we are confident we can make a great deal of progress before this administration leads at the end of the year. And I'll turn to John.

**Chief Technology Officer John Paul Farmer:** Thank you so much. As has been said so well when we talk about broadband, we're talking about people, people who need education, need to get skills and apply for jobs, need health care, real people, real needs. And that's why today we are opening up the Internet Master Plan RFP. It's going to close on April 19th. And it indicates that New York City is ready to partner with any and all companies, with everybody, who wants to bring affordable broadband to New York City families and small businesses. And we are confident that we're going to reach 600,000 New Yorkers, as the Mayor mentioned, 200,000 of those being New Yorkers living in NYCHA, just in the next year. And this is historic because what we're looking at is something to address a decades long digital divide. We recognize that digital poverty is poverty, period. Internet inequality is unacceptable inequality. And so, with Mayor de Blasio committing \$157 million in capital funds that represents the largest municipal investment in American history in closing the digital divide. Combine that on top of those capital funds, you're going to see private sector investment that this catalyzes, and in addition, the 100,000-plus real estate assets that the City controls making those available to lower the barriers to entry, to allow more businesses, small businesses, businesses that have existed here in New York City before, and others that haven't, bringing them in to create more low-cost affordable options. That's going to benefit New Yorkers who have previously been under-connected or unconnected, but also New Yorkers who've been connected, giving them more low-cost options. So, we see this next year as a milestone moment, a moment where we are going to make more progress in closing the digital divide than in any prior year. And we're going to build on that. The Internet Master Plan is a vision for how this continues to work iteratively. And it's a portfolio approach going neighborhood by neighborhood, prioritizing those 33 neighborhoods that the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity have identified, making sure we're serving the folks who need it most, making sure that they can participate in this recovery for all to ensure that we've got a Big Apple that works for everybody.

**Mayor:** Amen. Well said, John, thank you so much. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next. We'll go to Matt from Patch.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

**Mayor:** Good, Matt, how you been?

**Question:** Not bad, not bad. I have a question from a colleague, it involves East Harlem. As you know, it's the worst part of Manhattan in terms of COVID, but the City hasn't opened any City

run vaccine hubs there. Now you promised a hub at La Marqueta but that has never materialized. Local council member is looking for answers and still hasn't received it. So, can you explain what happened with the La Marqueta site? And are there any plans to focus on East Harlem in particular?

**Mayor:** Definitely plans to further focus on East Harlem. I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz, who has two facilities, obviously two big facilities in Metropolitan and Harlem Hospital that serve the community in different ways and other facilities as well. The La Marqueta site, I need to get an update on that. You're exactly right. It was part of the original vision. We've got to figure out either how to get that done quickly because we are going to be constantly expanding vaccination capacity and sites all over the city. So, we either need to get that into play or replace that concept very clearly with additional capacity. So, it's a very fair question. I want to get you a strong answer today. But let me see if Dr. Katz has anything to add?

**President Katz:** Sir, I'd just like to say that Metropolitan has been doing vaccinations in East Harlem. And we're hoping that with the expansion of supply, we will be able to markedly increase the number of vaccinations. The staff at Met are very motivated and look forward to vaccinating more of their patients and neighbors in East Harlem. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Matt.

**Question:** I just want to shift kind of more broadly over to Upper Manhattan and vaccine access there. There's been repeated calls for more vaccine hubs, more mega site type of places. Now vaccination rates across Manhattan are way better than in the city, but Upper Manhattan still lags behind. With the rise of this new NYC variant, do you think that there should be more focus on Upper Manhattan, especially because this variant seems to be more prevalent there?

**Mayor:** I want to do two things, Matt. One in a second, I'll turn to Dr. Varma because I really think we have to demystify this idea of a New York variant and explain what we know and what we don't know about it. And also, remind everyone of the bigger story about what variants are and are not. So, I'll do that in a second with Dr. Varma. But the answer on Upper Manhattan – clearly more need and we need to keep expanding. You know, we have had sites and again, we have Harlem Hospital. We have the Armory – sites, every site, if there's enough supply, almost every site can either add hours, add capacity. There's endless ability to add if we have supply, we still haven't had the kind of supply breakthrough we need. We obviously had a reality last week where we got two weeks' worth of supply in one week, because we had a week knocked out by the storm. That's one of the reasons we got to our all-time highest day last Friday, 76,000 doses. But we've never had a week where we even came close to our 500,000 doses a week capacity. And that capacity is actually continuing to grow. So, what I would say to you is when we actually start to get more and more supply, you will see more centers. You will see longer hours, more people getting vaccinated at centers. Upper Manhattan will absolutely be a priority. Now, Dr. Varma, the New York variant quote, unquote. And just again, a reminder on the truth of variants. Go ahead.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Great. Thank you very much for the question. Yeah. I want to first touch on the question that was asked about sort of geographic location. So, as everybody knows

