November 20, 2006

Mr. Laurence G. Reuter, President
MTA New York City Transit
2 Broadway
New York, NY 10004

RE: PTSB CASE #8749

Dear Mr. Reuter:

The Public Transportation Safety Board received notice of a bus fire involving the MTA New York City Transit, which occurred on Rossville Avenue at Woodrow Road, Staten Island, NY, on December 6, 2005.

Based on a review of the enclosed Abbreviated Report, no further action is necessary.

Sincerely,

John F. Guinan
Executive Director
Public Transportation Safety Board.

Enclosure
1. CASE: 8749
2. PROPERTY NAME: MTA NYCT
3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Bus Fire
3b. Accident Severity Index: 0.0
4a. DATE: December 12, 2005
4b. TIME: 10:50 pm
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: Rossville Avenue at Woodrow Road
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: Staten Island
7. SUMMONS: None
8. BUS NUMBER: 6288
8a. YEAR: 1999
8b. MAKE: Orion
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: 0
10. FATALITIES: 0
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: 5 hrs and 33 min in last 24 hrs/40 hrs and 55 min in last 7 days
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 10:50 pm, MTA New York City Transit (NYCT) bus #6288 was traveling on Rossville Avenue when the bus driver noticed smoke in the interior rear of the bus. The bus driver safely parked the bus, alighted all passengers and called the Command Center for assistance. The bus driver discovered flames emanating from the engine compartment. The bus fire suppression system activated extinguishing flames. FDNY responded to the fire. No injury claims were reported. The bus sustained moderate damage to the engine compartment.

In the vicinity of the accident site, Rossville Avenue is a two-way road divided by a full barrier yellow pavement marking, accommodating one northbound and one southbound travel lane. The roadway is straight, level and asphalt paved. Parking is permitted at the curbs. At the time of the accident it was dark. The street is highlighted by standard street luminaries. The weather was clear and the pavement was dry. The posted area speed limit is 30 mph.

Bus #6288 is a 1999 Orion V transit bus with a seating capacity of 39 passengers. A review of the bus records indicated that Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) are performed at Yukon Depot at regular 6,000 mile intervals, and the most recent was completed on November 16, 2005. The bus had traveled 2,901 miles at the time of the accident. A post accident inspection of bus #6288 was conducted by the PTSB staff in conjunction with NYCT staff on December 7, 2005. The inspection revealed an electrical short between the alternator’s positive stud steel washer and its casing. The fiberglass flat disk, the steel flat and star washers were burnt in the area where the stud was burnt in half. The three O-rings were damaged by the heat and most probably caused the oil leak which fed the fire. A review of the bus maintenance record showed no work performed that could cause or contribute to this failure.

The bus driver was hired by the MTA NYCT on August 11, 2003, and completed the standard “New Bus Operator Training Program”. A review of the driver’s Department of Motor Vehicles records for the last three years showed no violations or suspensions. New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were complete and up-to-date. A review of the driver’s MTA NYCT record revealed no collision accidents for the time since he was hired.
A post accident drug and alcohol test was not administered to the bus driver due to the nature of the accident.

In an interview with the PTSB staff the bus driver indicated that he was driving the bus southbound on Rossville Avenue when he smelt something burning inside the bus. He safely parked the bus, evacuated all passengers, and notified the Command Center. At that time the bus fire suppression system activated and extinguished the fire.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the most probable cause of the fire was the failure of the fiberglass insulating disk which allowed the flat metal washer to come in contact with the outer alternator housing and create a short.

The MTA NYCT reviewed the accident on December 10, 2005 and found it to be non-preventable. On July 13, 2006 NYCT issued a Maintenance Directive reinforcing the procedure of servicing the generator D.C. output terminal. NYCT is currently in discussions with the alternator’s manufacturer to provide an improved synthetic insulator disk and, in addition, possibly redesign the O-rings and insulating collars.

Based on the action taken by the MTA NYCT regarding this accident, the Public Transportation Safety Board staff makes no recommendations.

INVESTIGATOR:  Mikhail Palanker

CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION

DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYSDOT