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MTA Chief Warns Capital Plan Budget Gap Could Grow

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NEW YORK — The \$15 billion budget gap in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's \$32 billion capital plan could widen if there are changes in federal funding or to the state's payroll tax for transit, the agency's chairman and CEO warned Thursday.

In a speech to the General Contractors Association of New York in Midtown, Thomas Prendergast said the need to invest in the MTA's future is clear, WCBS 880's Paul Murnane reported.

"There isn't a major system in the world that considers itself to be a financial center that is not making considerable investment, not only in the maintenance of its infrastructure, but expanding the network," Prendergast said.

"One of the issues that people have raised is, are we sacrificing state of good repair so that we can do expansions or enhancements?" he added. "And I can tell you that we're not."

The plan, he said, is the start of a dialogue.

Carol Kellermann, president of the Citizens Budget Commission, said there's a need for clarity.

"We need to know what these different criteria are and then look at each project, almost giving it scores," she said.

Options being discussed for closing the funding gap include fare hikes and tolls on East River bridges.

MTA officials released the \$32 billion plan for the years 2015 to 2019 last month.

The plan includes funding for the Second Avenue subway line, the completion of the so-called East Side Access project providing a faster commute from Long Island and Queens and four new Metro-North stations in the Bronx.

The five-year plan also includes upgrades to the existing system such as installing countdown clocks in more subway stations to let riders know when to expect a train.