we had researchers from Columbia last week that reported that there was a strain of the coronavirus that they had found in testing that was done at Columbia. And then when you look at data that we have subsequently looked at, you see that strain certainly in other parts of New York City and other parts of New York State. There was no evidence so far that this is localized to any one particular area of Manhattan. We have teams of epidemiologists right now, who are combing through laboratory records, medical records, contact tracing records, so that we can understand more about the distribution. And even more important, how much we need to be worried about this. We are concerned, not just about this variant, but all of the ones that are circulating because it's just a reminder that we continue to need to be persistent about all of the things that we know prevent infection – wearing a well-fitting mask, possibly wearing two if that helps fit better, washing your hands, getting tested, keeping distance, and of course, getting vaccinated as soon as possible.

**Mayor:** But Jay, follow through that point, the concern that there's a New York variant and that it might be more present in Manhattan. We take everything seriously, but I want again, demystify what that means in terms of our decision making at this point.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah. I want to really emphasize this doesn't change any of the things that we are doing right now. Because again, we need to understand how these viruses evolve, because there may be a time when we need to do something different, but that time is not right now. Whether you're in Manhattan or any of the other boroughs of the city, we continue to want you to do the things that we know are important. And particularly when it comes to vaccination, we need to really emphasize that everything we know about vaccines and these variants is that getting vaccinated is the single best way to prevent yourself from getting severe illness and death. So, we want to make sure because there is, I think a real concern that it's important for people to understand that there are risks out there, but when those risks are amplified, they can tend to make people freeze or not take behaviors that we know are important. And we know things like vaccines and prevention measures continue to be important regardless of where you are in the city.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Gersh from Streetsblog.

**Question:** Well, Hi [inaudible] I appreciate you taking the call.

**Mayor:** Well, you came in a little – you came in a little choppy there, Gersh. Can you hear us okay?

**Question:** I can hear you. I hope you can hear me. I hope you are doing well.

**Mayor:** There you go. All right, you're getting better. I'm doing well. How you been?

**Question:** Oh, you know how it is Mr. Mayor. You know how it is. Anyway, let's go to something that happened last week, there was actually kind of a historic City Council hearing on that debate about whether the NYPD's Collision Investigation Squad could be moved to the

DOT. And I got to hand it to your government and with a hat tip from the five district attorneys, they mobilized on us and pushed back on the Council's effort. And as a result, it almost seemed as if the Council now was pulling back to a compromise position of actually expanding the Collision Investigation Squad, so they could investigate more than the current one percent of crashes that cause injuries. So, since the NYPD had rejected expanding the CIS before, but everyone argues – everyone agrees that reckless drivers should be held accountable, what's your position at this point, given that you've likely prevailed in the structure [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Appreciate the question. We need to do more. You and I – it's always striking when we agree Gersh, it's one of those moments. We need to do more to investigate crashes because we need more consequence for crashes. I still believe fundamentally that the laws in this state are too lenient towards people who use their vehicle to harm other people. And we've got to strengthen the laws. There has to be clear penalties, but there also have to be more thorough investigations to achieve prosecution, when there needs to be prosecution. And simultaneously we need to investigate crashes to figure out what we need to do differently in terms of street design, which is a central tenet of Vision Zero, which I brought to this city in 2014. So yes, we should expand that capacity. I think historically the question is always resources and other challenges. My hope now more than I've had the hope before Gersh, is that we actually may be made pretty whole by the federal government with the stimulus. And continuing to deepen Vision Zero is a central, central need. I spoke to Secretary Buttigieg about this a week or two ago, that we have a lot more to do on Vision Zero. And we need federal support to do as much as we could and should do. But yes, I like the idea of expanding the work within DOT, the work within NYPD. And we're going to look at that as part of our budget process. Go ahead, Gersh.

