

METRO

De Blasio claims he said 'early on' to avoid NYC mass transit

By Julia Marsh and David Meyer

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Mayor Bill de Blasio claimed Thursday to have told New Yorkers to avoid riding buses and subways “early on” in the coronavirus crisis — even though he was still saying public transit was safe well into March.

“Early on we said to people, if you don’t need to go on the subway, don’t; if you can work from home, work from home; if you can walk or bike or anything else, do so,” Hizzoner told reporters at his daily press briefing.

“There was a concern to start clearing out the subway to the maximum extent possible while recognizing that we also depended on the subway to get essential workers to do the lifesaving work they do.”

Up until March 8 — a week after the city’s first case emerged — the mayor and his administration were adamant that the subways were safe to ride for people who weren’t sick, according to public transcripts from his media appearances and press conferences.

“From what we do understand, you cannot contract it through casual contact so the subway is not the issue,” de Blasio said on March 3, responding to concerns that a Manhattan lawyer with the virus may have commuted from his home in New Rochelle on the Metro-North Railroad.

“Home is the issue, home is the problem, where you are in constant, regular, intense contact with other people, breathing the same air, the same bodily fluids around, like that’s the issue,” he said at the time.

“Subway is the other extreme, limited contact in a more open space, short period of time. Subways is not our problem right now.”

The SUV-loving mayor and his staff even took a one-stop trip on the A train from Manhattan to Brooklyn on March 6 to make the point. By that point, 22 people in the state had tested positive for the virus.

Finally, on, March 8, he acknowledged that people who “are sick” should stay off transit. He advised people to “Bike or walk to work if you can.”

De Blasio’s defense of his advisories Thursday came in response to a controversial study that argued mass transit was a “major disseminator” of the disease in the Big Apple.

MIT economics professor and physician Jeffrey Harris pointed to a parallel between high ridership “and the rapid, exponential surge in infections” in the first two weeks of March — though some experts and transit officials have dismissed that more as correlation than causation.

Confronted late last month with a clip show of his many instructions for New Yorkers to “go about their lives” in the lead up to the city’s outbreak, de Blasio said the time to deal with the question was “after this war is over.”

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