

News

THE former Underground manager who has been hired to fix New York's broken transit system believes London could be a role model for solving the crisis in Manhattan.

Andy Byford said that London's improvements during the 2000s would be an inspiration for him as he tries to turn around the Big Apple. Mr Byford, who worked on the Tube and London's railways for 20 years, said that the capital had been completely transformed over the past two decades thanks to a focus on passengers.

He will take up the post as head of New York City Transit Authority in January from his current role as chief executive of the Toronto Transit Commission and believes that it will be the "toughest job" in the sector. Years of underfunding and mismanagement have left New York's transport system in a shambles that led to a "summer of hell" marked by delays and daily derailments.

New York state governor Andrew Cuomo declared a transport state of emergency with a £620 million plan to stabilise the situation.

In an interview with the Evening Standard, Mr Byford said he applied for his new job because he "always loved a challenge" going back to 1995 when he chose to be group station manager of King's Cross instead of an easier posting.

Mr Byford said he would not shy from unpopular decisions – including temporarily ending New York's famous 24-hour service on some lines. "I think it's great New York has a 24-hour service because it's a 24-hour city, it's vibrant and that's what I love about it," he added.

"But at the end of the day, if you want things to improve and you want the service to be more reliable then the operator must get time to do the time-consuming difficult work of progressively upgrading infrastructure."

Before that Mr Byford will take stock of his new team and rally the 50,000 staff who will be working for him on the buses, subway, trains and roads. He said: "I have this strong view that to be world class you can't just get people from A to B. You have to have customers feel valued and you can only get that through highly motivated, highly capable employees who want to do a good job, not on the threat of a big stick."

"The holy grail is to get people to want and act and behave differently and they will only do that if they are inspired by better management."

In Toronto, Mr Byford became the public face of the transit system and was praised for speaking bluntly when things went wrong.

He rode the subway in Toronto every day – he has never owned a car – and wants to do the same in New York. But he admits that he will probably not be able to respond personally to emails from the public any more.

New York's transit system is more than four times as big as Toronto's with 7.7 million daily users, meaning his inbox would be deluged. Mr Byford will



"Summer of hell": years of underfunding and mismanagement have left New York's transit system in a shambles. Andy Byford, below, said he would not shy away from unpopular decisions to improve the service

Why our Tube is perfect role model to help fix New York's broken subway

The man who helped drive the transformation of the Tube is to head New York's Transit Authority. He tells Daniel Bates why making commuters feel valued is the key to success

also have to deal with bare-knuckle politics in New York and will be in the crossfire of a feud between state governor Mr Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. The governor has offered to pay half of the £620 million emergency plan's cost and has asked the city to pay the rest but Mr de Blasio has refused, claiming that the city already provides enough money for the subway.

MR Byford said: "I'm used to robust politics but this will be exponentially more intense. I think, and I may be proven wrong, I have one advantage which is that I do come from outside, I'm not a New Yorker. I have been recruited because of my worldwide experience and my diverse background. I will go in there with humility, respect for New Yorkers and New York transit. You have to earn respect... I'm well aware you have a finite honeymoon period."

Transport is in Mr Byford's blood. His grandfather drove a London bus out of

he launches into a detailed discussion of the S stock trains. Mr Byford said the problem with the deep-level Tube lines was that there was nowhere to get the hot air out. He quipped: "If it were easy London would already have done it." Mr Byford said that the Night Tube had well documented teething problems but was now a fabulous addition to London's transport system.

Asked about sexual offences, which were up seven per cent year on year on the Tube and 44 per cent on London Overground, Mr Byford said they were "insidious and cowardly". His solution, in Toronto was to launch an app which allowed victims to discreetly report incidents to the transit control room, and even take pictures of the offenders. Mr Byford said that he was shocked at

the spate of terror attacks in London this year and was particularly appalled by the rampage at London Bridge. "In somewhere as safe, traditional and iconic as a British pub, it's outrageous that people are being attacked. What I loved about Londoners was that Blitz spirit where people stood up to the attackers and fought back."

OVERALL, Mr Byford was full of praise for London and said he was amazed at how London had embraced cycling, improved its buses and made its transport better. He said: "I think back to how the Tube was facing these kinds of issues [as New York]. To me it's a good role model as a turnaround. I

think back to how decrepit some of the Northern line stations were, the Bakerloo line and Elephant and Castle was awful. The customer service was not where it should have been.

"Every time I go back to the Tube I am amazed... I go to the stations and they are bright and renovated. The station staff are incredibly proactive, they look great, they're very helpful, there are lots of announcements on the actual trains and the bus network has gone from strength to strength."

When Mr Byford was in London he used to read the Evening Standard daily and praised our transport writer Dick Murray as "legendary".

Mr Byford will ask a friend to pick up a copy of this interview as "it's not every day you're in the Standard".

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