**Question:** All right, [inaudible] answer. I'm going a different direction and I actually, I hope David Brand is on the line cause it's about Queens. We don't understand something. So, last year your Department of Transportation installed flexi posts on Northern Boulevard to create a protected bike lane during COVID. Then in December, your Department of Sanitation destroyed all the flexi posts when it cleared snow after a storm. And now it's March and the posts haven't been re-installed, completely nullifying DOT's earlier and frankly, successful effort. Now the same thing is true on West Street in Greenpoint, where the DOT installed a protected bike lane, but the 94th Precinct won't enforce it, so it's constantly filled with trucks. And then there's the Clinton Street bike lane, which is a typical route to the Williamsburg Bridge, which the Department of Buildings won't enforce – there's construction over there. So, it's constantly filled with trucks, I guess I'm asking after seven years, why is there no coherent Vision Zero strategy that puts all the agencies on the same page about building and maintaining these bike lanes?

**Mayor:** Okay, well, Gersh, you present the world in a colorful manner. I think there's a very coherent strategy called Vision Zero, and there's been a very coherent effort by the Department of Transportation to constantly increase the amount of bike lanes in the city, including protected bike lanes to record levels. These are obvious facts. Now, you can pull out situations where we have to do something better and you should. That's your job and I thank you for it. But that does not take away from the obvious consistency of what's being done around the city. If Sanitation did something that disrupted a bike lane, we have to fix it right away. And we have to make sure that Sanitation avoids doing that to the maximum extent possible. If there's lack of PD enforcement at a certain precinct, we have to address that with that precinct. Building, you know,

construction issues are something that disrupt streets, whether they're bike lanes or street areas for vehicles all the time. That's something that sometimes you just don't have a choice about. You got to do the best you can to work through it. But I guarantee you, there is a focus on ensuring the bike lanes are usable all over the city and continuing to expand. We'll follow up earnestly on the specific examples that you gave. I'll talk to our Transportation Commissioner about them, and we'll definitely follow up with the other agencies as well. Thank you.

**Moderator:** Last, we'll go to Erin from Politico.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. You've been talking a bit about needing local control restored. And as you know, yesterday, the Legislature announced a deal to repeal the Governor's emergency powers. There are some caveats to that existing order staying in place. He can still modify them. So, I'm just wondering, do you think that that is sufficient? Or do you think that there needs to be more action as far as restoring local control?

**Mayor:** Erin, I think it's the beginning. I think the goal has to be full local control, normal governance. We've got to start recovering. We've got to start moving forward and localities have to regain our power to do that. We cannot have a full recovery if we don't have our power, as we had it before. On top of that, as we see Albany's having its own challenges, that's exactly the moment to re-empower localities where their strength and stability to get things done. So, what I'm hearing out of Albany from the Legislature, definitely moving in the right direction, but we should ultimately go farther. Go ahead, Erin.

**Question:** Okay. Thanks. And then you know, if you were to get some of the City's normal authority back – I know you've talked about expanding vaccine eligibility, but aside from that, are there other specific policies that the Governor has put in place as part of the pandemic management that you would change with regular order restored?

**Mayor:** Yeah, the whole – it's not just vaccine eligibility, it's the approach to vaccine distribution. The State, the Governor has continually preferred these mega sites over community-based sites. I've said clearly that is exacerbating the disparity problem. The information we gave you about Javits and Aqueduct proves that so much of what's happening in those places is not even benefiting New York City residents, let alone people in the 33 communities hardest hit by COVID, that are immigrant and people of color communities. So again, I'm fine with any effort that helps vaccinate everyone in the tri-state area. But I want to be honest about what's happening here. The State has not made the kind of focus on addressing disparity we need to. The way to do that is to oversupply grassroots sites in communities of color and to give New York City its fair share if we're going to be -- we're going to be vaccinating folks from outside the city on top of all the people in the city, we need a hell of a lot more of the share of the vaccine. We can't do that with the current structure because the State arbitrarily makes decisions about supply. The more local control is restored, the more we can create equity. I think that's the bottom line.

Okay. Everybody, look, I'll conclude on this and certainly on the concept of equity and a recovery for all of us. We talked today about internet access. We talked about 5G. We talked about the fact that this is going to be 2021, the year of 5G. This is going to be the breakthrough year for New York City. This is going to be part of how our economy comes to life and expands.



And I want to be clear the goal over these next few years, over the few years, is to not only bring back New York City's economy, not only get to where we were just a year ago, 4.7 million jobs. The most in our history in this city, was one year ago, but then surpass that. We can recoup our losses and then we can go farther and become even stronger. 5G is going to help us do it. But at the same time, we do this with equity. This is a once in a generation opportunity to break the status quo and create fairness and equality. Once in a generation opportunity for transformation, we are seizing that opportunity. We're going to do the most we can with it, right now. And that's exciting. That's exciting for the future of the city. So, I look forward to doing this work together. Thank you, everybody.

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