November 20, 2006

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

RE: PTSB CASE #8775

Dear Mr. Reuter:

The Public Transportation Safety Board received notice of a bus fire involving the MTA New York City Transit, which occurred on Broadway at the intersection with Bennett Avenue, New York, NY, on December 29, 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

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
ABBREVIATED BUS ACCIDENT REPORT

1. CASE#: 8775
2. PROPERTY NAME: MTA NYCT
3a. ACCIDENT TYPE: Fire
3b. Accident Severity Index: 0.00
4a. DATE: December 29, 2005
4b. TIME: 11:12 p.m.
5. ACCIDENT LOCATION: Broadway at Bennett Avenue
6. TOWN/CITY/BOROUGH: New York, NY
7. SUMMONS: No
8. BUS NUMBER: 463
8a. YEAR: 1994
8b. MAKE: Orion V
9. NUMBER OF INJURIES: 0
10. FATALITIES: 0
11. HOURS OF SERVICE: 11 hr 23 min in last 24 hrs/45 hrs 32 min in last 7 days
12. SYNOPSIS:

At approximately 11:12 p.m., MTA New York City Transit (NYCT) bus #463 was traveling south on Broadway and approaching the intersection with Bennett Avenue when the bus driver was informed by a passing motorist that flames were coming from the rear of the bus. The bus driver moved to the curb, stopped, safely evacuated the 6 passengers and called for assistance. The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) responded and extinguished the fire. There were no injuries. The bus sustained extensive damage within the engine compartment.

The environment played no part in the fire.

Bus #463 is a 1994 Orion V transit type bus housed and maintained at the Kingsbridge Depot with a seating capacity of 40 passengers. The bus was not equipped with an on-board fire suppression system. A review of the bus records showed that Preventive Maintenance Inspections (PMI) are performed at regular 3,000 mile intervals (±500 miles), the most recent was completed on December 2, 2005 and the bus had traveled 1,462 miles since then. There were no safety or recurring defects noted in the 45 days prior to the accident. A post incident inspection was performed on December 30, 2005. The inspection showed that the engine’s valve cover (metal) breather tube, located directly beneath the rear seat inspection cover, was not secured - due to a missing bolt for the securing bracket. The unsecured breather tube had then made contact with the main DC power cable, worn through the cable’s insulation, shorted to ground and caught fire. The bus’ maintenance records were re-examined and showed no work had been performed in the vicinity of the fire that could be considered causative to the fire or which would have led to the discovery of the unsecured breather tube. Due to the considerable damage within the engine compartment, no decelerometer tests were performed on the bus’ braking systems. Upon completion of the investigation the bus was stripped of usable parts and scrapped.

The bus driver was hired by the MTA NYCT on June 6, 1988 and completed the New Bus Operator Training Program. A review of the driver’s Department of Motor Vehicles records for the past three years showed no violations, convictions or suspensions. NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law, Article 19-A records were reviewed and found to be complete, in-order and up-to-date. A review of the driver’s NYCT accident record for the past three years showed one non-preventable collision accident. No post incident drug and alcohol tests were performed on the bus driver.

In an interview the bus driver indicated that while traveling on Broadway and approaching the intersection with Bennett Avenue he was signaled by a passing motorist that sparks and flames were
coming from the bus’ engine compartment. The driver indicated that he safely moved to the curb, discharged his passengers and called for assistance. The bus driver further stated that prior to the warning by the passing motorist he had observed nothing wrong with the operation of the bus.

The Public Transportation Safety Board staff’s investigation of the fire found that it was extremely difficult to view the bracket securing the breather tube without first raising the bus rear bench seat and then removing the inspection cover located beneath the seat. The staff also found that the raising of the seat and removing the inspection cover was not part of any PMI procedure for this model of bus.

Public Transportation Safety Board staff finds that the probable cause of this fire was an unsecured valve cover (metal) breather tube which, by making contact with the main DC power cable, had rubbed through the cable’s insulation, caused a short to ground and caught fire. The PTSB staff could not, however, ascertain how long the breather tube had been unsecured or if any maintenance person had been negligent due to it being difficult to find the defect without first raising the rear seat, a procedure which was not part of the PMI.

The MTA NYCT Department of Buses (DOB) also found the cause of the fire was the unsecured valve cover breather tube. The MTA NYCT DOB, however, found the incident to be non-preventable on the part of the maintenance staff due to the difficulty in identifying the problem without raising the rear seat of the bus. As a result of this fire, the MTA NYCT DOB immediately campaigned their fleet of buses of this model to insure that items located beneath the rear bench seat were secured (in particular the breather tube) and corrected any problems which were discovered. In addition, the MTA NYCT DOB added the procedure of raising the rear bench seat and removal of the inspection cover to the 24K inspection procedure for this model of bus.

Based on the action taken by the MTA New York City Transit regarding this fire the Public Transportation Safety Board staff makes no recommendation in this case.

INVESTIGATOR: Harry W. Gerham

CHIEF, ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION SECTION

DIRECTOR, PCSB, NYSDOT